

# FACT SHEET: PNEUMONIA

November 2024

## WHAT IS PNEUMONIA?

Pneumonia is an infection of the lungs that can cause mild to severe illness caused by viruses, bacteria, and fungi. Common causes of viral pneumonia are influenza (flu), COVID-19, rhinovirus, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), human metapneumovirus (HMPV) infection, and human parainfluenza virus (HPIV) infection. Streptococcus pneumoniae and Mycoplasma pneumoniae are the most common causes of bacterial pneumonia. Some bacteria cause an infection called atypical pneumonia. For example, Mycoplasma pneumoniae causes a mild form of pneumonia often called “walking pneumonia.”

## WHO CAN GET PNEUMONIA?

Pneumonia can affect anyone, but certain factors can increase your risk. These include smoking, underlying medical conditions such as asthma, diabetes, or heart disease, being 65 years of age or older, or being a child younger than 5 years old. Also, people on ventilators are at risk for developing ventilator-associated pneumonia.

## WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF PNEUMONIA?

The symptoms of pneumonia include chest pain when breathing or coughing, confusion (altered mental status), cough (with or without sputum production), shortening of breath, fatigue, fever or chills, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea.

## HOW IS PNEUMONIA SPREAD?

Pneumonia spreads through droplets when an infected person coughs or sneezes. You can inhale these droplets or get infected by touching contaminated surfaces and then touching your eyes, nose, or mouth. You can also pick up germs that cause pneumonia by shaking hands or touching contaminated surfaces.

## IS A PERSON WITH PNEUMONIA CONTAGIOUS?

Yes, pneumonia can be contagious depending on the type of pneumonia. If you have bacterial pneumonia, you're contagious for about 48 hours after starting antibiotics and once the fever subsides. With viral pneumonia, you're contagious until symptoms, especially fever, improve. Fungal pneumonia is not contagious.

## HOW IS PNEUMONIA DIAGNOSED?

A physical examination and tests such as a chest x-ray, sputum or blood tests, and a flu test help healthcare providers diagnose pneumonia.

## HOW IS PNEUMONIA TREATED?

People with pneumonia can often be treated at home with rest, medication, and fluids. If pneumonia is caused by bacteria, antibiotics will be prescribed. Severe cases may require hospitalization for additional treatments.

## ARE THERE VACCINES TO HELP PREVENT PNEUMONIA?

Yes, immunization and appropriate treatment (such as antibiotics and antivirals) can prevent many deaths from pneumonia each year. There are several vaccines that help protect against infections caused by bacteria or viruses that may cause pneumonia. These vaccines include the following:

- COVID-19 and influenza vaccine
- *Haemophilus influenzae* type b vaccine (Hib)
- Measles, varicella (chickenpox)
- Pertussis (Whooping cough)
- Pneumococcal vaccine (PVC, PPSV23) and RSV vaccine

## CAN PNEUMONIA BE PREVENTED?

In addition to vaccination, you can protect yourself against pneumonia and other respiratory infections by taking the following steps:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick. Stay home from work or school when you are sick.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, scrubbing your hands for at least 20 seconds.
- Disinfect frequently touched surfaces.
- Take care of your medical problems, such as diabetes or heart disease.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- Limit contact with cigarette smoke or consider quitting smoking.

## WANT MORE INFORMATION?

Information about pneumonia and other related health topics can be found at [CDC.com](https://www.cdc.gov). The DC Department of Health promotes the health and safety of the District residents. For additional information, please visit [dchealth.dc.gov](https://dchealth.dc.gov) or call (202) 442-5865.