

# Pneumonia and Your Child

## What is pneumonia?

*Pneumonia* is an inflammation of the lungs. When children get pneumonia the breathing tubes that carry air to the lungs get narrow and inflamed.

## Causes of pneumonia

The most common causes of pneumonia in children are viral or bacterial infections. Less common causes of pneumonia in children are when the lungs are irritated by chemicals or other things inhaled into the lungs. Irritants may include chemicals (like spray from household cleaners), liquids (like swimming pool water or formula and other beverages), objects (like a small peanut or other food), or allergic triggers (like dust).

## Types of pneumonia

Pneumonia from infection is most common during the fall, winter, and early spring and can follow a cold, an ear infection, or a sore throat. The following are different types of pneumonia:

**Viral pneumonias** *do not* improve with antibiotics. At home, make sure that your child gets rest, plenty of fluids, and if necessary, medicines to reduce fever.

**Bacterial pneumonias** can be serious and should be treated with antibiotics right away. At home, make sure that your child gets rest, plenty of fluids, and if necessary, medicines to reduce fever.

**Pneumonia from irritants** inhaled in the lungs is most common in children with special health care needs. This includes children with neuromuscular problems, like cerebral palsy.

**Allergic pneumonias** are not common in children. When cases are reported it's often in dusty, rural areas.

## Symptoms of pneumonia

The symptoms of pneumonia are different for each child. Your child may have one or more of the following:

- Fever (may be high grade with chills).
- Cough (with a lot of mucus).
- Trouble breathing, often breathing faster and more deeply than usual with occasional widening of the nostrils during deep breathing.
- Wheezing.
- Chest pain, especially when coughing or with deep breathing.
- Stomachaches or vomiting.
- Eating less or not eating.
- Headache.
- Loss of energy.
- Babies and toddlers may seem pale and limp, and cry more than usual.

## When to call the doctor

Call the doctor if your child has any of the following signs:

- Especially fast or hard breathing (when you can see the chest drawing in and out)
- Persistent vomiting
- No energy to play or to keep up with daily routines for more than 2 or 3 days
- Very pale or bluish lips or fingernails
- Stiff neck

## Care of your child at home

- Make sure your child drinks plenty of liquids to avoid getting dehydrated.
- Help your child rest.
- Give your child the medicine the doctor has recommended. (See "Medicines for your child.")

## When is hospital treatment needed?

Your child may need to be treated at the hospital if your child

- Is younger than 1 year.
- Cannot swallow the medicine.
- Is dehydrated and needs fluids through an IV tube.
- Has severe breathing problems.
- Has problems fighting infections because his or her immune system doesn't work well.
- Has had pneumonia before.
- Has taken oral antibiotics but still has symptoms.

## Care of your child at the hospital

In the hospital your child may be treated with

- An IV (intravenous) tube to give fluids and medicine
- Extra oxygen given through a face mask or a tube in the nose

## Medicines for your child

After an exam, the doctor may order a blood test or an x-ray. These tests can help your doctor decide how to treat your child's infection. If your child needs medicine, be sure you know the right amount, when to give the medicine, and if you should give food with it. If you forget or don't understand the instructions on the medicine label, call the doctor or your pharmacist for help.

## Antibiotics

The doctor may prescribe an antibiotic if pneumonia is caused by bacteria, or an antiviral medicine if the pneumonia is caused specifically by influenza.

Antibiotics and antivirals can be given in 3 ways.

- **Oral (by mouth).** Oral antibiotics can usually be taken at home. It's important that your child continue to take the antibiotic for the number of days prescribed even if your child feels better.

- **Injection.** Your doctor may suggest giving an antibiotic shot, especially if your child is having a lot of trouble with vomiting.
- **IV.** If your child is being treated in the hospital, the antibiotic may be given by vein through an IV tube.

### **Fever and pain medicine**

Your child's doctor may also recommend medicine to decrease fever and aches. Call the doctor for fever lasting more than 2 or 3 days even after giving antibiotics for bacterial pneumonia. Never give your child aspirin unless prescribed by the doctor. It can be dangerous for children younger than 18 years.

### **No cough medicine**

A cough can last from days to weeks, but do not give your child cough medicine. Cough medicine doesn't work and it may keep your child from coughing up mucus that needs to come out of the lungs.

The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

**From your doctor**

