

Pneumococcal disease

Pneumococcal disease is caused by a bacteria called *Streptococcus pneumoniae*. The germ can cause a range of diseases, from mild ear or throat infections to severe lung infections (pneumonia) and meningitis (infection of the membranes covering the brain and spinal cord). In Australia, pneumococcal disease is more common in winter and spring. It is a leading cause of death in children under 5 years of age, especially in First Nations children. Seniors are also at risk of pneumococcal pneumonia.

How it spreads

Pneumococcal disease spreads by droplets in the air that contain the virus or direct contact with mucus or saliva. People get infected by:

- breathing in droplets when an infected person breathes, coughs or sneezes on them
- touching a surface contaminated with droplets – for example, hands, tissues, toys or eating utensils – and then touching their eyes, nose or mouth.

Vaccination against pneumococcal disease is part of the routine childhood vaccination schedule in the Australian National Immunisation Program.

Exclusion period

Exclude until the person has received antibiotics for at least 24 hours and feels well.

Actions for educators and other staff

Follow the exclusion period in the *Staying healthy* guidelines.

Ensure staff and children have good hand and respiratory hygiene.

Ensure staff use appropriate cleaning practices, as described in the *Staying healthy* guidelines.

Actions for parents and carers

Protect your child against pneumococcal disease by being up to date with their childhood vaccinations.

If your child has symptoms of the disease, see your doctor.

Keep your child at home until they feel well, and for at least 24 hours after they have started taking antibiotics.

Teach your child to cough or sneeze into a tissue, then throw the tissue into a bin and wash their hands. If there are no tissues nearby, teach them to cough or sneeze into their inner elbow instead of their hands.

Make sure your child washes their hands thoroughly and often.

More information about pneumococcal disease

See healthdirect for more information on prevention, diagnosis and treatment of pneumococcal disease (healthdirect.gov.au/pneumococcal-disease).

To find out if a child needs medical help:

- use the online symptom checker (healthdirect.gov.au/symptom-checker)
- speak to a registered nurse by calling the 24-hour health advice hotline on 1800 022 222.