



Pneumonia

Pneumonia is an infection that causes the lungs to fill up with fluid. It is contagious and often spread through coughing, sneezing and even breathing. Symptoms can vary from mild to very severe, and usually include the following:

- Cough
- Fever
- Chills
- Trouble breathing

Severe cases may need to be treated in hospital, and in vulnerable individuals, pneumonia can be fatal. As a result, taking steps to protect yourself from this illness is important.

Causes and triggers

Pneumonia is caused by a germ, usually a bacteria or a virus, that multiplies in the lungs.

Individuals most at risk of developing pneumonia and having more severe symptoms include:

- Those aged 65 years and older, or those younger than 2 years of age
- Those with certain lung diseases (emphysema, chronic bronchitis)
- Those with certain chronic illnesses, such as heart disease or diabetes
- Those with weakened immune systems

Treatment

Treatment depends on the type of pneumonia, the severity of symptoms, the patient's age, and whether there are other health conditions. If the disease is caused by a bacteria, your health care professional will likely prescribe an antibiotic. Sometimes, pneumonia requires treatment in hospital.

If it is caused by a virus, antibiotics will not be prescribed as they do not work against viruses. Rest and symptom management are usually all that is needed.

Treatment and recovery from pneumonia can take several weeks, and patients usually continue to feel tired for about a month. Adequate rest is key to recovery. To make you more comfortable while fighting the infection, the following measures are recommended:

- Control the fever with ibuprofen (e.g., Advil) or acetaminophen (e.g., Tylenol)
- Drink plenty of fluids to help loosen secretions and to make it easier to cough them up
- Avoid taking cough medicine without first talking to your health care professional (coughing is important in helping rid the body of infection)
- Avoid breathing in any smoke (including cigarette smoke and secondhand smoke)

Certain measures can be taken to help prevent pneumonia:

- Get vaccinated
 - The flu virus and the pneumococcal bacteria are common causes of pneumonia. There are vaccines that can help protect you from these germs; speak to your health care professional, especially if you are in one of the high-risk groups.
- Wash your hands frequently
- Stop smoking
- Throw away used tissues
- Stay away from people who are sick
- Practice good health habits (healthy diet, rest, exercise, etc.)

When should I see a medical professional?

See a doctor immediately if you have any of the following symptoms:

- Difficulty breathing
- Chest pain
- High fever
- Intense headache
- Severe cough with mucus, wheezing or cough that is getting worse

For more information:
The Canadian Lung Association
www.lung.ca

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