

To Your Health Newsletter

“Promoting Good Health Through Information”
Veterans Affairs Palo Alto Health Care System
Patient Education Newsletter • Fall 2008

Have You Had Your Pneumococcus Vaccination Yet?

Jenny Herschelman, Pharm.D.

Streptococcus pneumoniae, also known as pneumococcus, is a type of bacteria that can cause many types of infection. It can cause pneumonia (an infection in the lungs), bacteremia (an infection in the blood), meningitis (an infection near the brain), and other infections such as ear infections.

Pneumococcus is transferred from person to person through sneezing and coughing. Many people, including healthy people, carry pneumococcus in their lungs or nose, but it does not make them sick.

Each year in the United States, about 175,000 hospitalizations occur due to pneumococcal lung infections. Pneumococcal infections can be treated with antibiotics, but antibiotic resistant bacteria are becoming more common. People most often have to be treated in the hospital with intravenous antibiotics.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend that all adults ages 65 years and older receive one dose of the pneumococcal vaccine. People under 65 years of age should receive the vaccination if they have chronic lung disease (such as COPD, but not asthma), chronic heart disease, diabetes, chronic liver disease, chronic alcoholism, chronic kidney failure, people without a spleen, people with a suppressed immune system (such as those with an organ transplant or HIV infection), and people who live in nursing homes or other long term care facilities. For people who receive this vaccine before they turn 65 years of age, they should get a second dose when they turn 65 years old (as long as it has been 5 years since the first vaccination).

The pneumococcal vaccine is effective at preventing very serious infections. It is also very safe with the most common side effects from the vaccination being pain, swelling, or redness at the injection site.

Not sure if you had your pneumococcal vaccination yet? Ask your health care provider!

Recipe for Health

SPICY SOUTHERN BARBECUED CHICKEN

Removing the chicken fat and skin and adding no salt to the tasty sauce makes this chicken favorite heart-healthy!

Ingredients:

3 lb chicken parts (breast, drumstick, and thigh), skin and fat removed
1 large onion, thinly sliced
3 Tbsp vinegar
3 Tbsp Worcestershire sauce
2 Tbsp brown sugar
Black pepper to taste
1 Tbsp hot pepper flakes
1 Tbsp chili powder
1 Cup chicken stock or broth, skim fat

Directions:

1. Place chicken in a 13x9x2-inch pan. Arrange onions over the top.
2. Mix together vinegar, Worcestershire sauce, brown sugar, pepper, hot pepper flakes, chili powder, and stock.
3. Pour over the chicken and bake at 350° F for 1 hour or until done.
4. Baste occasionally.

Yields: 8 servings

Serving Size: 1 chicken part with sauce

Each Serving Provides:

Calories: 176

Total Fat: 6 g

Saturated Fat: less than 2 g

Cholesterol: 66 mg

Sodium: 240 mg

www.nhlbi.nih.gov

Stroke: *Brain Attack*

Amy Quien, RN, MS

Stroke is a medical emergency. It is the third leading cause of death in the United States and is a major cause of disability among adults. Strokes happen when a blood vessel that carries blood to the brain is blocked or breaks. As a result, part of the brain may be injured and cause difficulty with function that is controlled by that part of the brain. For example, you could lose the use of an arm or leg, or the ability to speak. The injury can be temporary or permanent. Therefore, it is important to receive treatment as soon as symptoms start. Treatment can return blood flow to the brain and lessen the chance of brain damage.

It is important that everyone become familiar with what you might see (signs) and how a person might feel (symptoms) when having a stroke. These signs and symptoms may include the following:

- Sudden weakness and numbness of the face, arm or leg on one side of the body
- Sudden trouble or inability to speak, or difficulty understanding others
- Sudden, severe headache
- Sudden dizziness or loss of balance
- Sudden dimming or loss of vision

If you or someone you know is having any of these symptoms, you should immediately call 9-1-1. It is better to have an ambulance bring you to the hospital since they can start treatment right away. Strokes can be treated. Do not ignore the warning signs and symptoms even if they go away. Some life-saving treatments are most effective when given as soon as possible. Remember, every second counts. Treating stroke early can save lives.

Test Your Stroke Knowledge

1. What is a stroke?

- A. A blood clot stops the flow of blood in a arm or leg
- B. The heart slows and nearly stops functioning
- C. Blood flow to the brain is interrupted, or a blood vessel in the brain bursts
- D. All of the above

2. True or False: Stroke is not a medical emergency.

3. What are the symptoms of stroke?

- A.. Sudden weakness or numbness on one side of the body, and/or sudden, severe headaches
- B. Sudden confusion, difficulty speaking, and/or blurred vision
- C. Sudden dizziness or problems moving or walking
- D. All of the above

4. What can you do to help reduce your risk for stroke?

- A. Exercise regularly
- B. Eat foods low in fat and salt
- C. Stop smoking
- D. All of the above

5. True or False: If you feel any stroke symptoms you should call 9-1-1 right away.

ANSWERS:

1. C; 2. False; 3. D; 4. D; 5. True

Have You Been Tested for Colon Cancer?

Rosemary Gill, RN, MS

Have you followed Katie Couric's advice?

Katie Couric's husband died of colon cancer and she has become a very strong supporter of screening for the disease. Screening is testing for a disease before the person feels symptoms. Cancer of the colon and rectum is the second most common cause of cancer death in the United States*. Screening for this cancer can prevent many of these cancer deaths.

How can screening prevent colon cancer?

Most cancers of the colon and rectum start as polyps. These are growths that should not be there. Some of these polyps can turn into cancer as they grow. There can also be small cancers that can be cured by removing them early.

Are there symptoms?

Many people with polyps or early colon or rectal cancer have no symptoms but some do. There may be blood in the stool, a change in bowel habits or losing weight without trying. These symptoms can be caused by other things than cancer so please check with your provider if you have any of these symptoms.

Who should be screened for colon cancer?

If you are 50 years of age or older, or a close relative had colon or rectal cancer, you should probably be screened. Talk to your primary care provider about it.

How do we screen for colon cancer?

There are several ways to look for colon cancer. Here at the VA Palo Alto Health Care System we use the best screening test available. It is called screening colonoscopy. The doctor uses a long, thin tube with a light to check the entire colon and rectum. Most polyps and some cancers can be removed during this procedure. Patients are given medication to make them comfortable during the procedure. Usually a screening colonoscopy only needs to be done every 10 years. Screening for colon and rectal cancer saves lives. Talk to your primary care provider at your next visit.

Bonus question:

What type of cancer kills more Americans than any other cancer?

Answer: Lung cancer.

Tips for Healthy Living

Avoid food portions larger than your fist.

Take a walk or do desk exercises instead of a cigarette or coffee break.

www.smallstep.gov

Taking an active role in your care can help prevent medication errors!

Carry your medication list with you at all times!

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