

## Pneumonia vaccines save lives, but not enough older Canadians are getting them

***Updated report from NIA calls for better messaging and monitoring  
to vaccinate more older adults against an infection that can be fatal***

**TORONTO, April 25, 2023** — Canada continues to fall short of its targets for vaccinating older adults against pneumonia, even though they are at higher risk of contracting this lung infection — and far more likely to die from it.

Today, the National Institute on Ageing (NIA) released an updated version of its 2019 report: [\*\*\*As One of Canada's Top Killers, Why Isn't Pneumonia Taken More Seriously?\*\*\*](#) It finds that, unfortunately, pneumococcal vaccination rates among Canadians aged 65 years and older continue to lag at around 55 per cent — nowhere near the target of 80 per cent set by the Public Health Agency of Canada.

Pneumonia is a common lung infection, with symptoms including difficulty breathing, coughing, fever, fatigue, nausea and chest pain. Along with influenza, it was the eighth leading cause of death in Canada in 2020. Pneumonia and other respiratory infections are estimated to cost the Canadian health system \$6.5 billion per year.

Pneumonia has a disproportionate effect on older Canadians: It is estimated that adults aged 65 and older are up to four times as likely to contract this type of infection compared to those under 65. The rates are even higher for older adults living in a long-term care home. And of the more than 5,900 deaths caused by pneumonia and influenza in 2020, 90 per cent were among those aged 65 years and older.

“We need far greater awareness that many cases of pneumonia can be prevented by vaccination,” says **Dr. Samir Sinha**, Director of Health Policy Research at the NIA and lead author of the report. “We need to do a much better job of educating doctors and other health care providers around the importance of the pneumococcal vaccine and best practices for increasing its uptake.”

The report identified a number of factors that contribute to low pneumococcal vaccination rates for older adults, including a lack of awareness about which vaccines are needed, and where and when they are available; inconsistent messaging about the vaccines; and a lack of quality data tracking how many Canadians are vaccinated.

The NIA makes 10 evidence-based recommendations for policy and practice approaches that can be used by health authorities and organizations to support pneumonia vaccination and prevention:

1. Promote general preventive practices, such as hand-washing and not smoking, in addition to vaccination
2. Promote a life-long vaccination schedule, similar to universal vaccine schedules for children, that includes older adults
3. Improve diagnosis and surveillance of pneumococcal disease
4. Improve monitoring of pneumococcal vaccination rates
5. Continue working to develop better pneumococcal vaccines
6. Educate and support clinicians, primary-care providers and pharmacists to deliver vaccinations
7. Harmonize the funding and messaging for pneumococcal vaccinations for older adults and other at-risk populations across Canada
8. Advise patients to receive the pneumococcal vaccine in conjunction with influenza and COVID-19 vaccination
9. Promote public awareness of the current National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) Statement for pneumococcal vaccination
10. Consider promoting pneumococcal vaccination for residents of long-term care homes

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The [National Institute on Ageing](#) is a think tank at Toronto Metropolitan University (formerly Ryerson University) focused on the realities of Canada's ageing population. Follow us on Twitter [@NIAgeing](#) and support our call for a National Seniors Strategy [@NSS\\_Now](#).

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