

ADVANTAGE

Pneumonia



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How is pneumonia acquired?



Coughing

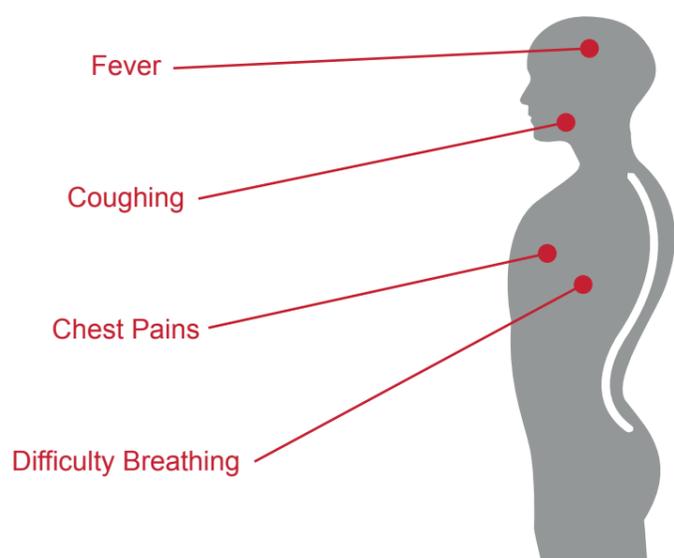


Sneezing



Aspiration

What are the symptoms of pneumonia?



How is it diagnosed?

- Physical Examination
- Chest X-ray
- Blood Test

People at risk



Infants



Elderly



Drug and alcohol abusers



Questions

for Dr Thapelo Motshudi

1 What is pneumonia?

The lungs have multiple tiny sacs called alveoli, and they normally contain air. When one has pneumonia these air sacs are filled with fluid or pus instead, and a number of organisms and processes can be responsible for this abnormality. Some bacteria, viruses, fungi, and other organisms can cause pneumonia. It is also possible to get fluid in the lungs from non-infective causes like heart and liver failure, but commonly when we speak about pneumonia we refer to the infective type.

2 How is pneumonia acquired?

There are a number of ways in which one can get and spread pneumonia, and generally the infection is classified based on where one was infected. This is because the types of organisms differ depending on whether one was infected in the community or in a hospital environment. It is spread by coughing and sneezing, and one can also get pneumonia from aspiration, which is inhalation of stomach or oral contents into the airways.

3 What are the symptoms and risk factors for pneumonia?

The symptoms are generally similar to those of flu and the common cold, and they depend on the severity of the infection. Symptoms include fever, coughing, chest pains and difficulty breathing. Even though anyone can get pneumonia, some people are at increased risk. These include infants; the elderly; people with weak immune systems; drug and alcohol abusers; those with chronic lung diseases like asthma; and those with impaired swallowing mechanism from stroke and other neurological symptoms.

4 How is it diagnosed?

Diagnosis is made on the history you provide your doctor, physical examination, and usually a chest x-ray as well, but this is not always necessary. Sometimes, especially with hospital-acquired pneumonia, your doctor might also request a blood test to so as to confirm the specific type of organism responsible for the infection. This helps with ensuring that the correct treatment is prescribed.

5 What are the complications?

For people with general good health, pneumonia should resolve easily with early diagnosis and treatment. However, in some instances, complications might arise as a result of some of the following:

- Infection with an unusual organism
- Incorrect treatment regimen
- Correct treatment but insufficient dose
- Stopping treatment too early
- If there are other underlying medical conditions causing a weakened immune system
- Infants and the elderly.

6 What is the treatment?

The type of treatment depends on the specific pneumonia one has. Bacterial pneumonia is more common, therefore treatment is usually antibiotics, either given orally or intravenously, depending on the severity. Sometimes patients are given oxygen as well if they are struggling to breathe. Viral pneumonia is treated symptomatically, but occasionally one can get secondarily infected with bacteria and then end up taking antibiotics too. There is also a vaccine available against one of the more common types of pneumonia, and it is usually offered to those at high risk.