

Ministry of Health

Vaccine Fact Sheet: Pneumococcal Vaccine Program for Individuals Aged 6 Weeks and Older

This document is intended for informational purposes only. It is not intended to provide medical or legal advice.

Why it is important to get pneumococcal vaccines

Pneumococcal vaccines can prevent illness caused by many types of pneumococcal bacteria. Most pneumococcal infections are not serious. Common pneumococcal infections include:

- Otitis media (ear infections)
- Sinusitis (sinus infections)

However, some pneumococcal infections can be serious and life-threatening, like:

- Meningitis (infection of the lining of the brain)
- Septicemia (infection in the blood)
- Pneumonia (infection of the lungs)

If a pneumococcal infection spreads to parts of the body that are normally bacteria-free, it can lead to a serious disease called invasive pneumococcal disease (IPD), which can cause serious symptoms, lifelong disability, or even death.

What pneumococcal conjugate vaccines protect against

The pneumococcal conjugate (Pneu-C) vaccines are safe, effective, and have been approved for use by Health Canada. They protect against several different types of bacteria that cause pneumococcal disease. Vaccines protect you by building antibodies against pathogens that cause disease. The vaccines are provided for free to eligible individuals as part of the Ontario's publicly funded immunization program.

How pneumococcal disease is spread

Pneumococcal bacteria are very common. Many people carry these bacteria in their nose and throat without getting sick, but they can still spread the bacteria to others through infected mucus or saliva. You may come in contact with infected mucus or saliva by:

- being near an infected person who coughs or sneezes
- having close contact with an infected person (for example, kissing or hugging)
- touching objects that were recently exposed to an infected person's mucus or saliva (such as shared utensils, cups, tissues, or toys) and then touching your eyes, nose, or mouth

Risk of pneumococcal disease

Anyone can get pneumococcal disease, but children under 2 years old, people with certain medical conditions or other risk factors, and adults 65 years or older are at the highest risk for IPD.

Publicly funded Pneu-C vaccines in Ontario

Type of Vaccine	Vaccine Name	Number of Types of Pneumococcal Bacteria Vaccine Protects Against	Abbreviation
Pneu-C	Vaxneuvance	15	Pneu-C-15
	Prevnar 20	20	Pneu-C-20
	Capvaxive	21	Pneu-C-21

Eligibility criteria for Pneu-C vaccines

Eligibility	Vaccine	# of doses
6 weeks to 4 years of age who are not at increased risk for IPD	Pneu-C-15	Up to 3 doses
6 weeks to 64 years of age with certain medical and non-medical conditions that increase their risk for IPD	Pneu-C-20	Up to 4 doses
65 years of age and older (excluding hematopoietic stem cell transplant [HSCT] recipients)	Pneu-C-21	1 dose
65 years of age and older who are HSCT recipients	Pneu-C-21	Up to 4 doses

Catch-up immunizations are available to those who miss their scheduled doses. Children 6 weeks to 17 years of age who are at increased risk for IPD and have not yet received the Pneu-C-20 vaccine can get at least one dose of Pneu-C-20 vaccine. Adults 18 years of age and older who have previously received all the publicly funded pneumococcal vaccines who were eligible based on their age and risk of IPD may not be eligible to receive additional doses of pneumococcal vaccines. Speak with your health care provider to determine your vaccine eligibility and schedule.

Vaccine safety

Pneu-C vaccines are safe and are approved for use by Health Canada. They are used not only in Canada, but around the world. Pneu-C vaccines have been used in Ontario's publicly funded immunization programs for more than 20 years.

Every vaccine must be shown to be safe and effective before it is approved for use in Canada. Once approved, vaccine safety is continuously monitored.

Possible reactions after receiving the vaccine

Many people have no side effects from Pneu-C vaccines. For those that do, they are usually mild and last one to two days. Serious side effects are very rare.

Common reactions to Pneu-C vaccines may include:

- Soreness, redness, and/or swelling where the vaccine was given
- Fever
- Drowsiness
- Loss of appetite
- Headache
- Muscle or joint ache
- Chills
- Fussiness (irritability) - infants only

People sometimes faint after medical procedures, including vaccination. Tell your provider if this has happened to you, or if you feel dizzy before, during, or after getting vaccinated so they can take extra precautions to ensure your safety.

As with any medicine, there is an extremely rare possibility (less than one in a million people) of a life-threatening allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. Signs of anaphylaxis can include hives, swelling of the face and throat, difficulty breathing, a fast heartbeat, dizziness, or weakness. For this reason, it is important to remain at your health care provider's office for at least 15 minutes after you have received your Pneu-C vaccine. If anaphylaxis occurs, you will be given medicine to treat the symptoms.

Any unexpected or serious reaction to a vaccine should be reported to your health care provider or local [public health unit](#).

Managing side effects of the vaccine

To help with soreness and swelling, put a cool, wet cloth over the vaccine injection site.

Medications may help relieve fever or pain. If you are unsure which medication or dose to take, consult a health care provider and follow the directions on the package.

Some people with health problems, such as a weak immune system, must call their health care provider if they develop a fever. If you have been advised to do so, call your health care provider even if you think the fever is from the vaccine.

What to do if a serious problem occurs

An allergic reaction could occur after leaving the location where you received your vaccination. If you develop signs and symptoms of a severe allergic reaction (hives, swelling of the face and throat, difficulty breathing, a fast heartbeat, dizziness, or weakness), call **9-1-1** and get to the nearest hospital immediately.

For other signs and symptoms that concern you, call a health care provider.

Adverse reactions should be reported to a health care provider or your local [public health unit](#).

When not to get the vaccine or when to delay immunizations

Speak with your health care provider if you have had a severe allergic reaction to a previous dose of pneumococcal vaccine or to any component of the vaccine including diphtheria toxoid.

In some cases, your health care provider may decide to postpone pneumococcal vaccination until a future visit. People with minor illnesses, such as a cold, can usually be vaccinated. Those who are moderately or severely ill should usually wait until they have recovered. Your health care provider can provide more information.

Vaccine record

Your health care provider should document your immunization in your Yellow Immunization Card. Please keep your Yellow Immunization Card in a safe place and bring it with you each time you receive a vaccine from your health care provider.

Privately purchasing vaccine for those that are not eligible for publicly funded Pneu-C vaccine

If you do not meet eligibility criteria for the publicly funded Pneu-C vaccine, you can speak to your health care provider to determine whether the vaccine is appropriate for you. The vaccine would need to be privately purchased. If you have private insurance, you may wish to contact your provider to confirm whether the Pneu-C vaccine is covered.

Getting immunized with publicly funded pneumococcal vaccines

Pneu-C vaccines are available through the following providers:

Pneu-C-15

- Primary care providers (e.g., family physicians, pediatricians, nurse practitioners)
- Public health units
- Community health centres
- Hospitals

Pneu-C-20

Available through all providers listed for Pneu-C-15, as well as:

- Long-term care homes

- Congregate living settings (e.g., retirement homes)

Pneu-C-21

Available through all providers listed for Pneu-C-15 and Pneu-C-20, as well as:

- Pharmacies