

Pneumonia

Pneumonia is an infection deep in the small airways and air sacs of the lungs. It results in severe coughing and can make it hard to breathe. Pneumonia can be caused by bacteria or viruses. The most likely cause of pneumonia depends on the child's age.

What are the Symptoms of pneumonia?

Common Symptoms include:

- Cough
- Fever (temperature higher than 100.4°F or 38°C)
- Breathing faster than normal
- Trouble breathing, when the area between the ribs and in the neck sinks in when a person breathes (“retractions”) or pain with breathing in
- Restlessness or trouble feeding (in babies)

Pneumonia is treated with rest, care at home, and medicines.

Steps to Take - Care at Home

Keep your child away from cigarette, cigar, marijuana or vape smoke. Ban smoking from the house and around your child. If you cannot do this, do not allow smoking in rooms where your child spends time. Do not smoke in the car with your child, even if the window is open.

What to Eat

Your child may not feel like eating.

To help your child get enough food and fluids:

- For breastfed infants, encourage frequent short breast feeds
- Encourage clear fluids during the day.
- Offer smaller, more frequent meals and snacks instead of larger ones.

Give your child plenty of fluids. Good choices are water or unsweetened juice with water added. Foods like soup, ice pops, or gelatin can also help. They may be easier for your child to swallow.

Activity

Have your child rest. Provide quiet, calm activities, such as coloring.

Your child may slowly return to activities as they feel better.

Your child can return to school or childcare when their fever has resolved, they are breathing normally and other symptoms have improved. If you are not sure, check with your doctor.

Medications

Medicine may be given to ease pain and treat infection caused by bacteria.

You can give medicine for pain or fever, such as acetaminophen (Tylenol, Tempra) or ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin). Be sure to read the instructions carefully.

DO NOT give your child medicines that quiet a cough. These usually do not work well and can have serious side effects in children. Cough and cold medicine are NOT recommended for children under 6.

The doctor will prescribe antibiotics if pneumonia is caused by a bacteria. Give your child all of the antibiotics, if prescribed. Do this even when your child is feeling well. If pneumonia is caused by a virus antibiotics will not help and will not be prescribed by the doctor.

Note: Do not give aspirin or aspirin products to a child who has an infection. It may cause serious problems.

When giving medicine:

- Give your child the medicine as advised. Do not change the amount or schedule.
- Use the measuring device that came with the medicine. If you need to use a spoon, cup, or syringe, make sure it has the units that match your child's prescription.
 - For example, if the medicine is given in milliliters (mL), the device should have mL on it.
- Be aware of the side effects of your child's medicine. Let the doctor know if any happen.
- Talk to your child's doctor before stopping any prescription medicine.
- Do not share your child's prescription medicine.
- Medicine can be harmful when mixed. Talk to your child's doctor or pharmacist if your child is taking more than one, including over the counter products and supplements.

Problems to Look Out For

Call or see your primary care practitioner or go to ER if you think your child has pneumonia or your child:

- Is coughing up blood
- Shows signs of problems breathing such as:
 - Widening of nostrils and squeezing of belly when trying to breathe in
 - High-pitched whistling/wheezing sound when breathing out
 - Grunting and tightening of belly muscles with breathing
 - The skin and muscles between your child's ribs or below your child's ribcage look like they are caving in
 - Problems drinking because of trouble sucking or swallowing
 - Being less alert or unable to talk
- Shows signs of dehydration such as:
 - Crying without tears
 - Decreased urination or fewer wet diapers
 - Dry mouth
- Your baby is younger than 3 months and has a fever
- Your baby is older than 3 months and has a fever for more than 3 days
- New or worsening symptoms

Call for medical help (911) or go to the emergency room right away if any of the following occur:

- A great deal of wheezing or severe problems breathing
- Frequent pauses in breathing or pauses causing a change in skin colour (pale/blue/gray skin colour)
- Starts grunting
- Stops breathing
- Blue or gray skin colour, bluish colour of the nails and lips
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Irritability or not wanting to be held

If you think your child has an emergency, call for medical help right away.

How is pneumonia diagnosed?

If a doctor or nurse thinks your child might have pneumonia, they will do an exam and listen to your child's breathing. They might also take an x-ray of your child's chest and do some bloodwork and a nasal swab.

How is pneumonia treated?

Treatment depends on the child's age, how serious the pneumonia is and whether it is caused by a bacteria or virus. Some children are very sick and need to be treated in hospital.

Pneumonia that is caused by a bacteria is treated with antibiotics. Antibiotics are medicines that kill bacteria. They are available in liquid or pill form or by Intravenous infusion. Make sure your child takes all of their antibiotics, even if they feel better before finishing them. Most children who are treated with antibiotics start to feel better in 2-3 days but they may still feel tired or have a cough for a few weeks after being treated.

Antibiotics do NOT help with pneumonia that is caused by a virus.

Can pneumonia be prevented?

There are ways to reduce your child's chances of getting sick with pneumonia.

You can help prevent infections from spreading if you:

- Wash your hands and your child's hands often with soap and water, or use an alcohol based hand sanitizer (do not use on infants who frequently place hands in mouth).
- Teach older children to cover their mouth when they cough.
- Do not share glasses, cups, utensils.
- Clean things that are touched a lot, such as counters, sinks, faucets, doorknobs, phones, remotes and light switches as well as infant toys and soothers.
- Stay away from people who are sick.
- If you cannot avoid people who are sick, wear a medical grade mask. When an adult or older child is sick, they should wear a mask if they are around infants and young children.
- Make sure that your child gets all of the recommended vaccines, including those for influenza and COVID-19. There are several specific vaccines that help to protect against pneumonia. Talk to your primary care provider about which vaccines your child should get.

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