


An elderly couple is smiling and posing on a beach. The man is crouching in the center, wearing a light-colored jacket over a dark sweater and light-colored trousers. The woman stands behind him to the right, wearing a light-colored cardigan over a white collared shirt and dark trousers. A white dog with floppy ears is sitting in the foreground, looking towards the camera with its tongue out. The background shows the ocean and a cloudy sky.

Aged 65 or over?

Make sure you get
your pneumo jab

mmunisation

the safest way to protect your health for life

Everybody aged 65 and over should now be immunised to help protect them against pneumococcal infection which can cause diseases such as pneumonia, septicaemia (blood poisoning) and meningitis.

This leaflet describes these diseases and explains how you can protect yourself by having the pneumococcal (or pneumo) vaccine.

What is pneumococcal disease?

Pneumococcal disease is the term used to describe a range of illnesses such as pneumonia, septicaemia (blood poisoning) and meningitis (inflammation around the brain), when these are caused by the bacterium *Streptococcus pneumoniae*.

How is it spread?

The bacteria (germs) that cause pneumococcal disease are spread by coughing, sneezing or close contact between people. The bacteria get into the nose and throat and they may stay there without doing any harm. But sometimes they can invade the lungs or bloodstream causing pneumonia and septicaemia, or they can reach the brain and cause meningitis.



How can it be prevented?

Immunisation with pneumococcal vaccine helps prevent pneumococcal disease. This vaccine has been used successfully in a number of countries, including the UK where it has been used for more than 10 years.

Who is at risk?

Everybody is at risk of getting pneumococcal disease, but the older you are, the greater the risk. You are particularly vulnerable if:

- you also have a heart or lung condition,
- have diabetes mellitus,
- have no spleen or
- have a weakened immune system, for example, if you are having treatment for cancer.

So, to provide the best protection, everyone aged 65 and over is now being offered a routine pneumo jab.

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms of pneumococcal infection of the lungs are:

- a high fever
- coughing
- shaking chills
- breathlessness
- chest pains, and
- confusion.

The symptoms of pneumococcal meningitis are:

- a severe headache
- a stiff neck
- a high fever
- confusion, and
- being sensitive to light.



You should contact your doctor if any of these symptoms is causing you concern.

Do I need to do anything to get the jab?

No, your doctor will invite you in for the jab. It can be given at any time of the year and you may be given it at the same time as your flu jab to save an extra visit. It is okay to have the two jabs at the same time. If you do not hear from your doctor's surgery, check that they have got your correct contact details.

Is it possible to get the disease from the vaccine?

No, you cannot get pneumococcal disease from the vaccine as it does not contain live bacteria.

Will there be any side effects?

Side effects are usually mild and don't last very long. Your arm may be swollen and sore where you had the injection. Very occasionally you may have a fever or muscle pain.



How often will I need this vaccine?

Most people will only need to have the vaccine once. You may need a second dose if you have certain conditions such as:

- a damaged spleen or no spleen, or
- problems with your kidneys.

Talk to your doctor or practice nurse if you think this applies to you.

I think I've already had this jab.

Do I need another one?

Check with your doctor or practice nurse if you think you've already had the jab. Unless you have one of the conditions listed above, you shouldn't need another jab.

Do people under 65 need the vaccine?

People who are at a higher risk from infection, such as those with other illnesses and medical conditions, are also recommended pneumococcal vaccine. These are people with:

- serious breathing problems, such as chronic bronchitis or emphysema,
- serious heart conditions,

- severe kidney disease,
- long-term liver disease,
- diabetes that needs medication, or,
- immunosuppression due to disease or treatment, for example, chemotherapy or radio therapy for cancer, or long-term steroid for conditions such as asthma; and problems with the spleen.

I'd like to know more

You can get more information about the pneumo jab from your doctor or practice nurse, or you can call **NHS Direct** on **0845 4647**. You can also visit the NHS immunisation website at

www.immunisation.nhs.uk

For more information, a '*Pneumococcal vaccine for older people*' factsheet is available from the address below.

