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Pneumococcal vaccines for adults and children (Pneumovax 23, Prevenar 13)

Pneumococcal vaccines help to protect against infections such as pneumonia and meningitis.

The vaccine will be injected into a muscle or under the surface of your skin.

The most common side-effects are tenderness at the site of the injection, a raised temperature (mild fever), feeling tired, and head/muscle aches. These should soon pass.

About pneumococcal vaccines

Type of medicine	Pneumococcal vaccine
Used for	Protection against pneumococcal infection in adults and children
Also called	Pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine (PPV) (Pneumovax® 23); Pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV) (Apexxnar®, Prevenar13®, Vaxneuvance®)
Available as	Injection

Pneumococcus is a germ (bacterium) which can cause [pneumonia](#), [meningitis](#) and some other infections. Pneumococcal infections can affect anybody, but older people and people with long-term medical conditions are at increased risk of developing them. Some pneumococcal infections are more serious than others.

There are two types of vaccine available to [protect against pneumococcal infection](#). One is called pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV) (Prevenar13®), which is the vaccine used to routinely immunise babies. It can also be given to children and adults.

The second type of vaccine is called pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine (PPV) (Pneumovax® 23). This vaccine is suitable for the immunisation of adults and of children over 2 years of age.

This leaflet provides information about both types of pneumococcal vaccine (PCV and PPV) when they are used in adults or in children over 2 years of age. There is another separate medicine leaflet called [Pneumococcal vaccine for babies and children](#) which provides more information about PCV when it is given to babies.

Pneumococcal vaccines stimulate the body's immune system to make antibodies against pneumococcal infections. These antibodies then help protect you from illness should you become infected with pneumococcal bacteria. The vaccines provide protection against many (but not all) types of pneumococcal infection.

Before having pneumococcal vaccine

Before you are given pneumococcal vaccine, make sure your doctor knows:

- If you have been unwell recently, or if you have a high temperature (fever).
- If you have previously had an allergic reaction to a vaccine or to any other medicine.
- If you have a condition that makes you bleed more than is normal, such as haemophilia.
- If you have a weakened immune system. This may be a result of an illness or taking medicines.
- If you are pregnant or breastfeeding.
- If you are taking any other medicines. This includes any medicines you are taking which are available to buy without a prescription, as well as herbal and complementary medicines.

How the vaccine is given

- Before you are 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 you may experience from having it. If you have any questions about the vaccine, ask your doctor or nurse for advice.
- You will be given one dose of the vaccine. It may be given at the same time as some other vaccines, such as the flu (influenza) vaccine, but it will be given as a separate injection.
- Most adults over 65 will be given a single, one-off dose of pneumococcal vaccine. Some people with kidney problems or immune system problems may need a 'booster' dose every five years. Your doctor will advise you on this.
- The vaccine is given by injection into a muscle, or as an injection underneath your skin.

Getting the most from your treatment

- If you have a high temperature (fever) or if you are acutely unwell at the time of your scheduled immunisation, your 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.
- If you have been prescribed antibiotic tablets/capsules to help prevent pneumococcal infections, you should continue to take these as your doctor has prescribed. Do not stop taking your antibiotics because you have been vaccinated.
- If you are particularly at risk of infection (for example, if you have had your spleen removed, or if you are taking medicines that lower your immune response) you may need urgent antibiotic treatment if you suddenly feel unwell with a high temperature. Make an appointment to see your doctor straightaway if this happens.

- In addition to the three routine doses of Prevenar 13® for babies, children who are particularly at risk from pneumococcal infections may need to have a dose of pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine (PPV) when they are a little older. This may be recommended, for example, for a child who has previously had pneumonia and been admitted to hospital.

Can pneumococcal vaccines cause problems?

Along with their useful effects, vaccines like most medicines can cause unwanted side-effects, although not everyone 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 I experience this?
A raised temperature (mild fever); soreness, swelling, or redness around the site of the injection	This should soon pass
Muscle aches, headache	If troublesome, ask your pharmacist to recommend a suitable painkiller
Feeling tired, drowsy, irritable or having restless sleep	This should soon pass
Loss of appetite, being sick (vomiting), diarrhoea	Drink plenty of water to replace lost fluids. 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 you do not react badly to the vaccine. Although allergic reactions are extremely rare, you should seek urgent medical advice if you become 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.

Important information about all medicines

If you are having an operation or any dental treatment, tell the person carrying out the treatment which medicines you are taking.

If you buy any medicines, check with a pharmacist that they are suitable to take with your other medicines.

Do not keep out-of-date or unwanted medicines. Take them to your local pharmacy which will dispose of them for you.

If you have any questions about this medicine ask your 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.
- [Manufacturer's PIL, Pneumovax® 23 Pneumococcal Polysaccharide Vaccine \(PPV\)](#); Merck Sharp and Dohme Limited, The electronic Medicines Compendium. Dated November 2022.

- [Medicines Complete BNF 87th Edition](#); British Medical Association and Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain, London.

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