

Pneumococcal Disease

What is Pneumococcal Disease?

Pneumococcal disease is caused by bacteria. There are many different types of pneumococcal bacteria that can cause serious infections of the lungs (pneumonia), the blood (bacteremia), and the coverings of the brain (meningitis). If not treated, the disease can cause death.

Who Can Get Pneumococcal Disease?

Anyone can get Pneumococcal disease. However, some people are at greater risk from the disease. These include:

- People 65 years or older
- Children less than 2 years old
- People with problems such as alcoholism, heart or lung disease, kidney failure, diabetes, HIV infection or certain types of cancer
- People who have had their spleen removed
- People with sickle cell disease

What are the Symptoms?

Symptoms may include:

- Fever
- Difficult or rapid breathing
- Cough that may produce a rusty-coloured mucous

If pneumococcal meningitis, symptoms may include:

- Fever
- Loss of appetite
- Stiff neck
- Severe headache
- Tiredness
- Vomiting

What is the Treatment?

Drugs such as penicillin were once effective in treating these infections, but the disease has become more resistant to these drugs, making treatment more difficult. Your doctor will decide which antibiotic is best to treat the disease.

How Can You Prevent Pneumococcal Disease?

There is a vaccine to prevent most types of pneumococcal infections. People who are at greater risk from the disease (see above) should talk to their doctor or Public Health Services about getting the vaccine.