Pneumonia Education and Discharge Instructions
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Definition:

Pneumonia is an infection of the lungs. Many different organisms can cause it, including bacteria, viruses, and fungi.

Pneumonia can range from mild to severe, and can even be deadly. The severity depends on the type of organism causing pneumonia as well as your age and underlying health.

*Pneumonia is a common illness that affects millions of people each year*

Alternative Names:

Bronchopneumonia; Community-acquired pneumonia
Causes:

Bacterial pneumonias tend to be the most serious and, in adults, the most common cause of pneumonia. The most common pneumonia-causing bacterium in adults is *Streptococcus pneumoniae* (pneumococcus).

Respiratory viruses are the most common causes of pneumonia in young children.

In some people, particularly the elderly and those who are debilitated, bacterial pneumonia may follow influenza or even a common cold.

People who have trouble swallowing are at risk of aspiration pneumonia. In this condition, food, liquid, or saliva accidentally goes into the airways. It is more common in people who have had a stroke, Parkinson's disease, or previous throat surgery.

It is often harder to treat pneumonia in people who have risk factors, like diabetes, cancer, alcoholism, or other chronic medical conditions. Patients in a hospital or nursing facility are also more difficult to treat.
**Symptoms:**

The main symptoms of pneumonia are:

- Cough with greenish or yellow mucus; bloody phlegm happens on occasion
- Fever with shaking chills
- Sharp or stabbing chest pain worsened by deep breathing or coughing
- Rapid, shallow breathing
- Shortness of breath

**Additional symptoms of pneumonia may include:**

- Headache
- Excessive sweating and clammy skin
- Loss of appetite and vomiting
- Excessive fatigue
- Confusion, especially in older people
Exams and tests may include any or all of the following:

- Chest X-Ray
- Culture of your sputum to look for the organism causing your symptoms
- Complete blood count to check white blood cell count; if high, this suggests bacterial infection
- Arterial blood gases to check how well you are oxygenating your blood
- CAT scan of the chest
- Pleural fluid culture if there is fluid in the space surrounding the lungs
- Crackles are heard when listening to your chest with a stethoscope. Other abnormal breathing sounds may also be heard through the stethoscope or via percussion (tapping on your chest wall).
Treatment:

If the cause is bacterial, the doctor will try to cure the infection with antibiotics. If the cause is viral, typical antibiotics will NOT be effective. Sometimes, however, your doctor may use antiviral medication. It may be difficult to distinguish between viral and bacterial pneumonia, so you may receive antibiotics.

Occasionally, steroid medications may be used to reduce wheezing if there is an underlying lung disease.

*Many people can be treated at home with antibiotics.*

**You must finish the entire course of antibiotics that your doctor prescribes!**

You can take these steps at home:

- Drink plenty of fluids to help loosen secretions and bring up phlegm.
- Get lots of rest. Have someone else do household chores.
- Control your fever with ibuprofen or acetaminophen.

Outlook (Prognosis)

With treatment, most patients will improve within 2 weeks. Elderly or debilitated patients may need treatment for longer.

Your doctor will want to make sure your chest x-ray becomes normal again after you take a course of antibiotics.
It is very important that you
Make an appointment with your doctor for a follow up exam

When to Contact a Medical Professional:

Call your doctor or go to the Emergency Department if you have:

- Worsening respiratory symptoms
- Shaking chills, or persistent fevers
- Shortness of breath, rapid or painful breathing
- A cough that brings up bloody or rust-colored mucus
- Chest pain that worsens when you cough or inhale
- Night sweats or unexplained weight loss
- Vomiting, dizziness, weakness, or confusion
- If you think you are having any kind of reaction to your medication
Prevention:

- **Wash your hands frequently!** Especially after blowing your nose, going to the bathroom, diapering, and before eating or preparing foods.

- Avoid contact with others that are sick.

- **Cover your cough** and **cover your sneeze!**

- Wear a mask when in dusty or moldy areas.

- **Don't smoke!** Tobacco damages your lung's ability to ward off infection. Additionally, avoid others who do smoke. *Being around smoke will cause your symptoms to become worse.*

  (Smoking cessation counseling is available on request)
**Vaccines Can Help Prevent Pneumonia**

**Flu vaccines** are given every year to protect against new viral strains and prevent pneumonia and other problems caused by the influenza virus.

**Pneumococcal vaccines** prevent *Streptococcus pneumoniae*.*

*Talk to your doctor about getting vaccinations*

(Information retrieved from MD Consult database June 16, 2009)