



Pneumonia

Pneumonia is an inflammation of the lungs and can be a complication of other illnesses. Pneumonia cases can occur throughout the year. Children younger than 5 years old are at increased risk for pneumonia. Infants and young children who experience common respiratory viruses and are exposed to second-hand tobacco smoke are at increased risk of developing pneumonia.

School health and childcare provider information

Cause

Many different viruses, most commonly respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) and influenza virus, and some bacteria (e.g., *Streptococcus pneumoniae*). Most of these viruses or bacteria can cause other illnesses, and not all persons exposed to them will develop pneumonia. Fungi and parasites are less common causes.

Symptoms

May have runny nose, mild cough, and fever several days before developing pneumonia. Rapid breathing, shortness of breath, chills, chest pain, cough, confusion, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, or muscle aches may occur. Children may develop ear infections. Babies and toddlers may look pale and limp, and cry more than usual.

Spread

Pneumonia cannot be spread, *but the viruses and bacteria that can cause it* are spread when an infected person coughs or sneezes tiny droplets into the air, and another person breathes them in. Also, can be spread by touching the secretions from the nose and mouth of an infected person or by touching hands, tissues, or other items soiled with these secretions and then touching one's eyes, nose, or mouth.

Incubation

Depends upon the germ that is causing the illness.

Contagious period

From shortly before symptoms begin and while the child feels sick.

Exclusion

Childcare and School: Until fever is gone without the aid of fever reducing medication and the child is well enough to participate in routine activities.

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Diagnosis

Recommend parents/guardians call their health care provider if their child has a high fever or persistent respiratory symptoms, sore throat, or cough. A chest X-ray may help with diagnosis.

Treatment

A health care provider will decide if treatment is needed. There is no specific treatment for viral pneumonia. Bacterial pneumonia can be treated with antibiotics.

Do not give aspirin or salicylate-containing medications to any child or adolescent under 18 years of age.

Prevention

- Cover nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing and sneezing or cough/sneeze into your sleeve. Dispose of used tissues in the trash.
- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm running water after touching the secretions from the nose or mouth. **Thorough handwashing is the best way to prevent the spread of communicable diseases.** If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Clean and disinfect commonly touched surfaces (doorknobs, refrigerator handle, crib rails, water faucets, etc.) at least daily (see Section 2).
- Do not allow sharing of anything that goes into the mouth such as drinking cups, straws, water bottles, and eating utensils.

For more information, call Hennepin County HSPHD-Epidemiology at (612) 543-5230 or call your local health department.

Hennepin County Public Health
Epidemiology
612-543-5230
epi-envhlth@hennepin.us

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