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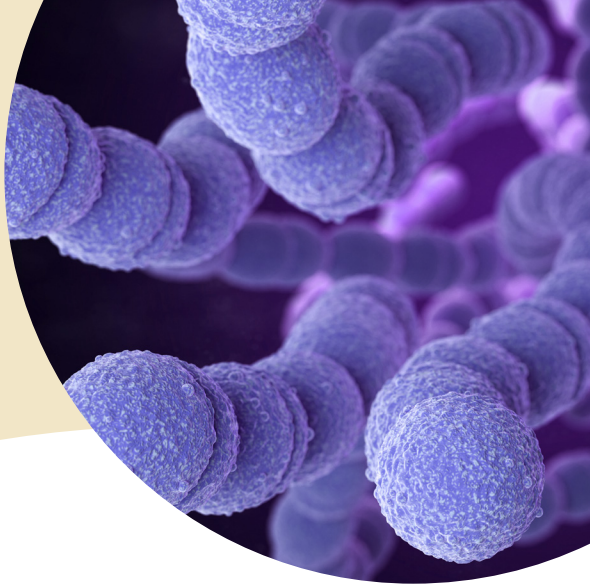
About Pneumonia

VETERANS
HEALTH AND WELLNESS FOUNDATION

Pfizer

What Is Pneumonia?[1,2]



Pneumonia is an infection of one or both lungs. Many kinds of germs can cause pneumonia, including different bacteria, viruses, or fungi. Pneumonia can be serious and even fatal.

Vaccines are available that can help prevent pneumonia caused by certain bacteria and viruses.

Who is at risk of getting pneumonia?

Anyone can get pneumonia. However, you may be at higher risk if you[1,2]:

- Are an adult age 65 or older
- Have trouble coughing or swallowing due to age, stroke, or other conditions
- Have a chronic lung disease, such as asthma, COPD, or cystic fibrosis
- Have any medical conditions that weaken your immune system, such as HIV/AIDS, cancer, an organ or bone marrow transplant, or sickle cell disease
- Are a smoker, heavy drinker, or have had exposure to certain pollutants or toxic fumes

Some ways to help reduce the risk of getting pneumonia[1,3]

Take Care of Your Health

- Wash your hands often with soap and water or use hand sanitizer.
- Practice good health habits—eat healthy, get regular exercise, get enough sleep, and don't smoke. These habits can help prevent colds, flu, and other respiratory illnesses. They can also help you recover faster when you do get sick.
- Be sure to manage any health conditions you may have such as asthma, COPD, diabetes, and heart disease.
- If you have cancer or HIV, ask your doctor about additional things you can do to help prevent pneumonia and other infections.

Get Vaccinated

- Talk to your health care provider about pneumococcal vaccines. Depending on your age and medical conditions, a pneumococcal vaccine may be recommended for you.
- Get a flu vaccine every year—it's usually given in September and October.
- Ask your doctor if you need other vaccines that can help prevent infections that may lead to pneumonia. These include pertussis (whooping cough), COVID-19, chicken pox, and measles.
- Make sure children are up to date on their vaccinations.

What are the symptoms of pneumonia?

Symptoms can range from mild to serious. Common symptoms of pneumonia are[1,2]:

- Cough with or without mucus (slimy substance)
- Fever and chills
- Rapid breathing or trouble breathing
- Chest pain

Older adults may also experience confusion or low alertness.

How is pneumonia diagnosed?

Call your doctor if you are having symptoms of pneumonia. Don't wait for the disease to get worse before you seek care. Your doctor will[1]:

- Ask you questions about your symptoms and other medical conditions
- Perform a physical exam and listen for abnormal breathing sounds

You may also need:

- Chest X-ray
- Lab tests (blood, mucus from your cough)

After a diagnosis, your doctor can decide what treatments are best for you.

Prevention is key[1]

There are vaccines that can help prevent infection by some of the bacteria and viruses that can cause pneumonia. Vaccines can't prevent all cases of infection. However, compared to people who don't get vaccinated, those who are vaccinated tend to have:

- Milder infections
- Pneumonia that doesn't last as long
- Fewer serious complications

Talk with your doctor about whether you and your family are up to date on your vaccinations and to determine which vaccines are right for you.

References

1. National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. Pneumonia. Updated March 24, 2022. Accessed May 1, 2023. https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/pneumonia

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3. American Lung Association. Preventing pneumonia. Updated January 30, 2023. Accessed May 1, 2023. https://www.lung.org/lung-health-diseases/lung-disease-lookup/pneumonia/preventing-pneumonia

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