

live well, work well

Pneumonia

Millions of people suffer from pneumonia each year in the United States. It is a common infection of the lungs that can be caused by many different organisms, including bacteria, viruses, and fungi.

Types

Pneumonia can range from mild to severe, and can even be deadly. The severity depends on the type of organism causing it, as well as the person's age and overall health.

- *Bacterial pneumonias* tend to be the most serious, and the most common in adults. In some people, especially the elderly, bacterial pneumonia may follow influenza or even a common cold.
- *Respiratory viruses* most commonly affect young children, especially those in the 2 to 5 age range.
- People who have trouble swallowing are at risk of *aspiration pneumonia*. In this condition, food, liquid or saliva accidentally goes into the airways. It is more common in people who have suffered a stroke, Parkinson's disease, or who have had previous throat surgery.

Symptoms

The main symptoms of pneumonia include:

- Fever with shaking chills
- Rapid, shallow breathing

- Cough with greenish or yellow mucus, sometimes accompanied by blood
 - Sharp or stabbing chest pain, made worse by deep breathing or coughing
 - Shortness of breath
- Other symptoms may include:
- Headache
 - Excessive sweating and clammy skin
 - Loss of appetite
 - Excessive fatigue
 - Confusion, especially in older adults.

Diagnosis

If a physician suspects pneumonia, he/she will likely order a chest x-ray. Some patients may require additional tests, such as:

- Gram's stain and culture of mucus to look for the organism causing symptoms
- CBC for a white blood cell count (if high, this suggests a bacterial infection)
- Arterial blood gases to check how well the blood is being oxygenated
- CAT scan of the chest
- Pleural fluid culture if there is fluid surrounding the lungs

Treatment

Antibiotics will be prescribed for

a bacterial infection; they are not effective for viral infections. It is important to get plenty of fluids, lots of rest, and to control fever with aspirin or acetaminophen; however, do NOT give aspirin to children. Those with underlying chronic diseases, severe symptoms or low oxygen levels will likely require hospitalization. With any treatment, most patients will improve within two weeks.

Prevention

- Wash hands frequently, especially after nose blowing, using the bathroom, changing diapers and with food preparation.
- Do not smoke. Tobacco damages the lungs' ability to ward off infection.
- Wear a mask when cleaning dusty or moldy areas.

Source: National Institutes of Health



Did you know...?

Infrequent, but serious, complications of pneumonia can include lung abscesses and empyema (not to be confused with *emphysema*, it is a collection of pus around the lungs.) Both can be corrected with surgical drainage.