

Pneumonia: Eight Questions

John D'Angelo

1. What is pneumonia? Pneumonia is a serious lung infection that is usually caused by breathing either bacteria or a virus into the lungs. Lab tests are available to determine whether the pneumonia is bacterial or viral, but the tests are time-consuming, expensive, and, in a lot of cases, the results can be inconclusive.
2. What are the symptoms? Symptoms of pneumonia usually appear about three days after exposure, but, in some cases, it may take as long as ten days for the symptoms to show. Symptoms usually include: persistent cough either with or without mucus, fever, difficulty breathing, shaking chills, chest pain that worsens when inhaling, weakness, and confusion especially in elderly patients. If the pneumonia is viral in nature, the symptoms will be the same but will usually appear more slowly.
3. How is pneumonia diagnosed? Pneumonia is usually diagnosed with a chest x-ray. However, some physicians also rely on a blood test along with the x-ray for diagnosis.
4. What treatment options are available? Bacterial pneumonia is usually treated with antibiotics. Some physicians will also prescribe a cough medicine so that a patient can rest adequately without a constant cough. Viral pneumonia can be treated with complete rest. Although some physicians will prescribe an antibiotic for viral pneumonia in order to prevent any possible complications from arising. Most cases of pneumonia will not require a hospital stay.
5. How effective are the pneumonia vaccines that are available? These vaccines are very effective and are highly recommended especially for children and older adults. However, the vaccines cannot guard against every kind of pneumonia-causing bacteria, so it is possible to get pneumonia even if a person has received the vaccine. Although a person can get pneumonia after receiving the vaccine, the symptoms will not be as bad and the recovery time will be much quicker.
6. What else can be done to protect yourself? Getting an annual flu shot will afford some protection because it has been shown that getting the flu can increase the risk for pneumonia. Also, avoiding places such as hospitals and nursing homes can add some protection. Finally, frequent hand

washing is one of the easiest ways to protect yourself from any type of infection.

7. Who are at an increased risk for pneumonia? If you fall into one or more of the following categories, you are at an increased risk: smokers, those with asthma or COPD, those under the age of 1 or over the age of 65, and those who use alcohol excessively.
8. What are the warning signs that one should go to the hospital? Go to the hospital immediately if it becomes too difficult to catch your breath or if you see no improvement in your condition after taking antibiotics for two or three days.

We at Tri-Community South want our residents to understand just how serious pneumonia can become if it is not recognized and treated quickly. Contact us at 412-831-3710 if you have further questions on this topic.