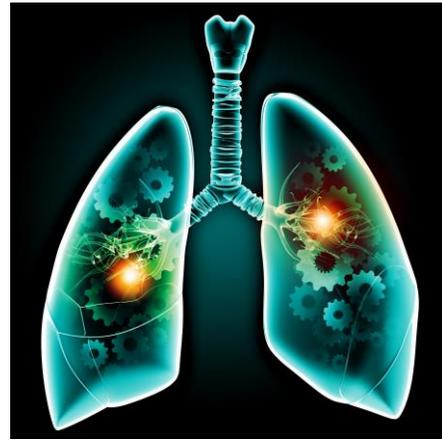


Pneumonia Vaccines: Saving Lives

What is Pneumonia?

Pneumonia is a common and dangerous infectious disease among elderly people. In fact, 1 in every 20 adults diagnosed with pneumonia would die from it. Pneumonia is usually caused by the bacteria *Streptococcus pneumoniae*. Milder pneumonia symptoms are similar to colds, including cough, phlegm production, fever, fatigue, and shortness of breath. For high risk patients such as the elderly, immunocompromised people, smokers, or those with chronic diseases (diabetes, lung diseases, etc), pneumococcal infection can result in hospitalization, and sometimes even invasive pneumococcal diseases (bloodstream infection or meningitis) or death.



Pneumonia Vaccine Efficacy

Other than taking basic preventative measures such as washing hands frequently, there are 2 vaccines that can help prevent pneumonia: Pneumovax 23 (PPSV23) and Prevnar 13 (PCV13). Studies show that PCV13 are at least 75% effective against invasive pneumococcal diseases and 45% effective against non-invasive pneumococcal diseases for the 13 serotypes it prevents against. PPSV23 are not very effective against non-invasive pneumococcal diseases, but it is 50~85% effective against invasive pneumococcal diseases caused by the 23 serotypes it prevents against.

The pneumococcal vaccines are effective for at least 5 years after injection. Nevertheless, Health Canada recommends people over 65 years old to receive the immunization only once, and no booster is required after 5 years.

Both Vaccines are Recommended

Which vaccine should you get then? Even though PPSV23 prevents more serotypes than PCV13, but studies show that PCV13 results in better immune response. This is why Health Canada's newest guidelines recommend everyone aged 65 or older should receive BOTH vaccines: first receive the PCV13 shot, then the PPSV23 one year after for optimal protection.

Are Pneumonia Vaccines Free?

The PPSV23 is free for anyone over 65 years old, residents or workers at long-term care centres, or those with certain chronic diseases (diabetes, kidney/liver/lung diseases, cardiovascular diseases, or immunosuppression). On the other hand, PCV13 costs around \$110. You can get both immunizations at your physician's office or at the pharmacy.

Summary

Everyone over 65 years old and people with high risks (as listed above) should receive PCV13 (self-paid), and then PPSV23 (free) one year after. Combined with preventative measures such as good hand-washing habits, one can significantly lower the risk of getting pneumonia and its possibly serious consequences.