

# Pneumonia

Pneumonia is a respiratory illness that causes more deaths worldwide than almost any other infectious disease. Over 1 million Americans are affected by it every year.

## What Is Pneumonia?

Pneumonia is an infection of the lungs that can cause mild to severe illness in people of all ages. Signs of pneumonia can include coughing, fever, fatigue, nausea, vomit-

ing, rapid breathing or shortness of breath, chills, or chest pain. Symptoms may seem similar to that of the flu or common cold, except that they are more severe. A diagnosis from your doctor can determine the difference, and should be obtained as early as possible.

Certain people are at greater risk of infection than others, including adults aged 65 or older, children younger than 5 years of age, adults who have underlying medical conditions like diabetes or HIV/AIDS, and people 19 through 64 who smoke cigarettes or have asthma. As of 2007, 1.2 million Americans were hospitalized with pneumonia and more than 52,000 people died from the disease.

## Causes of Pneumonia

You can develop pneumonia when certain bacteria, viruses or fungi living in your nose, mouth, sinuses, or the environment spread to your lungs, causing inflammation. You can also catch it from people who are infected, whether or not they show signs.



In the U.S., the most common bacterial cause of pneumonia is *Streptococcus pneumoniae* (pneumococcus) and the most common viral causes are influenza, parainfluenza, and respiratory syncytial viruses. In children younger than one year of age, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) is the most common cause of pneumonia. Other common bacterial and viral causes of pneumonia in the U.S. include *Staphylococcus aureus* and adenovirus. The fungus *pneumocystis jirovecii* is a common cause of pneumonia in patients with AIDS.

## Treatments for Pneumonia

Depending on its severity, pneumonia may be treated with a combination of antibiotics, sinus-clearing humidifiers, breathing exercises, and the consumption of more fluids. Serious cases may require a hospital visit and longer medical treatment.

## Reducing Your Risk

Pneumonia can be prevented with vaccines and good hygiene, which also help prevent respiratory infections in general. This includes wash-

ing your hands regularly, cleaning hard surfaces that are touched often like doorknobs and countertops, and coughing or sneezing into a tissue or into your elbow or sleeve, instead of your hands, shirt collar, or without any coverage. Limit your exposure to cigarette smoke and

if possible treat or prevent conditions like diabetes and HIV/AIDS, which can make you vulnerable.

Learn more about addressing pneumonia at: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0001200/>

## HIGHLIGHTS

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