**PNEUMOCOCCAL FACTS**

Pneumococcal disease is a very serious illness that results in more death to people in the United States than all other vaccine-preventable diseases combined. Pneumococcal infection can lead to life-threatening pneumonia and causes an estimated 40,000 deaths annually in the United States. It can be contracted any time of year, but is most prevalent in the winter months. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), pneumonia and influenza combined represent the leading cause of infectious disease death in the United States.  
  
Pneumococcal infections are caused by the bacteria Streptococcus pneumoniae, also known as pneumococcus. The most common types of infections caused by this bacteria include: middle ear infections, pneumonia, blood stream infections (bacteremia), sinus infections, and meningitis. The bacteria is spread through contact between persons who are ill or who carry the bacteria in their throat. Transmission is mostly through the spread of respiratory droplets from the nose or mouth of a person with a pneumococcal infection. Pneumococcal pneumonia is the most common clinical presentation of pneumococcal disease among adults. An estimated 175,000 hospitalized cases of pneumococcal pneumonia occur annually in the United States.   
  
Pneumococcal vaccine is recommended for persons at increased risk for serious pneumococcal infection, including those age 2 years or older with certain chronic medical conditions and all persons aged 65 years or older. Pneumococcal vaccine is typically given only once. This protects most people for a lifetime, although some might need to get a booster shot after 5 years. The pneumococcal shot protects individuals from getting serious infections in the blood or brain that can cause dangerous health problems, hospitalization or death. The shot is very safe and does not make you sick. In cases where the influenza vaccine is not available, getting pneumococcal vaccination is still recommended for those eligible. Pneumococcal vaccine however is not a substitute for influenza vaccination. It is available whenever you go to your doctor. Make sure you ask about it.