Prevent Pneumonia

[Announcer] This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

For most of us, breathing is something we take for granted, but when breathing becomes difficult, it can be scary; it can also be life threatening.

Hi, I'm Dr. Kathleen Dooling with the CDC.

Pneumonia is an infection of the alveoli, or air sacs, deep in the lungs. It can have a variety of causes, including bacteria, viruses, or fungi. In the United States, pneumonias are usually caused by bacteria or viruses. *Streptococcus pneumoniae*, also called pneumococcus, and *Staphylococcus aureus* are examples of bacterial pneumonia. Viral pneumonias can develop from influenza and parainfluenza viruses, adenoviruses, and respiratory syncytial virus, or RSV, just to name a few. Sometimes, especially in severe cases, bacteria and viruses infect *together* to cause pneumonia.

You can get viral or bacterial pneumonia by breathing in droplets from an infected person's cough or sneeze. You can also get pneumonia-causing germs by shaking hands or touching surfaces, then touching your eyes, nose, or mouth. Certain conditions, like having a weakened immune system or being a smoker, make it harder to fight off infections and can increase your chances of getting pneumonia.

Signs and symptoms of pneumonia can vary, depending on your age and health. You may have a cough with or without mucous, a fever, rapid or difficult breathing, chills, fatigue, or chest pain that's worse when you breathe in or cough. Pneumonia patients can have just some or all of these symptoms.

Call your doctor if you have a fever for more than a few days, have trouble breathing, or start to feel better after a mild illness with cough and then feel much worse again.

Let's talk about how pneumonia is diagnosed. Your doctor will ask about your symptoms and do a physical examination. She may order a chest X-ray, blood test, or rapid influenza test, or collect a respiratory specimen, like phlegm. This is usually enough for her to know if you have pneumonia. If bacterial pneumonia is suspected, she will prescribe antibiotics. On the other hand, viral pneumonia, without evidence of bacterial infection, is *not* treated with antibiotics. If your doctor suspects that influenza is the cause, she may prescribe an influenza antiviral medication. This is a drug that specifically fights influenza viruses.

There are some specific things you can do to help prevent pneumonia. In the US, several vaccines are available for children and adults to protect against germs that may lead to pneumonia. There are two pneumococcal vaccines. Prevnar 13 is recommended for all children younger than five years old. Pneumovax is recommended for all adults older than 65 and for people two years of age and older who are at high risk due to certain medical conditions. Some of these conditions include heart problems, lung disease, or a weakened immune system. There is also a yearly vaccine to protect you from the flu and its complications, which can include pneumonia.

Other vaccines protect against *Haemophilus influenzae* type b, whooping cough, chickenpox, and measles, which can sometimes cause pneumonia. In fact, being up to date on all recommended vaccines can help prevent many serious diseases in children and adults.

You can also lower your chances of getting pneumonia by taking good care of any medical problems you have, like diabetes or heart disease. If you smoke, quitting is one of *the most important things* you can do to reduce your chances of getting pneumonia.

Finally, staying away from people who are sick and remembering to wash your hands often with soap and water can keep pneumonia-causing germs away.

Pneumonia is serious, but knowing the facts, taking preventive steps, and staying up-to-date on your vaccinations can help keep you and your family pneumonia-free.

For more information, please visit www.cdc.gov and look for pneumonia under the "P" in the A-Z index.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov, or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.