

# COVID-19 and vaccination against pneumococci (2)

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## Executive summary

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Health Council of the Netherlands



In 2018, the Health Council of the Netherlands recommended that elderly people aged between 60 and 80 should be offered a vaccination against pneumococci once every five years. In response to this, the National Programme for Pneumococcus Vaccination in Adults (Nationaal Programma Pneumokokkenvaccinatie Volwassenen, NPPV) was established. Under the provisions of that programme, the 60, 65, 70, and 75 age groups would be consecutively invited to get vaccinated from the autumn of 2020 onwards. When the COVID-19 pandemic broke out, the State Secretary for Health, Welfare and Sport (VWS) asked the Council whether the pandemic should be considered sufficient reason to modify the NPPV. In its April 2020 advisory report, the Health Council recommended that, when implementing the programme, priority should be given to the most elderly people, as they are the most vulnerable.

The State Secretary has adopted the advisory report. Vaccines were readily available, so everyone aged 73 to 79 was offered a vaccination during 2020. Those aged 70 to 72 will follow in 2021. At the request of the State Secretary, the advisory report drawn up by the Council's Committee on Vaccinations is exploring the follow-up to this programme.

Compared to the situation in April 2020, the Committee notes that there has been a reduction in the burden of disease resulting from invasive pneumococcal infection. However, the elderly are still at increased risk of either an invasive pneumococcal infection or a severe clinical course of COVID-19. Accordingly, the Committee recommends that the NPPV should be continued, in its current form, until everyone aged 60 and above has received their initial vaccination. This means that, each year, invitations will be

sent to the most elderly groups that have not yet been vaccinated. Which groups are to be vaccinated when, will depend on the amount of vaccine available.

The Committee recommends that the programme be reassessed once invitations for pneumococcal vaccination have been sent to the entire group of people aged 60 to 80, and when it is time for the first five-yearly repeat vaccination. That is expected to take place in 2024. However, it might be necessary to reassess the situation before then if new vaccines (which might provide a longer period of protection than the current vaccine) become available in the meantime. New vaccines are currently under development, but these have not yet been registered for use.



The Health Council of the Netherlands, established in 1902, is an independent scientific advisory body. Its remit is “to advise the government and Parliament on the current level of knowledge with respect to public health issues and health (services) research...” (Section 22, Health Act).

The Health Council receives most requests for advice from the Ministers of Health, Welfare and Sport, Infrastructure and Water Management, Social Affairs and Employment, and Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality. The Council can publish advisory reports on its own initiative. It usually does this in order to ask attention for developments or trends that are thought to be relevant to government policy.

Most Health Council reports are prepared by multidisciplinary committees of Dutch or, sometimes, foreign experts, appointed in a personal capacity. The reports are available to the public.

This publication can be downloaded from [www.healthcouncil.nl](http://www.healthcouncil.nl).

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