

LIVING WITH SCI

FACTSHEETS

sia spinal
injuries
association
FOR LIFE AFTER SPINAL CORD INJURY



PNEUMOCOCCAL PNEUMONIA

Pneumococcal Pneumonia

Pneumonia is infection in the lungs which makes them wet and inflamed. Secretions block off the small air sacs and oxygen is not able to move from the inhaled air into the blood stream. Treated infections leave behind small areas of scarring in the lungs. Pneumonia is caused by a different number of bacteria, viruses and, even occasionally, fungi.

Pneumococci are bacteria often found in the throats of healthy people. They can, however, cause a range of infections from minor ear problems to pneumonia, meningitis, and septicaemia or 'blood poisoning'. Serious pneumococcal infections can occur throughout life, but infants, the elderly and people with weakened immunity are at the greatest risk. Having previous lung infections puts a person at higher risk of developing pneumococcal pneumonia. The infection also tends to be more severe in patients who have had their spleen removed.

Symptoms of bacterial pneumonia include a cough, discoloured phlegm that may be blood-streaked, chills, fever and chest pain. Symptoms often begin abruptly and may follow on from a relatively minor upper respiratory infection such as a cold.

People with high thoracic and cervical spinal cord injury (SCI) are not able to inflate their lungs to the full extent and lack of power in the abdominal ('tummy') muscles reduces the strength of their cough. Hence, their inability to effectively clear mucus from their throats. These effects of your spinal cord lesion on your respiratory system make it significantly less efficient at dealing with a respiratory illness. For these reasons, high level SCI patients are more susceptible to chest infections and are more likely to get a cold which 'goes to their chest'. Many tetraplegics will have a history of repeated chest infections. Put crudely if you were to get a chest infection it would be more likely to develop into pneumonia and you would be more likely to die or suffer serious lung damage than someone who did not have a spinal cord lesion (all other things being equal).

The effect of your spinal-cord lesion with regard to meningitis and septicaemia is less significant. However if you survived meningitis you might well be left with brain damage which would add to your disability. Septicaemia (blood poisoning) can occur on its own or in association with meningitis or pneumonia. As someone with a high spinal-cord lesion you would be less likely to survive than an able-bodied person.

Vaccination to help prevent this one serious type of pneumonia caused by pneumococcus is available through your family doctor and is generally recommended for people with a high likelihood of developing pneumococcal

infection or for those in whom a serious complication of infection is likely to develop.

Official NHS advice regarding those who should receive pneumococcal immunisation includes the following; children and adults with certain chronic (long-term) health conditions, **such as** a serious heart or kidney condition. Heart and kidney disease are given as examples, not as an inclusive list. There are other serious conditions that could have been chosen as examples of which impaired respiratory capacity (which you have if you have a high thoracic or cervical SCI) is one.

Of course, you may never get a serious pneumococcal infection without the vaccine and you could still get one with the vaccine. However if you keep your immunity up to date (recommended interval **five years**) you would be significantly less likely to get a pneumococcal infection and more likely to survive if you did.

Disclaimer

This factsheet has been prepared by SIA and contains general advice only which we hope will be of use to you. Nothing in this factsheet should be construed as the giving of specific advice and it should not be relied on as a basis for any decision or action. SIA does not accept any liability arising from its use. We aim to ensure the information is as up-to-date and accurate as possible, but please be warned that certain areas are subject to change from time to time. Please note that the inclusion of named agencies, companies, products, services or publications in this factsheet does not constitute a recommendation or endorsement by SIA.

Revised May 2017

ABOUT SIA



The Spinal Injuries Association (SIA) is the leading national user-led charity for spinal cord injured (SCI) people. Being user led, we are well placed to understand the everyday needs of living with spinal cord injury and are here to meet those needs by providing key services to share information and experiences, and to campaign for change ensuring each person can lead a full and active life. We are here to support you from the moment your spinal cord injury happens, and for the rest of your life.

For more information contact us via the following:

Spinal Injuries Association
SIA House
2 Trueman Place
Oldbrook
Milton Keynes
MK6 2HH

T: 01908 604 191 (Mon – Fri 9am – 5pm)

T: 0800 980 0501 (Freephone Advice Line, Mon – Fri, 11am – 1pm/2pm – 4.30pm)

W: www.spinal.co.uk

E: sia@spinal.co.uk

Charity No: 1054097

Brought to you by:



PLEASE SUPPORT SIA

SIA relies on fundraising, donations and gifts in wills to provide services that help spinal cord injured people rebuild their lives.

With your help, we can provide the right support to spinal cord injured people and their families and friends so they can enjoy a full and independent life after injury. Your donation today will go towards changing someone's life.

I would like to give: £15 ☐ £20 ☐ £53 ☐ other amount £.....

Method of payment

☐ I enclose a cheque/postal order/CAF voucher made payable to Spinal Injuries Association.

☐ I would like to pay by Mastercard/Visa/Maestro/Switch (delete as appropriate)

Card number

Start date

Expiry Date

Security Code

Signature

...../...../.....

Date

Name.....

Address

.....

Postcode Tel no.....

Email address.....

Please gift aid my donation ☐

If you tick the box it means for every £1 you donate we can claim an extra 25p from the taxman, at no extra cost to you. You need to pay an amount of income tax or capital gains tax at least equal to the tax we reclaim from HM Revenue and Customs – currently 25p in every £1 you give.

Please send your donation to: FREEPOST SPINAL INJURIES ASSOCIATION or you can donate online at www.spinal.co.uk

Thank you for your support!