

Streptococcus pneumoniae

This bacteria is found in many people as part of normal colonization in their upper respiratory tract. If the bacteria becomes invasive, it most commonly causes acute otitis media, sinusitis, pneumonia, and pink eye. **This bacterial infection is one of the two most common causes of life-threatening bacterial meningitis in infants and young children.** Severe but less common infections include cellulitis, infection of the lining around the heart, joint infections, soft tissue infections, and sepsis in the newborn.

This infection is transmitted from person-to-person by respiratory droplets (most commonly spread through nasal secretions). The incubation period can be as short as 1 to 3 days. Pneumococcal infections are most prevalent during the winter months, and rates of infection are highest in infants and young children, as well as the elderly. These infections also are more severe in people with a compromised immune system.

Since the year 2000 when the Prevnar vaccine was recommended for routine use in infants, the incidence of invasive pneumococcal infections have decreased by 80% for children younger than 2 years of age and approximately 90% in older children and adults. If the bacteria is sensitive to available antibiotics, children with serious infections are often hospitalized and treated with IV antibiotics. There is some concern over antibiotic resistance and the possibility that certain strains of the bacteria may not be able to be treated with IV antibiotics due to increasing bacterial resistance.

There are 2 vaccines available for use in children. The first vaccine is Prevnar that should be given in a 4 part series to all children under 2 years of age. Older children who are immunocompromised may be eligible to receive a Pneumovax vaccine. Your doctor will decide if your child is eligible for the Pneumovax vaccine based on their immune status. Most common side effects of this vaccine include mild redness or swelling at the injection site. Fever may occur 1 to 2 days following injection.