New vaccine is nothing to sneeze at

By ACSH Staff — January 4, 2012

A new option for staving off pneumococcal pneumonia one of the biggest causes of death among older adults in the United States has just been approved for use \[1\] in Americans aged 50 and older. The Prevnar 13 vaccine, produced by Pfizer, is formulated to protect against 13 forms of the Streptococcus pneumoniae bacterium, which can cause pneumonia, meningitis, and other diseases. Pneumonia caused by this bacterium leads about 300,000 older adults to be hospitalized in the U.S. each year.

The Prevnar vaccine had already been approved for use in children, but because the incidence of pneumococcal pneumonia begins to increase after age 50, older adults are an important target group for this inoculation. The only other vaccination option for this age group is Merck's Pneumovax, which is effective against invasive pneumonia, but does not protect against pneumococcal pneumonia the type that is more common in adults. The FDA has determined that Prevnar is just as safe and effective as the Pneumovax vaccine.

Since Prevnar underwent an accelerated approval process, confirmatory trials to assess the vaccine's ability to prevent pneumococcal pneumonia in adults are ongoing, including a study of over 80,000 adults in the Netherlands. ACSH's Dr. Josh Bloom believes that the Prevnar vaccine will be an important option for people over 50. Pneumonia is one of the biggest killers for older adults, he says, so people in this age group could greatly benefit from this vaccine, and should make it a priority.