

## Pneumonia Fact Sheet

### What is it?

Pneumonia is a lung infection usually caused by bacteria, viruses, or other agents. Certain preexisting conditions may make you more prone to pneumonia. Such as when your immune system is weakened by another infection like the flu. Or if you have other health conditions that weaken your body's ability to deal with infection.

Pneumonia and influenza (the flu) together are ranked as the seventh-leading cause of death among Americans age 65 and older. Pneumonia accounts for the vast majority of deaths between the two. In 2007, 52,847 people died of it. Slightly more women than men are hospitalized with it. And those 65 and older are hospitalized most frequently.

### What causes it?

Viruses, bacteria, and other organisms are the main causes. Pneumonia can also be caused by inhaling food, liquid, gases, or dust into the lungs. Certain diseases, such as tuberculosis and AIDS, may put some people at greater risk.

- **Viral pneumonia** accounts for about a third of pneumonia cases and tends to result in less severe illness than bacteria-caused pneumonia. The symptoms of viral pneumonia are similar to influenza symptoms and include fever, cough, headache, muscle pain, fatigue, and breathlessness
- **Bacterial or pneumococcal pneumonia** accounts for 25 to 35 percent of all community-acquired pneumonia, and an estimated 40,000 deaths each year. The onset of bacterial pneumonia can be gradual or sudden. In the most severe cases, the patient may experience shaking/chills, chattering teeth, severe chest pains, sweats, cough that produces rust colored or greenish mucus, increased breathing and pulse rate, and bluish-colored lips or nails due to lack of oxygen

### Who is at risk?

People who are at the highest risk include the very young and those over 65 years of age. Those with other health problems, such as chronic bronchitis, emphysema, COPD, diabetes mellitus, congestive heart failure, and sickle cell anemia — as well as patients with diseases or treatments that depress immunity — are most vulnerable.

### How is it treated?

There are no effective treatments for most types of viral pneumonia, which usually heal on their own.

Treatment with antibiotics can cure bacterial pneumonia. However, because the disease has become more resistant to these drugs, treating these infections has become more difficult.

### **Can it be prevented?**

The pneumococcal vaccine protects against 23 types of bacteria and is effective in most healthy adults. Unfortunately, the vaccine may be less effective in people in high-risk groups.

The pneumonia vaccine is generally given once. Revaccination should be considered for high-risk adults who received their first shot five or more years ago, and for those who have had a rapid decline in certain antibodies.

A flu shot may also be recommended, since pneumonia often occurs as a complication of the flu. Ask your doctor if you should get a flu shot. Pneumonia and influenza vaccines are covered by Medicare, as well as some state and private health insurance.