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Revaccination With Pneumococcal Vaccine - Not Yet!

A recent study (based on computerized medical record data) of the administration of pneumococcal vaccine in Alaska revealed that many patients received two or more doses of the vaccine. Although data are preliminary, of 11,227 patients vaccinated, 915 (8.2%) patients received two or more doses, 76 patients received three or more doses, and 8 patients received four or more doses. Even knowing that many entries may represent duplicate encounters (data errors), the message is clear.

Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommendations for use of pneumococcal vaccine emphasize that "Pneumococcal vaccine should be given **only once** to adults." As stated in the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR), "Arthus reactions and systemic reactions have been common among adults given second doses and are thought to result from localized antigen-antibody reactions involving antibody induced by previous vaccination. Therefore, second or 'booster' doses are not recommended, at least at this time. Data on revaccination of children are not yet sufficient to provide a basis for comment."

The article goes on to state, "Persons who have received the 14-valent pneumococcal vaccine should **not** be revaccinated with the 23-valent vaccine, as the modest increase in coverage does not warrant the possible increased risk of adverse reactions."

Studies now are in progress to re-evaluate these current recommendations for use of pneumococcal vaccine. In populations at high risk of pneumococcal invasive disease, revaccination may be appropriate because the benefits of vaccination may vastly outweigh the risk of adverse reactions to the vaccine. Studies done in Alaska by the Arctic Investigations Laboratory/Centers for Disease Control, Anchorage, have documented a high risk of pneumococcal invasive disease in certain populations in Alaska. We will have to wait to see if recommendations for use of pneumococcal vaccine are changed.

The study of pneumococcal vaccine administration in Alaska indicates that in order to comply with the above guidelines, health care providers should improve their screening of prospective pneumococcal vaccine recipients and maintain accurate records.

Administration of pneumococcal vaccine is **not** being discouraged. As the MMWR concludes, "When there is doubt or no information on whether a person has ever received pneumococcal vaccine, the vaccine should be given."