

# Infant Health Matters: Knocking Down Pneumococcal Disease

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*The National Coalition for Infant Health is a collaborative of more than 200 professional, clinical, community health, and family support organizations focused on improving the lives of premature infants through age two and their families. NCFIH's mission is to promote lifelong clinical, health, education, and supportive services needed by premature infants and their families. NCFIH prioritizes safety of this vulnerable population and access to approved therapies.*

Infants and children may soon have another line of protection against potentially life-threatening infections.

## Protecting Against Pneumococcal Disease

The Food and Drug Administration recently gave [priority review to a vaccine](#) that can protect against [invasive pneumococcal disease](#). (1,2) The new vaccine is specifically targeted for children aged six weeks through 17 years.

***“The new vaccine for invasive pneumococcal disease, for example, is anticipated to receive approval in April. Then, it would be ideal for the committee to take up that vaccine for a vote during the regularly scheduled June meeting. (3)”***

Pneumococcal bacteria spread through respiratory fluids like saliva and mucus. The bacteria can travel to different parts of the body. It's called invasive pneumococcal disease when it gets into “sterile sites” such as blood or certain body fluids, including those in the spine or joints.



The first vaccines against invasive pneumococcal disease were introduced more than 15 years ago. Nevertheless, it continues to be a leading cause of illness and death among children, prompting calls for new, more effective options.

The most recent vaccine in review targets 15 pneumococcal strains that contribute to a substantial portion of disease in young children.

While the development and priority review of a new vaccine is worth celebrating, it is just the first step of many that must be completed before children can benefit from its protection.

### Getting on the Vaccine Schedule

After earning federal approval from the Food and Drug Administration, vaccines are reviewed by the [Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices](#). (3) The committee, made of medical and public health experts, recommends the vaccine schedule for children and adults.

Before making its decisions, the committee considers immense information, including safety and effectiveness data. Every vaccine for every age group requires a detailed review. These experts have had a tremendous workload vetting coronavirus vaccines very quickly. They should be commended for their expeditious reviews throughout the public health emergency.

The ongoing pandemic does not negate that patients are still falling ill from other severe and life-threatening respiratory conditions. So, the committee must continue to complete timely reviews of other vaccines once they earn FDA approval.

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Even with ongoing pandemic-related demands, children's advocates are hopefully optimistic that the committee will take up its review of the vaccine for invasive pneumococcal disease without unnecessary delay.

### References:

1. <https://www.merck.com/news/u-s-fda-accepts-for-priority-review-the-supplemental-biologics-license-application-for-mercks-vaxneuvance-pneumococcal-15-valent-conjugate-vaccine-for-use-in-infants-and-children/>
2. <https://ep.bmj.com/content/96/5/183>
3. <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/acip/index.html>

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### National Coalition for Infant Health Values (SANE)

**Safety.** Premature infants are born vulnerable. Products, treatments and related public policies should prioritize these fragile infants' safety.

**Access.** Budget-driven health care policies should not preclude premature infants' access to preventative or necessary therapies.

**Nutrition.** Proper nutrition and full access to health care keep premature infants healthy after discharge from the NICU.

**Equality.** Prematurity and related vulnerabilities disproportionately impact minority and economically disadvantaged families. Restrictions on care and treatment should not worsen inherent disparities.