**Strep. Pneumonia Vaccine**

A vaccine to prevent illness caused by **strep pneumonia bacteria** was approved in March 2000. This vaccine is primarily designed to prevent “invasive disease” from this bacterium: pneumonia, meningitis, and bloodstream infection (sepsis or bacteremia). In addition, these bacteria cause about 30 – 40% of ear infections and sinus infections in children. Since Prevnar’s introduction there has been a dramatic reduction in these childhood illnesses.

This vaccine (brand name “**Prevnar**” or “PCV-7”) is based on an older vaccine called “**Pneumovax**” which has been available for over 20 years. Pneumovax was and still is routinely given to elderly people to prevent pneumonia. Pneumovax was also given to children over age 2 for certain rare indications. The vaccine was not very effective under age 2 and was not part of the routine immunization schedule. As of June 2010, PCV-7 (Prevnar-7) was replaced by PCV-13 (Prevnar-13) which protects against an additional 6 strains of strep pneumonia bacteria.

Prevnar is extremely safe and very effective. It uses a **component** of the bacterial cell to stimulate antibody production by the body’s immune system. It is not therefore a “live” vaccine. Prevnar, like all other childhood vaccines now, contains no mercury or thimerosol. Prevnar can cause fever and muscle soreness at the injection site for several days.

This vaccine will **not** protect against strep throat, since this is caused by Group A strep bacteria, not by strep pneumonia.

Prevnar is recommended for **all** kids under age 2 years. Between ages 2 – 3, experts in the field recommend immunizing children in daycare or preschool, and also kids 2 – 5 years old in certain designated “high risk” groups. In our practice, we feel that this is a valuable vaccine for **all** kids below age 5 years, and this has been our approach since it became available.

Immunization can start as early as 6 weeks of age. Kids under 6 months require a series of 3 doses and a “booster” at 12 months; for children 7 – 12 months of age, a total of 3 doses are given; from 12 – 23 months, 2 doses; and just 1 dose for kids over 24 months.

For more information on childhood vaccinations, go online to our website and click on the links under “immunizations”.

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