

Remember Pneumococcal Vaccination this year

The influenza season is upon us, as is the time for pneumococcal vaccination. Cast your minds back to 2005 when the pneumococcal immunisation program for older adults commenced in all states and territories, except Victoria, where the immunisation program started earlier¹. During that year many Australians 65 years and older, were vaccinated against pneumococcal disease. This year, the 5 year booster doses are due for those patients immunised in 2005.

As well as the over 65s, the NHMRC Immunisation Guidelines recommend pneumococcal vaccination with Pneumovax®23 for groups who are considered “at-risk” of infection from pneumococcal bacteria. This includes patients with chronic illnesses such as cardiac, renal or respiratory disease, diabetics, alcohol-related problems, those with impaired immunity, asplenic patients and tobacco smokers. These “at-risk” patients are eligible to receive Pneumovax23 on the PBS with a prescription¹.

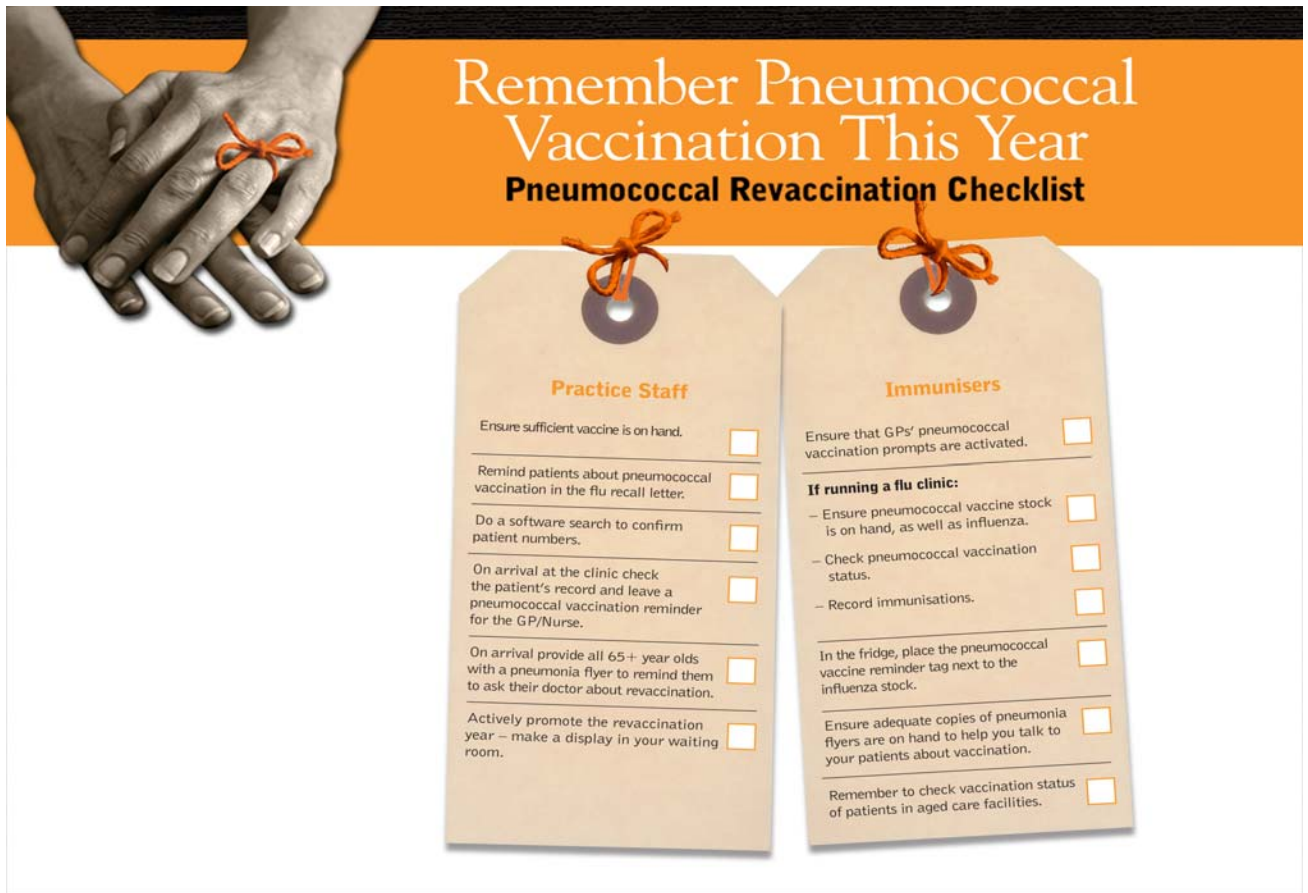
Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders (ATSI) over 49 years and those aged 15-49 with the “at risk” conditions mentioned above, are also provided the vaccine free on the National Immunisation Program (NIP)¹.

When comparing vaccination rates of the “at-risk” patients and over 65s, only a small proportion of the eligible “at-risk” patients are getting vaccinated each year^{2,3}. Pneumococcal disease can be serious for the “at-risk” patients, with most people who develop invasive pneumococcal disease having at least one risk factor¹.

During influenza pandemics, including the recent H1N1 pandemic, many of those dying from influenza had concurrent pneumococcal pneumonia⁴⁻⁶. This highlights the importance of immunising the “at-risk” patients this year.

The NHMRC immunisation guidelines have similar recommendations for patients “at-risk” of influenza and pneumococcal infection. This year more “at-risk” patients will be eligible for free influenza vaccine¹. This gives Healthcare Professionals greater opportunity to discuss pneumococcal vaccination when patients present for their flu vaccine.

Below is a *Pneumococcal Revaccination Checklist* to assist your medical practice in identifying patients due for an NIP booster dose.



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References: 1. The Australian Immunisation Handbook, NHMRC. 9th Edition, 2008, Chapter 3.15. 2. IMS Sales data 2005-2009. 3. Roxon, N. \$44 Million to protect those most at risk from seasonal flu [press release]. Canberra: Dept of Health & Ageing; 2009 Jul 19. 4. Bacterial co-infections in lung tissue specimens from fatal cases of 2009 pandemic influenza A H1N1 2009, MMWR, Sept. 29, 2009,58;1-4. 5. WHO Weekly Epidemiological, No. 42, 2008, 83, 373-384. 6. Morens et al. Journal of Infectious Diseases 2008;198:962-970.