

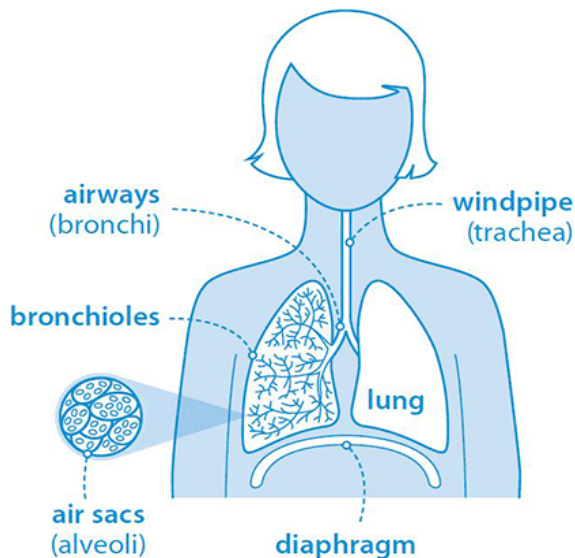
Information for patients and carers

Pneumonia



What is Pneumonia?

Pneumonia is a type of chest infection. It affects the tiny air sacs in your lungs, called alveoli. When you have pneumonia, these air sacs get inflamed and fill with fluid. There are many different types of bacteria and viruses that can cause the infection in the lungs. These infections are carried in the air particularly when people are coughing, sneezing, or vomiting.



What are the symptoms?

Symptoms may develop gradually over a few days but can progress much faster. The main symptom is **coughing**. You may feel generally unwell, weak and tired, and you'll probably have at least one of these symptoms too:

- Coughing up mucus that may become yellow or green
- a high temperature – you might also sweat and shiver
- difficulty breathing or getting out of breath quicker than normal
- chest pain or discomfort
- loss of appetite

Even if you have pneumonia, you may not have all these symptoms.

How is pneumonia treated?

After discussion with you, a decision will be made about which treatment is best. A course of antibiotics will normally be successful in treating your pneumonia. Usually, we can effectively treat your illness at home with oral antibiotics (tablets, capsules or liquid taken by mouth). Sometimes, these antibiotics may not be strong enough and we may need to give you intravenous antibiotics (where an antibiotic is injected into your vein via a drip).

It is particularly important to finish your full course of antibiotics – do not stop taking your antibiotics before the end of the course, even if you start to feel better.

Complications caused by pneumonia

Pneumonia can sometimes have complications. The most common complication is:

- **Pleurisy** – where the pleura, the thin linings between your lungs and ribcage, become inflamed, leading to chest pain. More information about this condition is available at: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/pleurisy/>

Most people recover from pneumonia and return to good health.

Recovery from pneumonia

Pneumonia can be a serious illness that takes weeks or months to recover from. It is impossible to say exactly how quickly you'll recover, but here's an idea of what to expect:

- **1 week** - your fever should be gone (if background respiratory disease this can take longer)
- **4 weeks** - your chest will feel better, and you'll produce less mucus
- **6 weeks** - you'll cough less and find it easier to breathe
- **3 months**- most of your symptoms should be gone, though you may still feel tired

Taking care of yourself

There are some simple things you can do to help your recovery:

- Remember gentle mobilisation is key and do pace yourself, but also listen to your body for when you need to rest. You can start to do more as you feel better, but don't push yourself. It is important not to overdo daily activities until you are fully recovered, and everyone's recovery is different
- Breathe deeply five to ten times and then cough or huff (as though you are going to mist in the mirror) strongly a couple of times. This helps to clear any phlegm that's settled in your lungs. Further information about breathing exercises can be found at: <https://www.acprc.org.uk/publications/patient-information-leaflets/>
- Drink warm beverages, take steamy baths/showers, use a humidifier to help open your airways and ease your breathing

- If you have a fever or are in pain, you can take over-the-counter pain relief such as paracetamol or ibuprofen (check with the team who is looking after you). Make sure you take them according to the instructions on the packet. Taking too much can be dangerous
- Drink plenty of fluids so that you don't get dehydrated, fluids also help to loosen secretions
- Make sure that you eat a healthy and well-balanced diet to give your body the nutrients it needs to fight an infection. Sometimes this can be difficult so little and often is recommended if this is the case
- Try and avoid alcohol
- If you're a smoker, now is a good time to give up. Smoking damages your lungs and makes it more likely that you'll get pneumonia again

How do you prevent pneumonia?

There are some things you can do to reduce your risk of pneumonia. These are important to follow if you have previously had pneumonia, to prevent developing it again.

- Stop smoking. Your doctor can help you with ways to stop smoking or you can access additional support from: <https://www.smokefreelancashire.org.uk/>
- Try to avoid the spread of illnesses by using strict hand washing and hygiene habits
- Avoid alcohol misuse- excessive alcohol weakens your immune system and this can make you more susceptible to infections

- Get vaccinated – If you are over 65 or in a high-risk group there are vaccines available for pneumonia. It is also a good idea to consider a flu jab each year. Both vaccines are usually free for people at risk, and they are available from your GP and many high street chemists. We recommend this is six weeks after your illness

More information on vaccines is available on the following website:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/vaccinations/pneumococcal-vaccination/>

When to seek help

If you are diagnosed with pneumonia and your symptoms don't improve in 48 hours, or if they get any worse, call your GP or **111** for reassessment.

If you however you develop **severe chest pain**, a **rapid heartbeat**, **quick breathing**, **blue tinged lips**, or **confusion**, get urgent assistance and call **999**.

Contact details

Should you require further advice or information please contact:

The Respiratory Department on telephone number: **01772 522416**

Sources of further information

www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk

www.nhs.uk

www.accessable.co.uk

www.patient.co.uk

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www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk/patient-information-leaflets

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If you want to stop smoking, you can also contact Smokefree Lancashire on Freephone **08081962638**

Please ask a member of staff if you would like help in understanding this information.

This information can be made available in large print, audio, Braille and in other languages.

Department: Respiratory

Division: Medicine

Production date: January 2024

Review date: January 2027

JR 892 v1