Pneumococcal Disease Fact Sheet

Pneumococcal disease refers to any infection caused by the bacteria *Streptococcus pneumoniae*.
This bacteria can cause ear infections and severe infections of the lungs (pneumonia), blood (bacteremia), and covering of the brain and spinal cord (meningitis). Increases in cases of pneumococcal pneumonia may occur during outbreaks of influenza. Pneumococcal disease can be very serious. Infants, young children, persons 65 and older, and persons with underlying medical conditions are at increased risk of getting pneumococcal disease. Persons are more likely to get very sick or die from pneumococcal disease if they have chronic health conditions, such as alcoholism, heart or lung disease, kidney failure, diabetes, cancer, a weakened immune system, or sickle cell disease.

Pneumococcal bacteria is spread from person-to-person by airborne droplets and direct contact with infected respiratory secretions.
Pneumococcal disease is spread by direct contact with respiratory droplets from the nose or mouth of an infected person or by a person who is carrying the bacteria. The length of time that a person may spread pneumococcal disease is unknown but is probably as long as the bacteria are present in the respiratory tract.

Symptoms to look for generally include:

- Fever and chills
- Headache
- Ear pain
- Cough
- Chest pain
- Shortness of breadth
- Disorientation
- Occasionally a stiff neck

Symptoms occur generally within 1 to 3 days, but this time period is not definite.

Laboratory testing is available to confirm a pneumococcal infection.
People who think they have a pneumococcal infection should see a doctor **immediately** to be tested. Pneumococcal disease is diagnosed by testing the blood, spinal fluid, middle ear, lungs, or other bodily fluids. **See a doctor immediately for treatment**.

Pneumococcal disease may be treated with a variety of antibiotics such as penicillin. However, penicillin-resistant strains of pneumococcal infections are occurring more frequently. These strains may be successfully treated with other types of antibiotics.

Pneumococcal disease can be prevented with a pneumococcal vaccine.
Pneumococcal vaccines can help protect against pneumococcal infections, including invasive disease. Invasive disease means the bacteria invade parts of the body, such as blood, that are normally free of germs. This can be very serious and can sometimes result in death.

There are two types of pneumococcal vaccines used in the United States to prevent pneumococcal disease: pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccines and pneumococcal conjugate vaccines.

Pneumococcal vaccine recommendations vary based on age and risk factors. Talk to your doctor to make sure you are up to date on pneumococcal vaccination.