



**Protection against pneumococcal infection**  
**A message from the Chief Medical Officer**

**Dear Patient**

Vaccination against pneumococcal infection can protect you against an illness which is potentially serious. If you are aged 65 or over or have a serious medical condition, and you

haven't previously been vaccinated, I hope you will take this opportunity to ask your GP or practice nurse about getting the pneumococcal vaccine.

Most people only need to be immunised against pneumococcal infection once so there is no need for repeat injections every year and it can be given at the same time as the flu vaccination. The vaccine is very safe and is not associated with any serious side effects.

Your GP or practice nurse can give you the pneumococcal vaccine when you attend for your flu vaccination. I would strongly recommend that you take this opportunity to be immunised against this potentially serious infection.

Yours sincerely

Dr H Campbell  
Chief Medical Officer



**Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland**

18 Ormeau Avenue, Belfast BT2 8HS.

Tel: 028 9031 1611 (Voice/Minicom). Fax: 028 9031 1711.

[www.healthpromotionagency.org.uk](http://www.healthpromotionagency.org.uk)

# Protect yourself from pneumococcal infection



# Protect yourself from pneumococcal infection

## What is pneumococcal infection?

Pneumococcal infection is an infection which is responsible for a lot of serious illness. It may cause up to half of all cases of pneumonia. It also causes a significant proportion of cases of ear and chest infection, sinusitis, meningitis and septicaemia (blood poisoning).

## Who is at risk?

Pneumococcal infection can affect anyone, but it becomes more common as people get older. It is most dangerous in very young children, people over 65 years of age and people with underlying medical conditions such as:

- diabetes;
- chronic kidney, liver, heart or lung disease;
- those with impaired immune systems;
- those who don't have a functioning spleen or have had their spleen removed;
- those with cochlear implants.

## Is there a vaccine?

A vaccine is available which will protect against most pneumococcal infections.

## Who should get the vaccine?

Everyone over 65 should get vaccinated, as well as those with the specific medical conditions highlighted above, as they are at increased risk of infection (a separate vaccine is available for children under two years old).

## When should the vaccine be given?

The vaccine can be given at any time, but since infection rates are highest in winter, it makes sense to get it at the same time as your flu vaccination in October or early November. You can have both vaccinations at the same time, by having one injection in each arm.

## Do I need to get vaccinated every year?

Unlike the flu jab, which has to be given every year, most people only need to be immunised against pneumococcal infection **once**.

## Does the vaccine have side effects?

This vaccine has no serious side effects. As with any vaccination, some people may have mild soreness and swelling at the site of the injection, or a slight fever afterwards.