

PNEUMOCOCCAL DISEASE FACT SHEET



ABOUT

While pneumococcal disease can occur at any time, infections seem to be more common during winter and spring.

Young children, older people, and people with impaired immune systems and chronic diseases are among the most susceptible.

Pneumococcus (*Streptococcus pneumoniae*) is a bacteria that often lives harmlessly in the upper airways (nose and throat) of healthy people without causing illness.

In some people (particularly those at increased risk), the pneumococcus bacteria invades other parts of the body such as the lower tract airway or blood stream causing a more serious pneumococcal infection.

Pneumococcal infection is a common cause of middle ear infection but may also cause pneumonia, meningitis (infection of the lining of the brain) and septicaemia ('blood poisoning') if left unchecked.

HOW IT SPREADS

The pneumococcal germ passes from one person to another in droplets from the upper throat or nose. The germs get spread directly when an infected person sneezes or coughs close to someone else. It may also be possible to spread it by kissing and from contaminated objects, such as toys.

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

Streptococcus pneumoniae can cause a range of illnesses, depending on which part of the body is infected. These include:

- **Sinusitis** – infection of the sinuses (air-filled cavities in the face). Symptoms include aching face, blocked nose, yellow-green nasal mucus and headache
- **Otitis media** – middle ear infection. Symptoms include painful ear, hearing loss, high temperature, nausea and vomiting.
- **Bacteraemia** – bacteria invade the blood. Symptoms include fever, headache and muscular aches and pains. This is a very serious condition

- **Septic arthritis** – joint infection. Symptoms include joint pain, swelling and reduced movement of the joint.
- **Osteomyelitis** – bone infection. Symptoms include bone pain, reduced movement of the affected part and fever.
- **Pneumonia** – lung infection. Symptoms include fever, cough, chest pains and breathing problems, such as shortness of breath.
- **Meningitis** – infection of the lining around the brain and spinal cord. Symptoms may include high fever, headache, stiff neck, nausea and vomiting, and sometimes coma. Pneumococcal meningitis is extremely serious and has a high death rate.

If you experience symptoms, contact your GP or HCP.

PREVENTION & TREATMENT

Immunisation can reduce the risk of infection, especially in young children (It is on the routine vaccine schedule). Children are eligible for pneumococcal disease vaccination under the [National Immunisation Program](#) (NIP).

There are at least 90 different strains of *Streptococcus pneumoniae*. Only some of these are regular causes of invasive pneumococcal disease (IPD) in Australia. Immunisation against these strains greatly reduces the risk of disease.

Treatment options include:

- Antibiotics such as penicillin
- Pain-relieving medication
- Plenty of fluids
- Rest
- Hospital admission in severe cases, such as meningitis

For further information on available pneumococcal disease-specific preventative treatment options, contact your GP or HCP.