

More than half a million people^{1,3} in Ireland age 65 and older at risk of pneumococcal disease

Age Action, Diabetes Ireland, Asthma Society of Ireland and Croí unite to raise awareness of pneumo

- More than 510,000 people age 65 and older in Ireland are at risk
- Of those who contract the disease, 1 in 4 will develop meningitis, 1 in 4 will develop pneumonia, and 1 in 10 will die²
- 84% of people aged 65 and older are not protected against pneumococcal disease³
- Children under-5 and people with weakened immune systems are also at an increased risk⁴
- Pneumo can cause serious illness and death from infection including meningitis, pneumonia, and septicaemia⁴
- It has been estimated that 10% of adults may carry the bacteria to 50% of children attending day care facilities⁵

3rd October 2017: More than 500,000 people age 65 and older in Ireland are at risk of getting pneumococcal disease, or pneumo, this winter^{1,3}. Pneumo is a bacteria which can cause serious illness including meningitis, pneumonia and septicaemia⁴. Of those who get infected with pneumo, 1 in 4 will develop meningitis, 1 in 4 will develop pneumonia and 1 in 10 will die². Currently, 84 per cent or more than 500,000, of over 65s are not protected against pneumo¹.

Those aged 65 and over are at increased risk of pneumo infection, however children under the age of five and people with weakened immune systems also have a higher risk of infection⁴. It has been estimated that 10% of adults may carry the bacteria while that figures ranges up to 50% of children attending day care facilities.⁵

Those who are officially at-risk according to the Immunisation Guidelines for Ireland include people with diabetes, asthma, heart disease, as well as those with chronic renal disease and chronic lung problems⁴.

Dr Andrew Murphy, Galway-based GP said, "It is disappointing that there are more than half a million 65 year olds and over in Ireland who have not been vaccinated against pneumo, or pneumococcal disease. A pneumo infection can cause serious illness and even result in death. We know the introduction of a nationwide vaccination programme for pneumo almost a decade ago, has resulted in a 90% fall in cases. It is important to maintain that success rate and continue to protect at-risk groups.

"If you are 65 or older, or in one of the official at-risk groups, speak to your GP or pharmacist about protecting yourself against pneumococcal disease this winter."

Neil Johnson, CEO of Croí, the West of Ireland Heart Charity, said; "Winter months are a prime time for those with weakened immune systems, including people with heart disease, to catch infection that can cause serious illness. Know that you can be and should be protected against Pneumo this winter. Talk to your GP or your pharmacist, or talk to Croí."

Averil Power, CEO, Asthma Society of Ireland, said, "Prevention is better than cure and the first step towards prevention is awareness. The pneumo bug is spread like the common cold, through coughing, sneezing and by close contact, and like the common cold, it can be hard to avoid. "The Asthma Society of Ireland encourages people to Know Pneumo and if you think you are at-risk, talk to your healthcare professional. We want to ensure people with asthma know that they are at-risk of infection and that there is something they can do about it."

Dr Anna Clarke, Diabetes Ireland said; “We are all aware of meningitis, pneumonia and even septicaemia, but often we are not aware of one of the causes of these serious illnesses. I would urge those with diabetes to Know Pneumo, know the impact it can have on your health and wellbeing and talk to your Diabetes team.”

The Immunisation Guidelines for Ireland recommend that infants, official at-risk groups and everyone aged 65 years or older should be offered pneumococcal vaccination.

To find out more on how to protect yourself or the ones you love against pneumococcal disease, talk to your GP or your pharmacist. You can also visit pneumo.ie or follow #KnowPneumo online.

Ends

Notes for Editors:

Pneumococcal disease is an important cause of serious illness in adults. It is caused by a common bacterium, *Streptococcus pneumoniae*, which can attack different parts of the body. If the pneumococcal bacteria infect the lungs, they can cause pneumonia. When they invade the blood stream, they cause septicaemia and when they invade the brain, they cause meningitis.

Like the common cold, pneumococcal disease is spread by close contact, coughing and sneezing. However, spreading of infection and disease can be reduced by hygiene measures such as washing your hands regularly throughout the day.

Pneumococcal vaccination is generally a once off vaccination for those aged age 65 or older.

#KnowPneumo

The #KnowPneumo campaign aims to raise awareness about pneumococcal disease and its potential to cause serious illness. A number of patient organisations have joined forces as part of the initiative, namely Age Action, Diabetes Ireland, the Asthma Society of Ireland and Croi.

To find out more about the campaign, check out the attached infographic, the website www.pneumo.ie or follow # KnowPneumo online.