PNEUMONIA FACTS

What is Pneumonia?
Pneumonia is an inflammation of the lung caused by infection with bacteria, viruses, and other organisms. Pneumonia is often a complication of a pre-existing condition/infection and triggered when a patient’s defense system is weakened, most often by a simple viral upper respiratory tract infection or a case of influenza, especially in the elderly. Half of all pneumonia cases are caused by bacteria. The streptococcus bacterium, known as pneumococcus, is the main cause of the most typical pneumonia. People considered at high risk for pneumonia include the elderly, esp. those with underlying health problems, such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), diabetes mellitus and congestive health failure. Patients undergoing cancer therapy or who have impaired immune systems are particularly vulnerable.

How is pneumonia contracted?
Infection usually occurs when you breathe in the microorganisms.

Complications of Pneumonia
The bacteria can multiply and cause serious damage to healthy individual lungs, bloodstream (bacteremia), brain (meningitis) and other parts of the body, especially when the body’s defenses are weakened. Pneumococcal pneumonia accounts for 25 to 35 percent of all community-acquired pneumonia, and an estimated 40,000 deaths yearly.

Pneumonia Prevention
A vaccine is available for bacterial pneumonia. The pneumococcal vaccine protects against 23 types of pneumococcal bacteria populations. It protects against the most common kind of pneumonia, caused by Streptococcus pneumoniae bacteria, known as pneumococcus. If people get vaccinated against the pneumococcus bacteria, then quality of life and life expectancy improve for approximately 90 per cent of those infected.

Common Side Effects of the Pneumococcal Vaccine
About half of those who get the vaccine have very mild side effects, such as redness or pain where the shot is given. Less than 1% develops a fever, muscle aches, or more severe local reactions. Severe allergic reactions have very rarely been reported. As with any medicine, there is a very small risk that serious problems, even death, could occur after getting a vaccine. Getting the disease is much more likely to cause serious problems than getting the vaccine.
**FLU FACTS**

**What is the Flu?**
The flu, more scientifically known as influenza, is a highly contagious respiratory infection, caused by influenza viruses. There are 3 different types or classifications of flu – 1) Influenza type A; 2) Influenza type B; and 3) Influenza type C. Symptoms of the flu include headaches, body aches, dry cough, fever and sore throat.

**How do you get the Flu?**
The influenza virus usually enters the body through mucous membranes in the mouth, nose or eyes. When a person with the flu coughs or sneezes, the virus then becomes airborne and can be inhaled by anyone nearby.

**Complications of the Flu**
Flu complications can happen if you get a bacterial infection, causing pneumonia to irritate and inflame your weakened lungs. Pneumonia can also be caused by the flu itself. Bacterial pneumonia can be a very serious and sometimes life threatening condition. Some people, such as older adults, and people with specific health condition, are at high risk for serious flu complications. In extreme cases, complications can lead to death. On average in the United States each year: 5% to 20% of the population gets the flu; more than 200,000 people are hospitalized from flu complications; and about 36,000 people die from the flu.

**Flu Prevention**
The best way to prevent or lessen the severity of the flu is to get a flu shot each fall. However, because the particular flu strains that the vaccine protects against may not be the same ones that are going around your area, the vaccine is not always 100% effective. Scientists make different flu vaccines every year because the strains of influenza viruses change from year to year. Sometimes an unpredicted new strain may appear after the vaccine has been made and distributed. Because of this, even if you do get the flu vaccine, you still may get infected. Annual influenza vaccination of the U.S. elderly population has been demonstrated as safe and effective in reducing the risks of illness, hospitalization and death. Because of the high risk of having serious flu complications, the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) recommend that adults age 50 years or older and residents of nursing homes and long term care facilities are vaccinated.

**Common Side Effects of the Flu Vaccine**
The flu shot uses an inactivated or killed vaccine. This vaccine can’t give you the flu. However, flu vaccine, like other vaccines, can occasionally cause a reaction. The vaccine acts to stimulate your immune system and prepare you to resist infection. You may feel your body’s protective activity through mild symptoms. If you do experience a reaction to the flu shot, it is usually local and mild—redness, soreness, and swelling at the site of the injection. Fever and more generalized aches and pains can occur but are even less likely. The symptoms typically cause discomfort, not sickness, and last for a day or two.

**Who should not receive the Flu Vaccine?**
If you are allergic to eggs or have ever had a serious allergic reaction to the flu vaccine in the past you should not receive the vaccine. Also if you are sick with a fever, you should wait until the fever is resolved before getting vaccinated.