



Information for Patients & Caregivers

What you need to know about
Pneumonia?

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+ WHAT IS PNEUMONIA?

Pneumonia is an inflammation of the lung tissues, usually caused by an infection. It can be a very serious condition requiring medical attention and occasionally admission to hospital.

Pneumonia can be a potentially fatal lung infection and should not be underestimated.

During normal respiration, air moves through the lungs to small air sacs called alveoli. Pneumonia occurs when these alveoli fill with mucus that then obstructs normal air flow.

Pneumonia can occur at any age, but those at a higher risk are infants, young children, adults aged over 65 years, smokers, people with medical conditions such as diabetes or cancer and those with a weak immune system. It is important to remember that no matter how healthy and active you are, your risk for getting pneumonia increases with age. This is because our immune system naturally weakens with age, making it harder for our bodies to fight off infections and diseases.

The symptoms of pneumonia depend on a person's age, the cause of the pneumonia and the severity of the infection. Some of the symptoms include:

- Rapid or difficult breathing
- Coughing
- Fever, sweating and chills
- Chest pain
- Confusion and unsteadiness, especially in older people
- Feeling tired or unwell
- Muscle aches and pains

These symptoms may develop gradually, but sometimes the symptoms can start suddenly and rapidly get worse. If your symptoms are severe, seek urgent medical attention.

The main treatment for pneumonia is antibiotics. In milder

+ WHAT CAUSES PNEUMONIA?

Many kinds of infectious microbes can cause pneumonia. These include bacteria, viruses and fungi. To cause pneumonia, these organisms need to get past your body's immune system and enter your lungs. This may happen if the microbe is particularly strong or your immune system is weak.

The most common cause of pneumonia is a type of bacterium called *Streptococcus pneumoniae*. This bacterium is responsible for about 1.6 million deaths each year, world-wide. Pneumonia may also be caused by viruses, such as the flu virus and Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV).

Pneumonia can also be caused by fungi, particularly in people whose immune system is weak.

Pneumonia can be spread through inhaling infected droplets in the air from a cough or sneeze of an infected person. It can be triggered by a cold or bout of flu, which allows microbes to grow in the air sacs of the lungs.

+ WHEN SHOULD I SEE A DOCTOR?

It is important that you see a primary care doctor immediately if:

- You have difficulty in breathing, chest pain, persistent fever and cough which may be dry or contains mucus, which is green or yellow, rust-coloured, or blood-stained.
- If you seem to be recovering well from a cold or flu, but then gets worse - pneumonia may be the cause.
- Pneumonia can be life threatening, especially in babies, young children, and the elderly. It is important for these groups of people to see a doctor right away if pneumonia is suspected.

+ HOW IS PNEUMONIA DIAGNOSED?

To make a diagnosis of pneumonia, your doctor will take a medical history and perform a physical examination. If the symptoms and signs suggest you have pneumonia, your doctor may order some tests such as chest-x-ray, blood and sputum tests to further confirm the diagnosis.



+ WHAT YOUR DOCTOR WILL DO

Depending on your symptoms, your age, and what they find on examining you, the doctor may decide that you need to be admitted to hospital.

If your pneumonia is not too severe, you may be given some oral antibiotics to take at home and instructions to see your doctor immediately if your symptoms suddenly become worse despite treatment.

If, however, your symptoms are severe, you will usually be admitted to hospital for treatment. If this happens, you will be treated with antibiotics by injection until the infection is under control.

Once you are stable the doctors will change you to oral antibiotics and you will be discharged home.



+ HOW IS PNEUMONIA TREATED?

The main treatment for pneumonia is a course of antibiotics. These can be given as tablets, liquid or injections. Your doctor will prescribe an antibiotic that works against the type of bacteria most likely to be causing your pneumonia.

A group of antibiotics called penicillin is usually used to treat pneumonia. An example of penicillin is Amoxicillin.

If you are allergic to penicillin, it is important that you tell your doctor so that you can be placed on other antibiotics. Examples of these alternative antibiotics include antibiotics such as Clarithromycin and Azithromycin.

You will typically need to take the antibiotics for between 5 -10 days. If you don't feel better within 3 days after starting the antibiotics or your symptoms become worse, it is important to tell your doctor. If this occurs, your doctor may ask you to take antibiotics for a few days longer than initially planned, increase the dose, or prescribe a different antibiotic.

Cough medicine is not recommended for people with pneumonia as coughing helps remove mucous plugs from the airways and clear the infection.

TOP-TIP: If you are diagnosed with pneumonia, it is important that you:

- Stop smoking
- Drink plenty of fluids
- Rest
- Take your medicines as directed by your doctor



+ PREVENTING THE SPREAD OF INFECTION

If you have pneumonia, you can prevent its spread by doing the following:

- **Stop smoking.** This will not only help you get better, but it will also reduce the chances of those around you also getting pneumonia.
- **Wash your hands regularly** with soap and water.
- **Cover your mouth and nose** when coughing or sneezing.
- **Ensure you and your family are up to date with vaccinations** and check with your doctor whether you should get vaccinated against influenza each year.



+ SYMPTOMS TO WATCH OUT FOR

If you or your child have any of the following symptoms, call an ambulance or go immediately to an Emergency Department or Paediatric Emergency Centre:

- SEVERE WHEEZING
- DIFFICULTY IN BREATHING
- WORSENING COUGH
- BLUISH-COLOURED LIPS
- CHEST PAIN WHILE BREATHING
- CONFUSION
- SEVERE WEAKNESS OR TIREDNESS
- WORSENING FEVER

ALWAYS MAKE SURE YOUR DOCTOR KNOWS ALL THE MEDICINE YOU ARE TAKING AND WHETHER OR NOT YOU HAVE ANY ALLERGIES

+ ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Ministry of Public Health has published a National Clinical Guideline advising doctors on how to treat patients with Community Acquired Pneumonia.

The Guideline is available to the public from the MOPH website:

www.moph.gov.qa