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Pneumonia vaccine

Pneumonia is an infection that causes inflammation (swelling) and mucus in your lungs. It can be serious, especially if you're older or have a long-term health condition. So, for some groups of people, doctors recommend vaccines that help prevent it.

You can use this information to talk to your doctor to decide which vaccines are right for you.

Which vaccines can protect me against pneumonia?

There are two vaccines that can help protect you against pneumonia. One is called the **pneumococcal vaccine**. The other is the **flu vaccine**.

It might sound strange to have a flu vaccine to prevent pneumonia. But having flu weakens your immune system. This makes you more likely to get other illnesses, including pneumonia.

The pneumococcal vaccine

The pneumococcal vaccine is designed to protect against the most common type of pneumonia. The vaccine contains bacteria, but these bacteria are dead and can't harm you. The pneumococcal vaccine can't give you pneumonia or any other illness.

The vaccine can cause side effects in some people, such as:

- a sore arm where you had the injection
- a fever, and
- pain in some joints and muscles.

These side effects don't usually last more than a few days.

Different countries have different recommendations about who should have the pneumococcal vaccine and when.

For example, in the UK, the pneumococcal vaccine is given as part of the regular vaccinations for children. Babies are offered one injection at 16 weeks old, followed by a

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booster injection at 1 year old. This is all that most people need. But you might need to have another injection if:[1]

- You are 65 years old or over
- You have a long-term condition, such as diabetes, heart disease, kidney disease, liver disease, a neurological disease, or sickle cell disease
- You have a lung condition, such as COPD or severe asthma
- You have no spleen, or you have a condition where your spleen doesn't work properly, like coeliac disease
- You have a cochlear implant (a device put inside your ear to help with hearing loss)
- You have a weak immune system due to a condition, like a complement deficiency or HIV
- You have a weak immune system due to medical treatment, like chemotherapy or steroids
- You have had cerebrospinal fluid leaking, possibly due to an accident or surgery (this fluid surrounds the brain and spine)
- You are at risk of getting pneumonia because of your work - if you work with metal fumes in welding, for example.

Some people with a very weak immune system or problems with their spleen might need booster injections every 5 years. Your doctor will let you know if this applies to you.

The flu vaccine

Having flu makes you more likely to get pneumonia. So, if you have the flu vaccine, it may also reduce your chance of getting pneumonia.

The flu vaccine can't give you flu. But it can cause similar side effects to the pneumonia jab.

You need to have a new injection every year, usually in autumn or early winter.

Different countries have different recommendations about who should have the flu vaccine and when.

For example, in the UK, you will be advised to get the flu vaccine every year if you're at a higher risk of becoming very unwell from flu. This includes if:[2]

- You are aged 65 years old or over
- You are pregnant
- You are very overweight
- You have a long-term condition, such as diabetes, heart disease, kidney disease, liver disease, sickle cell disease, or a condition that affects your brain or nerves
- You have no spleen, or you have a condition where your spleen doesn't work properly, like coeliac disease
- You have a lung condition, such as COPD or severe asthma

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- You have a weak immune system due to a condition, like a complement deficiency, HIV or AIDS
- You have a weak immune system due to medical treatment, like chemotherapy or steroids
- You live with or care for someone who could become very unwell if they had flu (for example, you live with someone having chemotherapy, or you work in a nursing home)
- You are a healthcare worker.

The flu vaccine is also offered to children between aged 2 and 18 years old in the UK. This vaccine is usually given as a nasal spray, not an injection.

Younger children (aged between 6 months and 2 years old) are only offered the flu vaccine each year if they have certain long-term health conditions, or if they live with someone who could become very unwell if they had flu.

Children aged under 6 months old are too young to have the flu vaccine.

References

1. UK Helalth Security Agency. Complete routine immunisation schedule from 1 January 2026. Mar 2026 [internet publication].
2. UK Health Security Agency. Annual flu programme. Feb 2026 [internet publication].

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