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PNEUMONIA

Diagnosis



Your healthcare provider will diagnose pneumonia based on your medical history, a physical exam, and test results. Sometimes pneumonia is hard to diagnose because your symptoms may be the same as a cold or flu. You may not realize that your condition is more serious until it lasts longer than these other conditions.

Medical history and physical exam

Your provider will ask about your [symptoms](#) and when they began. They will also ask whether you have any [risk](#) factors for pneumonia. You may also be asked about:

- Exposure to sick people at home, school, or work or in a hospital
- Flu or pneumonia vaccinations
- Medicines you take
- Past and current medical conditions and whether any have gotten worse recently
- Recent travel
- Exposure to birds and other animals
- Smoking

During your physical exam, your provider will check your temperature and listen to your lungs with a stethoscope.

Diagnostic tests and procedures

If your provider thinks you have pneumonia, he or she may do one or more of the following tests.

- A [chest X-ray](#) looks for inflammation in your lungs. A chest X-ray is often used to diagnose pneumonia.
- [Blood tests](#), such as a complete blood count (CBC) see whether your immune system is fighting an infection.
- **Pulse oximetry** measures how much oxygen is in your blood. Pneumonia can keep your lungs from getting enough oxygen into your blood. To measure the levels, a small sensor called a pulse oximeter is attached to your finger or ear.

If you are in the hospital, have serious symptoms, are older, or have other health problems, your provider may do other tests to diagnose pneumonia.

- **A blood gas test may be done** if you are very sick. For this test, your provider measures your blood oxygen levels using a blood sample from an artery, usually in your wrist. This is called an arterial blood gas test.
- **A sputum test, using a sample of sputum (spit) or mucus from your cough, may be used to** find out what germ is causing your pneumonia.
- **A blood culture** test can identify the germ causing your pneumonia and also show whether a bacterial infection has spread to your blood.
- **A polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test** quickly checks your blood or sputum sample to find the [DNA](#) ⓘ of germs that cause pneumonia.
- A [bronchoscopy](#) looks inside your airways. If your treatment is not working well, this procedure may be needed. At the same time, your doctor may also collect samples of your lung tissue and fluid from your lungs to help find the cause of your pneumonia.
- A [chest computed tomography \(CT\) scan](#) can show how much of your lungs are affected by pneumonia. It can also show whether you have complications such as lung abscesses or pleural disorders. A CT scan shows more detail than a chest X-ray.
- **A pleural fluid culture can be taken using a procedure called** [thoracentesis](#), which is when a doctor uses a needle to take a sample of fluid from the pleural space between your lungs and chest wall. The fluid is then tested for bacteria.

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