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Stewardship of the Body

“I give you thanks that I am fearfully, wonderfully made” (Ps. 139)

Immunizations for Pneumococcal Disease

**Pneumococcal Disease:** The pneumococcal bacterial can cause pneumonia as well as other types of infections such as ear infections, sinus infections, meningitis, bacteremia and sepsis (blood stream infection). Although some of these infections can be mild, some cases of disease caused by the pneumococcal bacteria can be fatal or result in long-term problems, such as brain damage, hearing loss and limb loss. The bacteria is spread through coughing and sneezing. Many people can be carriers (have the bacteria in their nose or throat without being ill). Pneumococcal infections can occur in children and adults but older adults are at increased risk of serious illness and death.

There are two types of vaccines which can provide protections against pneumococcal disease. They are: Prevnar 13 and Pneumovax 23. The CDC (Centers for Disease Control) makes the following recommendations:

Prevnar 13 should be given to:

* All children younger than 2 years old
* All adults over 65 years or older
* People aged 2 through 64 with certain medical conditions

Pneumovax 23 should be given to:

* All adults 65 years or older
* People 2 through 64 years of age with certain medical conditions
* Adults 19 through 64 years old who smoke cigarettes

The vaccines against pneumococcal disease work well; however they do not prevent all cases. Studies have shown that one dose of the Prevnar 13 vaccine protects against serious pneumococcal disease in 8 out of 10 babies, 75 out of 100 adults 65 years or older, and 45 out of 100 adults 65 years or older from pneumococcal pneumonia. One dose of the Pneumovax 23 protects 50 to 85 out of 100 healthy adults from invasive pneumococcal disease.

Children who have the pneumococcal vaccine have been found to have fewer ear infections and require fewer ear tubes. Also since the introduction of the first Pneumococcal vaccine in the year 2000, the rates of pneumococcal disease have decreased significantly in the population of people who have not received the vaccine. This means that the disease is not being spread in the community since more people have received the vaccine.

Side effects of the vaccines are generally mild including redness and soreness at the injection site, fever, aching, loss of appetite, headache, chills. They generally only last a couple of days if they occur.

The cost of the pneumococcal vaccines are covered 100% by Medicare Part B and by most private insurance companies.