

Patient information factsheet

Community acquired pneumonia

Community acquired pneumonia is one of the most common infectious diseases, most commonly caused by an infection, usually bacterial.

Community acquired is when a person who has little contact with the healthcare system contracts the condition. It is also referred to as CAP.

Pneumonia is swelling (inflammation) of the tissue in one or both of your lungs. It's usually caused by an infection. At the end of the breathing tubes in your lungs are clusters of tiny air sacs. If you have pneumonia, these tiny sacs become inflamed and swell up with fluid.

Terms such as bronchopneumonia, lobar pneumonia and double pneumonia are sometimes used, but refer to the same condition with the same causes and treatment.

The germs that cause an infection are usually breathed in. In rare cases, pneumonia can develop from an infection elsewhere in your body, when germs enter your lungs through your bloodstream.

There are four main types of pneumonia. These are:

- bacterial pneumonia
- viral pneumonia
- aspiration pneumonia
- fungal pneumonia

Causes

The most common cause of pneumonia is a pneumococcal infection, caused by bacteria called *Streptococcus pneumoniae*. However, there are many different types of bacteria and viruses that can lead to pneumonia.

Who is affected?

In the UK, pneumonia affects around 1 in 1000 adults each year. It is more common during autumn and winter.

Pneumonia can affect people of any age, although it is more common and can be more serious in groups such as:

- babies, young children and elderly people
- people who smoke
- people with other health conditions, such as a lung condition or a weakened immune system

Treating pneumonia

Mild cases of pneumonia can usually be treated at home with antibiotics and plenty of rest and fluids. More severe cases may need hospital treatment.

Treatment at home

You may continue to cough for two to three weeks after finishing your course of antibiotics, and feel tired for even longer, as your body continues to recover. Tell your GP if your symptoms don't get better within two days of starting treatment.

Your symptoms may not have improved because:

- the bacteria causing the infection may be resistant to antibiotics – your doctor may change to a different antibiotic, or may start treating you with a second antibiotic while you continue to take the first one
- a virus may be causing the infection, rather than bacteria – antibiotics have no effect on viruses, and your body's immune system will have to fight the viral infection by creating antibodies

Self help

You can take painkillers such as paracetamol or ibuprofen to relieve pain and reduce fever. However, you should not take ibuprofen if you:

- are allergic to aspirin or other non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)
- have asthma, kidney disease, a history of stomach ulcers or indigestion

Cough medicines are not recommended, and there is little evidence these are effective. Coughing lets you clear mucus from your lungs, so trying to stop your cough could make the infection last longer.

Drink plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration, and get plenty of rest to help your body recover. If you smoke, it's more important than ever to stop, as smoking damages your lungs.

Pneumonia is not usually passed from one person to another, so it is safe to be around others, including family members. However, it is sensible for those with weakened immune systems to avoid a person with pneumonia until they start to get better.

Once your symptoms improve, it may take a while for you to fully recover, and your coughing may continue for some time. Speak to your GP if you are concerned.

Prevention

Good hygiene and a healthy lifestyle can help prevent pneumonia. Try to avoid smoking, as it damages your lungs and increases the chance of infection. People at high risk of pneumonia should also be offered the pneumo jab and the flu jab.

Who to contact if you are concerned

If you have any concerns about your symptoms you should contact your GP or call 111 for advice.

Useful links

NHS Choices www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Pneumonia/Pages/Introduction.aspx

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Have your say

We would be very grateful if you would complete a feedback card before you leave. It's your chance to have your say on the treatment you have received in hospital. Feedback helps us continually improve the service we give to our patients.

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The information in this factsheet has been adapted from NHS Choices www.nhs.uk

If you need a translation of this document, an interpreter or a version in large print, Braille or on audiotape, please telephone 023 8120 4688 for help.

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