

The CDC is pushing a vaccine for pneumonia — just not for the kind infecting kids

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The CDC is now recommending people 50 and older get vaccinated against pneumonia. (AP Photo/Mark J. Terrill)

Doctors' offices and hospitals have been reporting [a spike in cases of pneumonia](#) in Maryland and around the nation since late summer. So it seems right on time for the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to recommend more people get vaccinated.

The pneumonia vaccine is now recommended for those at least age 50, down from age 65. It covers about 20 kinds of bacterial pneumonia — but not the kind currently going around, *mycoplasma pneumoniae*. And the target of the CDC's vaccination efforts are not the bulk of those getting sick this wave, who are predominately children.

So what gives?

The advice is something of a coincidence of timing, said Dr. Gregory Schrank, an infectious disease doctor at the University of Maryland Medical Center and an assistant professor in the affiliated university school of medicine.

Current state and national health data shows kids are indeed getting sick with mycoplasma pneumonia. But over the last couple of years, 50-year-olds have also been getting sick with pneumococcal pneumonia.

“The CDC saw the data going in the wrong direction post-COVID,” after years of going trending down, he said about the pneumococcal pneumonia. “They had an incentive to reexamine their recommendations about who should be getting vaccinated.”

There is no vaccine against mycoplasma pneumonia. But there are newly approved vaccines targeting the bacteria that causes pneumococcal pneumonia. The infections can seem similar, giving people those same miserable flu-like symptoms, but the latter also can lead to complications, including bloodstream infections and meningitis, or potentially deadly inflammation in the brain or spinal cord.

The reasons for the upward COVID-era trend weren't totally clear. But infections jumped in those age 5 and younger and those age 65 and older, plus among 50- to 64-year-olds, though most of the last group had risk factors, such as chronic heart or lung conditions or diabetes.

The CDC said since many 50-somethings have some kind of health condition, officials advised they all get a shot instead of parsing which conditions warranted the extra protection.

A statement from the CDC says just lowering the age simplifies the advice and should “improve vaccination coverage among adults 50 through 64 years of age, including those with risk conditions.”

That could be life-saving, as pneumococcal pneumonia kills 1 in 20 older adults who get it and 1 in 6 who develop meningitis or bloodstream infections.

Dr. Raymond Zollinger, vice president of medical affairs for Johns Hopkins Community Physicians, said the advice is still new, just adopted October 23, so Hopkins officials will review the information before they start recommending the vaccine for certain patients.

He said they will also give it enough time to make sure insurance companies cover the cost of the shots, which they typically do after a CDC recommendation. In this case, it would be one shot providing coverage for many years, not seasonally.

“We were already vaccinating those 65 and older and younger adults with certain conditions,” he said.

And while the timing of the CDC recommendation may be confusing, since there is that other form of pneumonia going around, it might also be helpful. They said people should be talking to their doctors anyway about seasonal vaccines against flu, RSV and COVID.

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