

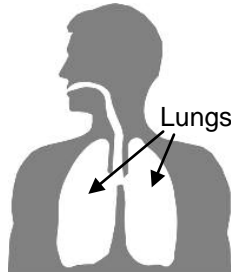
Emergency Services

Pneumonia

What is pneumonia?

Pneumonia (sounds like *new-moan-yah*) is an infection in one or both lungs.

You get pneumonia from breathing in germs (viruses or bacteria). The signs of pneumonia usually come on slowly when it is from a virus. When it is from bacteria, the person usually gets sick quite quickly and is sicker. You are more likely to get pneumonia after having a cold or the flu.



The infection usually gets better in 2 to 3 weeks. Most people can be treated at home. Some people can get very sick and need to be treated in the hospital. People more likely to get very sick are babies, people with other diseases (especially a lung disease), or those over 65 years old.

How to know when the pneumonia is getting worse or has come back

Your pneumonia is getting worse or has come back if you notice any of these signs:

- A cough, especially coughing up mucus (sputum) that looks rusty or green, maybe even has small specks of blood
- A fever over 38.5° C (101.3° F).
- Shaking, 'teeth-chattering' chills either just once or many times
- Breathing faster than usual
- Feeling short of breath
- Pain in the chest that feels worse when you cough or breathe in
- A fast heartbeat
- Feeling very tired or feeling very weak

Older adults can have fewer signs, milder signs, or different signs of pneumonia. They might not have a fever or they might have a cough but without the mucus. A key sign of pneumonia in older adults can be a change in how they think and remember. They can become confused or delirious. If an older adult already has a lung disease, the only sign might be when that lung disease gets worse.

When to get help

The sooner you get treatment, the sooner you will get over the pneumonia. This is especially important for the very young, people with other disease, and people over 65 years old.

Call 911 right away if:

- You suddenly have:
 - Shortness of breath
 - Wheezing so bad it is hard to breathe
 - Coughing you cannot control
 - Tightness in or around your chest
- You have trouble speaking because you can't get your breath.
- Your lips or fingers are turning blue.
- You have crushing or squeezing chest pain that does not go away.
- You cough up blood that is bright red.
- You feel you might faint when you stand up or sit up.

Pneumonia - *continued*

When to get help - *continued*

Call your doctor right away if you have any of the following:

- You are coughing up mucus that has specks of blood in it.
- You are coughing up mucus that is the colour of rust.
- You get a fever 38.5° C (101.3° F), and shaking, 'teeth-chattering' chills.
- You are feeling short of breath and breathing faster than normal.
- Your breathing sounds wheezy.

Make an appointment to see your family doctor if you have any of the following signs.

- You have been coughing up yellow or green mucus for more than two days.
(Do not confuse mucus from your lungs with mucus that runs down the back of your throat from your nose. Mucus from your nose is annoying but not something you need to see the doctor about.)
- You get a fever 38.5° C (101.3° F), using an ear or mouth thermometer.
- You often cough so hard that you throw up.
- You still have a cough after four weeks.
- You have a new chest pain that is more than just pain when you cough. Maybe the pain gets worse when you take a deep breath.

To learn more, it's good to ask:

- Your family doctor
- HealthLinkBC - call 8-1-1 (7-1-1 for deaf and hard of hearing) or go online at www.HealthLinkBC.ca

How to take care of yourself at home

- Drink lots of liquids especially water. Liquids keep the mucus thin and easy to cough up.
- Rest often. You might feel tired and weak. This can continue for a week or so after the infection has gotten better.
- Take medicine for fever or if you have any pain. Take either regular acetaminophen (Tylenol or store brands), or ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin, or store brands).
- Take antibiotics **exactly** as your doctor has directed you to take them. You should start to feel better in a few days. You must continue to take the medicine until it is all gone. If you do not, the infection can return.
- Talk to your doctor about using a cough medicine if your cough is keeping you from sleeping.
- Call your doctor if you do not feel better in a few days.
- Make an appointment to see your doctor in two weeks.

How to prevent pneumonia in the future

Here are a few things that you can do to keep yourself healthy:

- Wash your hands often.
- Cough or sneeze into a tissue.
- Wear a mask when working around dusty or mouldy areas.
- Eat healthy foods.
- Do some type of exercise, such as walking, every day.
- Get at least six hours of sleep each night.
- Get a flu shot each year.
- **Do not** share drinking glasses or utensils.
- **Do not** smoke.

Adapted with permission from FN.350.P749.PHC 'Pneumonia – Going Home' (March 2012) by Providence Health Care.

www.fraserhealth.ca

This information does not replace the advice given to you by your health care provider.