



Stewardship of the Body

“I give you thanks that I am fearfully, wonderfully made” (Ps. 139)

Pneumonia

What is pneumonia? Pneumonia is an infection in one or both of your lungs.

What causes pneumonia? Pneumonia is caused by germs that invade your lungs, causing them to become inflamed and filled up with fluid.

What kinds of germs cause pneumonia? Pneumonia can be caused by either bacteria or viruses. Many types of bacteria can cause pneumonia. The ones that you encounter in everyday life cause what is called “community-acquired pneumonia”. The most common bacteria that causes pneumonia is *Streptococcus pneumoniae*.

Community-acquired pneumonia also can be caused by viruses. Most cases of viral pneumonia are mild and short-lived; however some cases can become severe, especially if they are a complication of and caused by the flu virus.

Is pneumonia serious? Most cases of pneumonia are mild and easily treated. However, certain cases can become serious and even life-threatening. This is especially true for people who are elderly, have weak immune systems, have another chronic illness, have the flu, or are on a ventilator in the hospital or are in a nursing home.

What are the symptoms of pneumonia? Symptoms of pneumonia include: fever, cough, shortness of breath, sweating, shaking chills, chest pain that fluctuates with breathing (pleurisy), headache, muscle pain, and fatigue. Older people may actually have a lower than normal temperature. **Because pneumonia can be serious, see your doctor as soon as possible if you have a persistent cough, shortness of breath, chest pain, and fever — especially a lasting fever of 102 F (39 C) or higher with chills and sweating. Also contact your doctor if you suddenly feel worse after a cold or the flu.**

How is pneumonia treated? Treatment of pneumonia can vary depending on a number of factors, such as age, overall health and the cause of the pneumonia. Bacterial pneumonia is usually treated with antibiotics. If these are prescribed, it is important to continue to take them as long as recommended, even if you are feeling better. Viral pneumonia may be treated by antiviral medications. They do not cure the pneumonia, but are helpful in reducing the symptoms and the amount of time you are sick. Other medications can be used to reduce the fever and ease the cough in both types of pneumonia.

Other strategies, such as getting plenty of rest, staying home, drinking plenty of fluids can be helpful in uncomplicated cases of both types of community-acquired pneumonia.

Can pneumonia be prevented? People can protect themselves from developing pneumonia in a couple of ways: 1) Getting a flu shot, since many cases of pneumonia develop following the flu; and 2) getting the pneumonia vaccine which protects against the *Streptococcus pneumoniae* bacteria. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends this vaccine for anyone 65 or older and for people at high risk of complications from this type of pneumonia. This includes people who smoke, those who have heart or lung disease, diabetes, or a weakened immune system due to a chronic illness or the use of immunosuppressant drugs, corticosteroids and medications to prevent transplant rejection. If the vaccine is given after age 65, it is usually needed to be given just once. If younger than 65, a booster may be needed at a later time.