

## What is pneumonia?

- Pneumonia is an infection of the lungs.
- It can affect one or both lungs.

Illini Pediatrics, LLC  
Joseph E. Cangas, M.D.  
107 N. Main St, Ste 2B  
Columbia, IL 62236  
(618) 281-HEAL (4325)

## What causes it?

- It can be caused by a virus, bacteria, parasites, or fungi.
- It is usually caused by a virus.
- It often begins after an upper respiratory tract infection (an infection of the nose and throat).

## Who can get it?

- People with weak immune systems or chronic illnesses are more likely to get pneumonia.
- Children who were born early are at higher risk of having more severe symptoms.
- It is spread more easily in schools and day care.
- Young children and people over age 65 are at highest risk.
- People who smoke or abuse alcohol are at higher risk.

## What are the signs and symptoms?

Symptoms may be different depending on the child's age and the cause. They are often similar to that of a cold or the flu. Symptoms can include:

- Fever
- Shaking, chills, sweating
- Cough, coughing up phlegm
- Rapid breathing
- Wheezing
- Sucking in between the ribs with each breath
- Vomiting
- Chest pain
- Stomach pain
- Headache
- Muscle aches
- Little energy, feeling very tired
- Loss of appetite (older children)
- Poor feeding (infants)
- Bluish or gray color to the lips or nails

## Is it contagious?

- Yes. Pneumonia is contagious.
- It can be spread by coughing, sneezing, and sharing eating utensils or glasses.
- It can be spread by direct contact with an infected person or indirect contact with items an infected person has touched.

## How is it treated?

- Call the doctor immediately if you think your child has pneumonia.
- The doctor will examine your child.
- X-rays, blood tests, or other standard tests may be needed.
- Most cases can be treated at home with antibiotics.
- Give the medicine as instructed. Even if your child feels better, do not stop taking the medicine until the prescription is gone.
- Children with severe symptoms, such as difficulty breathing, may need to stay in the hospital.

- Children who have both pneumonia and a chronic illness may have to stay in the hospital.
- Give plenty of fluids. Do not force your child to eat if she doesn't feel well.
- If your child has a cough, ask your doctor if they recommend an over-the-counter medicine.
- If her chest hurts, put a heating pad or warm towel on her chest. Acetaminophen or ibuprofen also can help.
- Depending on severity, your child may need to be seen as early as one day after diagnosis. Otherwise, a one week follow up will be scheduled. The doctor will make sure that she is better. If not, more tests may be needed to see what is causing the symptoms.
- Acetaminophen can be used to treat muscle aches and fever.

### **How long does it last?**

- With treatment, pneumonia caused by bacteria can usually be cured in 1 or 2 weeks.
- Pneumonia caused by a virus often lasts longer.

### **Can it be prevented?**

- Children usually get vaccines to help protect them against certain kinds of pneumonia.
- Some people should also receive the vaccine around age 65.
- Getting a flu vaccine may give added protection.
- Avoid close contact with a person who has an upper respiratory tract infection.
- If you have pneumonia, stay away from people with weak immune systems so they are not infected.
- Wash hands often.
- Avoid smoking and abusing alcohol around your child. (NO smoking in the house)
- Do your best to stay healthy. Eat right, exercise, and get enough rest.
- Drink plenty of fluids, especially water.
- Take all medication as prescribed by your doctor. If you don't take it all, the infection may come back.

### **When should I call the doctor?**

- Pneumonia can lead to death. Call the doctor immediately if your child has symptoms.
- Call the doctor if your child is having difficulty breathing, is breathing very fast, or if her lips and nails are a bluish or gray color.
- Call the doctor if your infant under 3 months old has a fever.
- Call the doctor if you have questions or concerns about your child's treatment or condition.

### **Quick Answers**

- Pneumonia is an infection of the lungs.
- It can be caused by a virus, bacteria, parasites, or fungi.
- Young children and people over age 65 are at highest risk of getting certain kinds of pneumonia.
- Symptoms are often similar to that of a cold or the flu.
- It can be spread by coughing, sneezing, direct contact, and indirect contact.
- Call the doctor immediately if you think your child has pneumonia.
- Children usually receive routine vaccines to help protect them against pneumonia.
- Call the doctor if your child is having difficulty breathing, is breathing very fast, or if her lips and nails are a bluish or gray color.

### **References**

- Columbia University College. Infectious Diseases: Lung Infections. (cited 2002 March 19).
- MayoClinic. What is Pneumoina? 2001 September 17 (cited 2002 March 19).
- Rutherford K. Pneumonia. KidsHealth. 2001 July (cited 2002 March 19).