

## Pneumonia Common Questions and Answers

### What is pneumonia?

Pneumonia is a serious infection in the lungs. It can affect one or both of your lungs. Air sacs within the lungs fill with pus and fluid making it hard for oxygen to get into your bloodstream. Without enough oxygen, you may have trouble breathing and your body cells do not work properly. You may have:

- High fever and chills
- Shortness of breath
- Cough that may produce mucus
- Chest pain

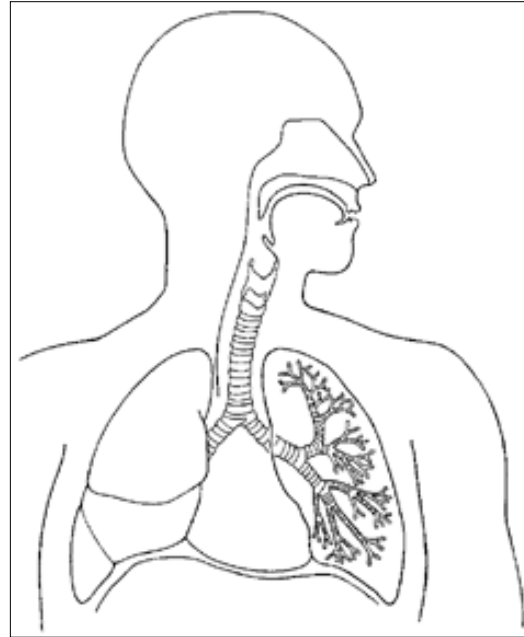
### How do people “catch” pneumonia?

Most cases occur when small droplets that contain a bacteria, virus, or fungus are breathed in. Droplets can get into the air when someone with these germs coughs or sneezes. Pneumonia bacteria can also be found in healthy throats. When a person’s resistance is lower, bacteria can work its way into the lungs. Once it reaches the lungs, it settles into the air sacs and rapidly grows. The lung becomes filled with pus or fluid while the body tries to fight off the infection.

### Who is at risk?

Certain factors may put you at a higher risk for pneumonia. You are at risk if you:

- Have a chronic illness or have had a recent surgery.
- Have the flu, a common cold, or a viral infection.
- Smoke or abuse alcohol.
- Are age 65 or older.
- Have a lung disease.
- Have poor eating habits.
- Are taking medicines that suppress the immune system.



### How is it treated?

Antibiotics are used to treat pneumonia. The sooner you receive them, the better. Most often, you get the first dose through an IV. You may also take them in pill form. You may need extra oxygen until you heal.

There are other treatments that may help. These include:

- Deep breathing and coughing
- Getting out of bed as much as you can
- Increased fluids
- Proper diet
- Pain relief for chest pain
- Getting up for meals when able
- Stopping smoking

### What tests can I expect?

You need a chest x-ray to confirm you have pneumonia. You can expect lab tests such as blood cultures. You will also be asked to cough deeply and spit any mucous into a sterile cup. These tests help the doctor to choose the best treatment options for you.

**How can I prevent spreading the infection?**

Be sure to cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Discard the tissue and wash your hands. These simple steps are the best defense against the spread of infection.

**How long will I feel tired?**

It may take a few weeks for you to recover. Avoid overdoing it when you go home. Your body is using its energy to fight the infection, so take it easy and follow your doctor’s advice.

**When do I need to call my doctor?**

You need to call your local doctor if your symptoms return. Call if you have:

- High fever
- Chills
- Cough that worsens
- Shortness of breath or severe chest pain
- Profuse sweating
- Blue lips and nail beds
- Confusion or delirium
- Side effects of the antibiotics such as diarrhea, nausea, or a skin rash
- Other concerns or symptoms

**Follow-up**

If you are hospitalized, you should see your doctor 1-2 weeks after discharge. Your doctor may do a chest x-ray in 4-6 weeks to ensure that the pneumonia has resolved. If you smoke, your doctor will discuss ways to help you quit.

**Prevention**

There are many ways you can prevent pneumonia. See the table below for information.

To help prevent pneumonia:	Reason
Complete the full course of antibiotics.	Helps to prevent relapse
Get a flu shot yearly.	Pneumonia can be a complication of the flu
Get your pneumonia vaccine.	Prevents re-infection and eases symptoms in the future
Maintain good health habits – balanced diet, rest, and exercise	Increases resistance to respiratory illnesses
Quit smoking	Decreases chance for infection

My doctor’s name:

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My doctor’s phone number:

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Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person’s health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 2/2018. University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#5604.