



What is Pneumonia?

Pneumonia is an infection of one or both lungs. Organisms settle in the air sacs where they grow rapidly. These air sacs become filled with pus and fluid as the body attempts to fight infection. Young children, cigarette smokers, adults over 65 and people with certain medical problems including COPD are at greater risk for developing pneumonia. COPD is the fourth leading cause of death, while pneumonia and flu contribute to the eighth leading cause of death in the United States.

What Causes Pneumonia?

Pneumonia is most commonly caused by bacteria and viruses and less commonly by fungi which are more common in patients with suppressed immune systems. Contact with the organisms occurs either through directly touching objects with your hands (which then transmit the organism to your mouth, nose or eyes), or through inhalation of droplets containing the organisms. The causes of pneumonia for which vaccines (shots) are available include:

- Influenza (Flu)
- Pneumococcus
- Measles
- Pertussis (whooping cough)
- Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib)

Symptoms of Pneumonia:

There are several symptoms of pneumonia that are similar to those of a COPD flare-up, which are often caused by infection. It is important to recognize these pneumonia symptoms and to call your doctor if you experience one or more of the following:

- Fever over 100.5 degrees or shaking chills
- Shortness of breath or more rapid breathing
- Nausea, vomiting or diarrhea
- Cough with increased amount of mucus
- Cough with a change in mucus color
- More rapid heart rate
- Pain in one area of the chest with deep breaths

How Can I Avoid Pneumonia?

- See your health care professional at your regularly scheduled appointment even if you feel fine.
- Get your flu shot every year. Local pharmacies and grocery stores offer these shots at the start of flu season.
- Check if you are due for a pneumonia shot which can greatly reduce your risk of developing pneumonia.
- Wash your hands often and carry a small bottle of hand sanitizer for when you cannot wash your hands.

- Avoid touching your mouth, eyes, and nose in public to help prevent germs from entering your body.
- Stay away from crowds, especially during cold and flu season.
- Use your own pen, especially when signing in at your doctor's office or other health care appointments.
- Don't smoke as it makes it harder for the lungs to fight off an infection.
- Get plenty of sleep. When your body is tired, you're more likely to get sick.

It is possible to stay healthy, even if you have COPD, at any stage. Watch for early warning signs of COPD flare-ups which may include pneumonia and report them right away. Work with your health care team to avoid pneumonia!

Download the COPD and Pneumonia Fact Sheet

COPD and Pneumonia Fact Sheet

Resources and Support

The COPD Foundation offers resources such as **COPD360social**, an online community where you can connect with patients, caregivers and health care providers and ask questions, share your experiences and receive and provide support.
