

# Pneumococcal Vaccines (PCV13 and PPSV23)

## Addressing Common Questions about Pneumococcal Vaccination for Adults

### What diseases do these vaccines protect against?

There are two vaccines that protect against pneumococcal disease, which is caused by infection with a common bacterium called *Streptococcus pneumoniae*.

- **PCV13 (pneumococcal conjugate vaccine)** protects against 13 of the approximately 90 types of pneumococcal bacteria that can cause pneumococcal disease, including pneumonia, meningitis, and bacteremia.
- **PPSV23 (pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine)** protects against 23 types of pneumococcal bacteria. This vaccine helps prevent invasive infections like meningitis and bacteremia, but only offers low levels of protection against pneumonia.

### How common is pneumococcal disease?

Each year in the United States, pneumococcal disease kills thousands of adults, including 18,000 adults 65 years or older. Thousands more end up in the hospital because of pneumococcal disease.

### How does pneumococcal disease spread?

Pneumococcal bacteria can spread from person to person by direct contact with respiratory secretions, like saliva or mucus. People can carry the bacteria in their nose and throat, and can spread the bacteria without feeling sick.

### Who is at risk for pneumococcal disease?

- People 65 years and older
- People with certain health conditions, such as chronic lung disease or diabetes
- People who are taking medications that lower the body's resistance to infection (immunocompromised)
- People who smoke cigarettes

### What could happen if I get this disease?

Pneumococcal disease ranges from mild to very dangerous. Pneumococcal disease can spread from the nose and throat to ears or sinuses, causing generally mild infections, or spread to other parts of the body, leading to severe health problems such as lung infections (pneumonia), blood infections (bacteremia), and infection of the lining of the brain and spinal cord (meningitis).

These illnesses can lead to disabilities like deafness, brain damage, or loss of arms or legs. These illnesses can also be life threatening:

- Pneumococcal pneumonia kills about 1 out of 20 people who get it.
- Pneumococcal bacteremia kills about 1 out of 5 people who get it.
- Pneumococcal meningitis kills about 3 out of 10 people who get it.

Adults with chronic conditions are at increased risk of developing complications from pneumococcal disease.

For more information on this and other vaccines for adults, visit [www.cdc.gov/vaccines/adults](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/adults).

DON'T WAIT.  
VACCINATE!



U.S. Department of  
Health and Human Services  
Centers for Disease  
Control and Prevention

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## Who should get these vaccines? When and how often are they needed?

**PCV13:** Adults should get one dose of this vaccine before starting or continuing doses of PPSV23. It is recommended for:

- All adults 65 years or older
- Adults 19 years or older with certain medical conditions
- Adults 19 years or older who are taking medications that lower the body's resistance to infection

**PPSV23:** Adults should get one, two, or three doses of this vaccine, depending on their age, health condition, and timing of the first dose. It is recommended for:

- All adults 65 years or older
- Adults 19 years or older with certain health conditions
- Adults 19 years or older who have a disease or condition, or are taking medications that lower the body's resistance to infection
- Adults 19 years or older who smoke cigarettes

## Who should not get these vaccines?

**PCV13:** Anyone who has ever had a life-threatening allergic reaction to a dose of the vaccine, to an earlier pneumococcal vaccine called PCV7 (or Prevnar), or to any vaccine containing diphtheria toxoid (for example, DTaP), should not get PCV13. Anyone with a severe allergy to any component of PCV13 should not get the vaccine.

**PPSV23:** Anyone who has ever had a life-threatening allergic reaction to a dose of the vaccine or with a severe allergy to any component of the vaccine should not get the vaccine.

## How well do the vaccines work?

**PCV13:** Studies done on PCV13 use in adults showed the vaccine to be 75% effective in preventing invasive pneumococcal disease, like bloodstream infections and meningitis, and 45% effective at preventing non-invasive pneumonia caused by the 13 strains it covers.

**PPSV23:** In adults with healthy immune systems, this vaccine has been shown to be 50-85% effective in preventing invasive disease caused by the 23 strains it covers.

## How safe are these vaccines?

Pneumococcal vaccines are very safe. They went through years of testing before being licensed by the FDA and continue to be monitored for safety by the FDA and CDC.

### Is it safe to get if I have certain health conditions or am taking prescription meds?

Unless you have had an allergic reaction in the past to the vaccine or have allergies to certain components of the vaccine, it is safe to get. It is safe for people taking prescription medications to get vaccines.

## What are the potential side effects of these vaccines?

**PCV13:** Adults receiving the vaccine have reported redness, pain, and swelling where the shot was given. Mild fever, fatigue, headache, chills, or muscle pain have also been reported. Life-threatening allergic reactions from this vaccine are very rare.

**PPSV23:** About half of people who get PPSV23 have mild side effects, such as redness or pain where the shot is given. Less than 1% develop a fever, muscle aches, or more severe local reactions. The risk of a vaccine causing serious reaction, or death, is extremely small.

## Where can I get these vaccines?

Pneumococcal vaccines may be available at private doctor offices, public or community health clinics, pharmacies, or other community locations (such as schools/universities, workplaces, religious centers or places of worship). Check with your doctor or pharmacist or use the [Adult Vaccine Finder \(vaccine.healthmap.org\)](http://vaccine.healthmap.org) to help find places that provide pneumococcal vaccines near you.

## How much do the vaccines cost?

Most private health insurance covers pneumococcal vaccines. Check with your insurance provider for details on whether there is any cost to you and for a list of in-network vaccine providers. Medicare Part B covers the cost of two recommended doses of pneumococcal vaccine (when administered at least 12 months apart).