

Prevent Pneumonia

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

Most of us take breathing for granted, but when breathing becomes difficult, it can be scary. It can also be life threatening.

Hi, I'm Matthew Westercamp with CDC's National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases.

Pneumonia is a lung infection that can cause mild to severe illness in people of all ages. It can be caused by many things, including bacteria, viruses, or fungi. Sometimes, especially in severe cases, both bacteria and viruses *together* can cause pneumonia. The good news is, there are steps you can take to help prevent it.

The viruses and bacteria that cause pneumonia usually spread in small droplets when an infected person coughs or sneezes into the air. If you are nearby, you can breathe in these droplets or they can land in your nose or mouth. You can also pick up 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 if you come in contact with these germs.

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

Now, 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, rapid influenza test, or collect a respiratory specimen. If bacterial pneumonia is suspected, she'll prescribe antibiotics. 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 United States, several vaccines are available for children and adults to protect against germs that may lead to pneumonia. There are two types of pneumococcal vaccines that help prevent infections caused by *Streptococcus pneumoniae* bacteria. One is recommended for all children younger than five years old, all adults 65 or older, and for some children and adults with certain medical conditions. The other is recommended for all adults 65 or older, adults who smoke cigarettes or have asthma, and for people two years or older who are at increased risk due to certain medical conditions. Talk to your doctor about which pneumococcal vaccines you and your family may need.

There is also a yearly vaccine to help 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 medical problems, such as diabetes or heart disease. If you smoke, you can also reduce your chances of getting pneumonia by quitting.

Finally, stay away from people who are sick, remember to wash your hands often with soap and water, and disinfect frequently touched surfaces. These good hygiene practices can help prevent pneumonia and other respiratory infections.

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 cdc.gov/pneumonia. That's c-d-c dot gov slash p-n-e-u-m-o-n-i-a.

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