PNEUMONIA FACT SHEET

What is pneumonia?

Pneumonia is an infection of the lungs that can cause mild to severe illness. Pneumonia can be caused by viruses, bacteria, and fungi. Common causes of viral pneumonia are influenza and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), and a common cause of bacterial pneumonia is *Streptococcus pneumoniae* (pneumococcus).

Who can get pneumonia?

Anyone. However, you are more likely to become ill with pneumonia if you smoke, have underlying medical conditions (such as asthma, diabetes or heart disease) are 65 years or older, or are a child younger than 5 years old. Persons who are on ventilators are at risk for ventilator-associated pneumonia.

What are the symptoms of pneumonia?

Most people experience cough, fever and difficulty breathing. Signs and symptoms of pneumonia can vary, depending on your age and health.

How is pneumonia spread?

The viruses and bacteria that cause pneumonia usually spread in small droplets when an infected person coughs or sneezes into the air. If you are nearby, you can breathe in these droplets or they can land in your nose or mouth. You can also pick up germs that cause pneumonia by shaking hands or touching contaminated surfaces, then touching your eyes, nose or mouth.

Are there vaccines to help prevent pneumonia?

Yes, there are several vaccines that help protect against infections caused by bacteria or viruses that may cause pneumonia. These vaccines include the following:

- Pneumococcal
- *Haemophilus influenzae* type b (Hib)
- Pertussis (whooping cough)
- Varicella (chickenpox)
- Measles
- Influenza (flu)

How is pneumonia treated?

Bacterial pneumonia can be treated with antibiotics. Viral pneumonia, without evidence of bacterial infection, is *not* treated with antibiotics, but rather an influenza antiviral medication. This is a drug that specifically fights influenza viruses.

How can people protect themselves against pneumonia?

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

- 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
- Quit smoking

Where can I get more information?

Information about pneumonia and other related health topics can be found at www.cdc.gov. The DC Department of Health promotes the health and safety of the District residents. For additional information, please visit www.doh.dc.gov or call (202) 442-9371.