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Pneumonia

What is pneumonia?

Pneumonia is an infection of one or both lungs which is usually caused by bacteria, viruses, or fungi. Pneumonia is the sixth leading cause of death in the United States.

What are the symptoms of pneumonia?

Most people who develop pneumonia initially have symptoms of a cold which is followed by a high fever, shaking, chills, and a cough with sputum production. The sputum is usually discolored and sometimes bloody. People with pneumonia may become short of breath. Chest pain may develop and is usually sharp and worsens when taking a deep breath. Children and babies who develop pneumonia often do not have signs of a chest infection but develop a fever, rapid breathing, appear quite ill, and can become sluggish. Elderly people may also have few symptoms with pneumonia.

How do you get pneumonia?

Some cases of pneumonia can be spread by breathing in small droplets that contain the organisms that cause pneumonia. These droplets get into the air when a person infected with these germs coughs or sneezes. In other cases, pneumonia is caused when bacteria and viruses that are normally present in the mouth, throat, or nose inadvertently enter the lung. During sleep, it is quite common for people to breathe in secretions from the mouth, throat, or nose. Normally, the body's reflex response (coughing back up the secretions) and immune system will prevent the organisms from causing pneumonia. However, if a person is in a weakened condition from another illness, severe pneumonia can develop.

Can pneumonia be prevented?

Getting vaccinated is the best way to protect against pneumonia. There are two types of vaccine currently available: Pneumovax for adults and Prevnar for children.

How often is vaccination needed?

Vaccination is needed only once in a lifetime for most adults who are vaccinated at age 65 or older. However, for adults who are vaccinated before age 65, or for those at highest risk for serious disease, revaccination may be necessary.

It is recommended that children less than 5 years of age receive four doses of the children's vaccine, depending upon the age the first dose is given.

Who is at risk for pneumonia?

Anyone can get pneumonia but some groups are at particularly high risk. These groups include:

- Persons age 65 and older;
- Persons over two years of age who are taking any treatments that weaken the body's immune system;
- Residents of chronic or long-term care facilities;
- Persons with weakened immune systems due to medical conditions including:
 - * Cancer
 - * Hodgkin's disease
 - * Sickle cell disease
 - * Kidney disorders
 - * Lung disease
 - * Heart Disease
 - * Diabetes
 - * HIV/AIDS
 - * Alcoholism



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Health Department

March 2009

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How is pneumonia treated?

Your doctor may prescribe antibiotics. These almost always cure pneumonia caused by bacteria. Take all of the antibiotics as prescribed by your doctor. You should start to feel much better after taking all of the medication, however, call your doctor if you do not after 2 to 3 days of antibiotics. Call your doctor right away if you feel worse. You may need to go to the hospital if you have severe symptoms, a weak immune system, or another serious illness. Pneumonia caused by a virus usually cannot be treated with antibiotics. Home treatment, such as rest and taking care of your cough, is the only treatment.

How effective is the Pneumonia Vaccine?

Pneumonia vaccines are clinically effective and safe. The adult version of the vaccine has been shown to be effective in the prevention of invasive pneumonia, offering protection against 23 of the most prevalent pneumonia types. The children's version of the vaccine has also reduced the incidence of pneumonia.

Courtesy: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases

For more information:

Sedgwick County Health Department
660-7300

Sedgwick County Website
www.sedgwickcounty.org