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Pneumococcal vaccine for babies and children (Prevenar 13)

Pneumococcal vaccine is offered as part of the UK childhood immunisation schedule. It helps to protect against infections such as pneumonia and meningitis.

The vaccine will be injected into your child's leg or upper arm.

The most common side-effects are tenderness at the site of the injection, a raised temperature (mild fever) and lack of appetite. These should soon pass.

About pneumococcal vaccine

Type of medicine	Pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV)
Used for	Childhood immunisation to protect against pneumococcal infection
Also called	Prevenar 13®
Available as	Intramuscular injection

Pneumococcus is a germ (bacterium) which can cause [pneumonia](#), [meningitis](#) and some other infections. Pneumococcal infections can affect anybody, but they are particularly common in young children. Some pneumococcal infections are more serious than others.

[Immunisation against pneumococcus](#) is part of the routine childhood immunisation programme in the UK. The routine schedule consists of two injections; the first at age 12 weeks and the second at one year.

There are two types of vaccine available to protect against pneumococcal infection, but only one of these works well in young children. It is called pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV). The brand name of the vaccine usually used for childhood immunisation is Prevenar 13®.

The second type of vaccine is called pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine (PPV) and is used for adults and for children over 2 years of age. There is another separate medicine leaflet called [Pneumococcal vaccine for adults](#) which provides more information about this vaccine. Adults and children aged 2 years or over can also have PCV, although this is not routinely provided by the NHS.

The vaccine stimulates your child's immune system to make antibodies against pneumococcal infections. These antibodies then help to protect your child from illness should they become infected with pneumococcal bacteria. The vaccine protects against many (but not all) types of pneumococcal bacteria.

Before your baby is given pneumococcal vaccine

Before your child is given PCV, make sure your doctor knows:

- If your child has been unwell recently or has a high temperature (fever).
- If your child has previously had an allergic reaction to a vaccine or medicine.
- If your child has a condition that makes them bleed more than is normal, such as haemophilia.
- If you have been told your child has a weakened immune system.

How the vaccine is given

- Before your child is given the vaccine, ask to read the manufacturer's printed information leaflet. The manufacturer's leaflet will give you more information about the vaccine and will tell you about any side-effects which your child may experience from having it. If you have any questions about the vaccine, ask your doctor or nurse for advice.
- Your child will be given two doses of the vaccine. It is usual for the first to be given at 12 weeks and the second at one year. PCV will be given on the same visit as your child's other routine vaccines, but it will be given as a separate injection.
- The vaccine is usually given by injection into a muscle in their thigh or upper arm. However, if your child has a condition that makes them bleed more than normal, the vaccine can be given as an injection just underneath the skin.

Getting the most from the vaccine

- If your child has a high temperature (fever) or is acutely unwell at the time of a scheduled immunisation, the doctor or nurse may recommend delaying giving the vaccine. A minor illness (such as a cough, cold or snuffles) will not interfere with the vaccine. If a delay is advised, you will be given an alternative appointment for the vaccination to be given.
- Children who are particularly at risk from pneumococcal infections may need to have a dose of a different type of pneumococcal vaccine when they are a little older. This will be in addition to the two routine doses of PCV. This may be recommended, for example, for a child who has previously had pneumonia and been admitted to hospital.

Can pneumococcal vaccine cause problems?

Along with their useful effects, vaccines like most medicines can cause unwanted side-effects, although not every child experiences them.

Pneumococcal immunisation often causes no problems, but the table below contains some of the side-effects which may occur. You will find a full list in the manufacturer's information leaflet supplied with the vaccine. Speak with a doctor or nurse if any of the following side-effects continue or become troublesome.

Common pneumococcal vaccine side-effects	What can I do if my child experiences this?
A raised temperature (mild fever); soreness, swelling, or redness around the site of the injection	This should soon pass. If you are concerned, speak with your doctor or health visitor who may recommend giving a dose of paracetamol
Irritability, drowsiness or restless sleep, rash	This should soon pass
Loss of appetite, being sick (vomiting), diarrhoea	Make sure your child has plenty to drink. If this continues, let your doctor know

You will normally be asked by the doctor or nurse to wait several minutes after the immunisation to make sure that your child does not react badly to the vaccine. Although allergic reactions are extremely rare, you should seek urgent medical advice if your child becomes breathless, or if any swelling or a rash develops within a few days of the immunisation.

If you experience any other symptoms which you think may be due to the vaccine, speak with your doctor or pharmacist.

If you experience side effects, you can report them online through the [Yellow Card website](#).

Further reading

- [Manufacturer's PIL, Prevenar 13® suspension for injection](#); Pfizer Limited, The electronic Medicines Compendium. Dated March 2021.
- [Medicines Complete BNF 87th Edition](#); British Medical Association and Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain, London.

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