

# Seniors need two pneumonia vaccines, CDC advisory panel says

February 3 2015, by Steven Reinberg, Healthday Reporter

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(HealthDay)—Adults 65 and older need two vaccines to better protect them from bacterial infection in the blood (called sepsis), meningitis and pneumonia, according to a revised vaccination schedule from the 2015 Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP).

The ACIP is the vaccine advisory panel for the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Such infections are caused by [pneumococcal bacteria](#), and older people have an increased risk of life-threatening infection from these bacteria.

"All adults aged 65 years or older should talk to their [health care providers](#) about getting [pneumococcal vaccines](#) for protection against pneumococcal diseases," said Dr. David Kim, the CDC's deputy associate director for adult immunizations.

The new recommendations were published in the Feb. 3 *Annals of Internal Medicine*.

The committee recommended that seniors get both the Prevnar 13 and the Pneumovax 23 vaccines. As their names imply, Prevnar 13 protects against 13 types of pneumococcal bacteria, and the Pneumovax 23 protects against 23 types of pneumococcal bacteria.

Why not just get the vaccine that covers more strains? Because the two vaccines work in different ways, which appears to offer broader

protection, according to Dr. Sandra Fryhofer. She is an adjunct associate professor of medicine at Emory University School of Medicine in Atlanta and author of an accompanying editorial in the journal.

Additional protection is especially important for [older adults](#) because they're much more vulnerable to serious infections, she noted.

"The risk of [invasive pneumococcal disease](#) in older adults is nearly 10 times that of young adults," Fryhofer said.

According to the National Foundation of Infectious Diseases (NFID), about 1 million U.S. adults get pneumococcal pneumonia every year. As many as 7 percent die from these infections. Although fewer people get [pneumococcal meningitis](#) or sepsis, the death rate is higher—10 percent or more, according to the foundation.

Overall, pneumococcal pneumonia, meningitis and bloodstream infections kill tens of thousands annually in the United States. Of those deaths, 18,000 are adults ages 65 and older, the foundation said.

Pneumococcal disease is also responsible for serious illness and complications that may last a lifetime. These complications include heart problems, hearing loss, seizures, blindness and paralysis, the foundation said.

Fryhofer said that since these new recommendations come from the CDC's vaccination committee, both vaccines should be covered by [health insurance companies](#). And, as of Feb. 2, Medicare should cover them as well.

However, both shots must be given at different times.

"These vaccinations cannot be given at the same time, because they

induce an immune response in a different way," Fryhofer said.

For older adults, the Prevnar 13 vaccine is generally given first and then the Pneumovax 23 vaccine 12 months later, she said.

If someone has already had the Pneumovax 23, they can get the Prevnar 13 immunization 12 months later, according to the editorial.

**More information:** For more information on pneumococcal vaccine, visit the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

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