

Communicable Disease

Pneumococcal Conjugate Vaccine



November 2010

Vaccines (also called “needles” or “baby shots”) are the best way to protect against some very serious infections. The Canadian Paediatric Society and the National Advisory Committee on Immunization strongly recommend routine immunization.

Pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (which uses the brand name **Pevnar**[®]) protects children from diseases caused by thirteen most common strains of *Streptococcus pneumoniae* (Pneumococcus) bacteria.

What is Streptococcus pneumoniae?

Infection with the *Streptococcus pneumoniae* bacteria can cause very serious illness or death. These bacteria are responsible for meningitis, blood infections, pneumonia, and ear infections in children. Children under two years old are at highest risk for serious infection.

Pneumococcus bacteria are spread by:

- Coughing
- Sneezing, and
- Sharing food, drinks, toothbrushes or toys that have been put into the mouth.

Pneumococcal infections can be difficult to treat because the bacteria have become resistant to some of the antibiotic drugs used to treat them. That is why it is important to prevent Pneumococcal infections.

Pevnar[®] vaccine covers the types (strains) of bacteria that are most often resistant to antibiotics.

At what age should my child be vaccinated with the Pneumococcal Conjugate vaccine?

The provincial government pays for Pneumococcal Conjugate vaccine shots for children age two months, four months, as well as a booster at twelve months. Some children with high risk conditions may require doses at two months, four months, six months and 15 months.

This vaccine may be given with other vaccines. If your child misses a needle, you should get the next needle as soon as possible. Your family health care provider will tell you when to return for future needles.

The vaccine is also publicly funded for children two to five years of age who have a high-risk medical condition, such as:

- Chronic respiratory disease excluding asthma, [except those treated with high-dose corticosteroid therapy]
- Chronic cardiac disease
- Cirrhosis
- Chronic renal disease or nephritic syndrome
- Diabetes Mellitus
- Asplenia, splenic dysfunction, sickle-cell disease, and other sickle cell hemoglobinopathies
- Chronic cerebrospinal fluid leak
- Primary immune deficiency
- HIV infection and other conditions associated with immunosuppression (malignancies, long-term systemic corticosteroids and other immunosuppressive therapy)
- Solid organ transplant recipients
- Cochlear implant recipients (pre/post implant)

Children who have had a bone marrow transplant should receive a different vaccine called a polysaccharide pneumococcal vaccine.

How well does Pneumococcal Conjugate vaccine protect my child?

The children who receive the recommended number of doses are well protected against meningitis and blood infections. The vaccine also provides some protection against pneumonia and ear infections.

Is the Pneumococcal Conjugate vaccine safe?

Yes. Serious side effects are rare. Mild pain, swelling and redness for a few days are common at the spot where the needle was given. Some children get a fever, rash, lose their appetite, or are fussy or drowsy for a day or two after the shot. Your family health care provider may suggest you give your child a medicine called acetaminophen to prevent pain and fever.

Call your family health care provider or local hospital if your child has any of the following within three days of getting the needle:

- high fever (over 40 C or 104 F)
- crying for more than three hours
- convulsions or seizures
- very pale color and serious drowsiness
- hives
- swelling of the face or mouth
- trouble breathing
- other serious problems

Who should NOT get the Pneumococcal Conjugate vaccine?

Your family health care provider may decide not to give your child's needle or may give a different vaccine if your child has:

- a high fever or serious infection worse than a cold
- had a serious allergic reaction to a previous dose of pneumococcal vaccine (Prevnar, Synflorix™, Pneumo 23)
- a severe allergy to any parts of the vaccine including diphtheria toxoid, aluminum, or polysorbate 80
- religious or philosophical objections to any part of the vaccine
- children less than six weeks of age
- anyone who has received the polysaccharide pneumococcal vaccine should wait 8 weeks before receiving Prevnar® 13

Who should I talk to if I have any more questions about the Pneumococcal Conjugate vaccine?

Talk to your family health care provider or the Huron County Health Unit for more information.

Your Record of Protection

After your child receives any immunization, make sure the health care provider updates the yellow personal Immunization Record card. Keep it in a safe place.