

Senior Health Alert

Talk to Your Health Care Provider About Pneumococcal Disease This Flu Season

(NAPSA)—With flu season on the way, you may be planning a doctor's visit. Take the opportunity to also talk to your doctor about another serious health issue—pneumococcal disease (pronounced NEW-moe-cock-ul).

“Pneumococcal disease, like influenza, is very common and often underestimated. Both are more prevalent during the winter months and may cause serious health problems, particularly in older adults,” according to William Schaffner, M.D., Chair of the Department of Preventive Medicine at Vanderbilt Medical Center in Nashville, Tennessee.

A Look At The Facts

Pneumococcal pneumonia is the most common form of pneumococcal disease in adults. Each year in the United States, there are an estimated 175,000 hospitalizations for pneumococcal pneumonia.

When infection spreads to the bloodstream, it is called bacteremia, a very serious—and sometimes deadly—complication. It has been estimated that there are more than 50,000 cases of bacteremia each year.

Causes, Symptoms And Treatment

Many healthy people—up to 70 percent—carry the bacteria that cause pneumococcal disease and don't even know it. The bacteria are spread by coughing, sneezing or close contact. Researchers don't know why it suddenly enters the lungs and bloodstream to cause illness, but they do know that



pneumococcal disease occurs more commonly during winter months.

Pneumococcal disease is usually treated with antibiotics, but that's not always effective. “Treatment of pneumococcal disease is getting harder because the bacteria are becoming more resistant to penicillin and other antibiotics,” said Schaffner. So remember to talk to your health care provider about pneumococcal disease.

For more information about pneumococcal disease, visit www.niaid.nih.gov/factsheets/pneumonia.htm.

Are You At Increased Risk?

Some people are at increased risk for pneumococcal disease, including those who:

- Are age 65 or over
- Have chronic heart or lung disease
- Have problems with alcohol or have chronic liver disease
- Have diabetes
- Have a suppressed immune system or have cancer
- Are without a spleen
- Have sickle cell disease

