
What is Pneumonia?

Pneumonia is an infection in the lungs. The lungs contain tiny air sacs called alveoli. When you have pneumonia, these sacs swell and fill with fluid, making it hard to breathe. It is more common in winter and affects five to eleven out of every 1,000 adults.

What causes Pneumonia?

Pneumonia is usually caused by bacteria or viruses but can also come from fungi or if food/drink accidentally enters the lungs (aspiration). The most common type, “community-acquired pneumonia”, happens outside hospitals and is commonly caused by a bacteria called *Streptococcus pneumoniae*. Another type, “hospital-acquired pneumonia”, may affect people in hospitals.

Who can get Pneumonia?

Anyone can get pneumonia, but it is more likely if you have a weaker immune system. This includes:

- Babies and young children
- Adults over 65
- People with diabetes, cancer, or heart, lung, liver, kidney, or brain conditions
- Heavy smokers, people who consume alcohol a lot, or those on medicines that weaken the immune system

Symptoms of Pneumonia:

Common symptoms include:

- Coughing with or without mucus
- Difficulty breathing
- Being out of breath more easily
- Chest pain or discomfort
- Fatigue and malaise
- Reduced appetite
- Fevers with or without chills

Severe cases can also cause:

- Fast breathing
- Low blood pressure and dizziness
- Fast heartbeat or palpitations (fluttering and skipping heartbeat)
- Coughing blood
- Confusion

Some people experience a sharp pain in the chest on breathing. This is called pleurisy and is caused by the lining between your lungs and ribcage becoming inflamed.

If you feel unwell with these symptoms, see your GP or call 111. If you have chest pain, a rapid heartbeat, quick breathing, shivers or confusion, get urgent advice from GP or call 999, particularly if over 65. Call 999 immediately if you notice a blue tinge to lips or under fingernails.

Diagnosis and Treatment

A doctor can often diagnose pneumonia by listening to your chest. They may also order a blood test, chest X-ray, or mucus sample (what you cough up). It is important to treat pneumonia quickly. Bacterial pneumonia is treated with antibiotics, and you should rest, drink fluids, and take painkillers if needed.

Mild cases can be treated at home with antibiotics, but serious cases may need hospital care for intravenous antibiotics or oxygen if needed.

Recovery Timeline

Recovery can take weeks to months:

- One week: Fever gone
- Four weeks: Less mucus
- Six weeks: Less coughing, easier breathing
- Three months: Mostly recovered, may still feel tired
- Six months: Full recovery for most people

Taking care of yourself

Most people do not need any follow up appointment after pneumonia. However, we recommend a repeat chest X-ray six weeks after starting antibiotics if you are over 50 years, smoke, or your symptoms are taking a long time to resolve. This X-ray is to check that the infection has cleared.

Prevention

Some measures can reduce your chance of developing Pneumonia in the future. These include:

1. Avoid smoking – this increases your risk of pneumonia and other chest infections
2. Wash hands regularly to stop germs spreading
3. Avoid drinking more than the recommended amount of alcohol (14 units per week) – this weakens the immune system
4. Get vaccinated – high risk groups should have annual flu and Covid-19 vaccines and there is a one-off Pneumococcal vaccine for those aged 65 or over or in a high-risk group.

To organise a pneumonia or flu jab, talk to your GP, local pharmacist or call the Asthma and Lung UK helpline on 0300 222 5800.

Further information: Asthma and Lung UK - <http://www.asthmaandlung.org.uk>

Your Feedback

We want your visit to be as comfortable as possible - talk to the person in charge if you have any concerns. If the ward/department staff are unable to resolve it, then ask for our Patient Advice and Liaison (PALS) information. Please be assured that raising a concern will not impact on your care.

Before leaving please complete a Friends and Family Test feedback card.

Help us transform NHS services and to support patient choice.

OUR VALUES

Collaboration

We work positively with others to achieve shared aims

Accountability

We act with professionalism and integrity, delivering what we commit to, embedding learning when things do not go to plan

Respect

We are anti-discriminatory, treating people fairly and creating a sense of belonging and pride

Empowerment

We speak out when things don't feel right, we are innovative and make changes to support continuous improvement

Support

We are compassionate, listen attentively and are kind to ourselves and each other



The hospital can arrange for an interpreter or person to sign to assist you in communicating effectively with staff during your stay. Please let us know.

For a large print version of this leaflet, contact PALS 01493 453240