

# Pneumonia



## Information for patients

This leaflet provides information on pneumonia, including symptoms, diagnosis, treatment, recovery and prevention. If you have any queries or concerns, please speak to your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

### Confirming your identity

Before you have a treatment or procedure, our staff will ask you your **name** and **date of birth** and check your **ID band**. If you don't have an ID band we will also ask you to confirm your address.

**If we don't ask these questions, then please ask us to check.**

Ensuring your safety is our primary concern.

## What is pneumonia?

Pneumonia is a condition caused by an infection in your lungs. Each year in the UK between 5 and 11 adults in every 1,000 get pneumonia. The infection can be bacterial, viral or fungal in origin. This affects small air sacs within your lungs known as alveoli, causing them to swell (inflammation) and fill up with fluid. This process makes it difficult to breathe. It most commonly occurs in winter as respiratory viral infections such as flu spread easily person to person.

## Types of pneumonia

### Most common:

- community-acquired pneumonia, commonly caused by bacteria called *Streptococcus pneumoniae*

### Others:

- hospital-acquired pneumonia
- viral pneumonia
- aspiration pneumonia
- fungal pneumonia

## High-risk groups

- Babies and young children.
- Adults over 65.
- People with diabetes, cancer or long-term heart, lung, brain, liver or kidney conditions.
- Heavy smokers or drinkers.
- People on immunosuppressant medications or chemotherapy.



## Symptoms of pneumonia

Pneumonia is serious and may make you feel very unwell. Symptoms may include:

- coughing with or without yellow or green mucus
- fever with or without chills
- difficulty breathing
- chest pain or discomfort
- fatigue and malaise
- reduced appetite

### **In more severe cases you may notice:**

- fast breathing
- confusion – particularly in the elderly
- low blood pressure
- fast heartbeat or palpitations
- coughing blood
- nausea and vomiting

People may get a sharp pain in the chest when breathing in or out. This may be caused by inflammation between the lining of the lung and ribcage, called pleurisy.

**If you feel unwell with these symptoms, see your GP or call 111. If you have chest pain, a rapid heartbeat, quick breathing, shivers or confusion, get urgent advice from GP or call 999, particularly if over 65. Call 999 immediately if you notice a blue tinge to lips or under fingernails.**

## Diagnosis and treatment

Your doctor can make a diagnosis based on symptoms and physical examination, however you may require a chest X-Ray to confirm the pneumonia. They may also do some blood tests and ask for a sputum sample.

The main treatment for pneumonia is antibiotics which should be started as soon as possible after diagnosis. The duration depends on the severity of the pneumonia. You should also rest and drink plenty of fluids. More severe cases may require hospital admission and intravenous antibiotics.

## Recovery

Pneumonia can take weeks to months to recover from. The timeframe below varies from person to person and depends on your general health, age and severity of the pneumonia.

- 1 week – fever resolved
- 4 weeks – less mucus
- 6 weeks – reduced cough
- 3 months – mostly resolved
- 6 months – fully resolved

## Ongoing care

We recommend helping recovery by eating well and light exercise, including deep breathing exercises. Exercise your lungs by taking long slow deep breaths or blowing through a straw into a glass of water. This is also good for clearing mucus from the lungs. More information on:

[www.acprc.org.uk](http://www.acprc.org.uk)

If your symptoms are slow to disappear, you're over 50 or you smoke, we recommend you have a chest X-ray, 6 weeks after starting antibiotics or treatment to check that the infection is no longer in the lungs.

## To prevent pneumonia

- Avoid smoking: Smoking increases the risk of developing pneumonia and other chest infections (including in children whose parents smoke).
- Practice good hygiene to avoid spread of germs.
- Avoid alcohol misuse. This weakens your immune system.
- Get vaccinated – if you are in a high risk group, this should be done annually.



To organise a pneumonia or flu jab, talk to your GP, local pharmacist or call the Asthma and Lung UK helpline on 0300 222 5800.

## Sources

- Asthma and Lung UK
- NHS

## Sharing your information

We have teamed up with Guy's and St Thomas' Hospitals in a partnership known as King's Health Partners Academic Health Sciences Centre. We are working together to give our patients the best possible care, so you might find we invite you for appointments at Guy's or St Thomas'. To make sure everyone you meet always has the most up-to-date information about your health, we may share information about you between the hospitals.

## Care provided by students

We provide clinical training where our students get practical experience by treating patients. Please tell your doctor or nurse if you do not want students to be involved in your care. Your treatment will not be affected by your decision.



## **PALS**

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) is a service that offers support, information and assistance to patients, relatives and visitors. They can also provide help and advice if you have a concern or complaint that staff have not been able to resolve for you. They can also pass on praise or thanks to our teams. The PALS office is located on the ground floor of the Hambleton Wing, near the main entrance on Bessemer Road - staff will be happy to direct you.

PALS at King's College Hospital, Denmark Hill, London SE5 9RS

Tel: **020 3299 3601**

Email: **[kch-tr.palsdh@nhs.net](mailto:kch-tr.palsdh@nhs.net)**

PALS at Princess Royal University Hospital, Farnborough Common, Orpington, Kent BR6 8ND

Tel: **01689 863252**

Email: **[kch-tr.palspruh@nhs.net](mailto:kch-tr.palspruh@nhs.net)**

**If you would like the information in this leaflet in a different language or format, please contact our Communications and Interpreting telephone line on 020 3299 4826 or email [kch-tr.accessibility@nhs.net](mailto:kch-tr.accessibility@nhs.net)**