

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 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 right.

Symptoms

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

Causes

Most cases occur when small droplets that contain a bacteria, virus, or fungus are breathed in. These 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.

Risk Factors

Certain factors may put you at a higher risk. 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.

Testing

A chest x-ray will confirm you have pneumonia. 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 choose the best treatment options for you.

Treatment

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 your lungs heal.

Other treatments that may help are:

- 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
- Quitting smoking

Prevention and Spread

There are many ways you can prevent pneumonia.

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Discard the tissue and wash your hands. This is the best way to prevent the spread of infection.
- Complete the full course of antibiotics.
- Get a flu shot yearly. Pneumonia can be a complication of the flu.
- Get your pneumonia vaccine. This prevents reinfection and eases symptoms in the future.

- Maintain good health habits – balanced diet, rest, and exercise.
- Quit smoking.

It may take a few weeks for you to recover. Don't overdo it when you go home. Your body is using its energy to fight the infection. Take it easy and follow your doctor's advice.

When to Call

Call your 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

My doctor's name:

My doctor's phone number:

Follow-up

If you are in the hospital, you should see your doctor 1-2 weeks after you go home. Your doctor may do a chest x-ray in 4-6 weeks to ensure that the pneumonia has resolved.

If you are a patient receiving care at UnityPoint – Meriter, Swedish American or a health system outside of UW Health, please use the phone numbers provided in your discharge instructions for any questions or concerns.

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 © 3/2021. University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#5604.