

# FACTSHEET

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## Pneumonia

### What is pneumonia?

Pneumonia is inflammation or infection of one or both lungs caused by viruses or bacteria. Whole sections of the lung may become blocked by the infection, so that air cannot enter the lungs properly.

Your doctor may diagnose your child as having pneumonia. The diagnosis of pneumonia is often confirmed by a chest x-ray. An x-ray will show material in the lung where there is usually air ("consolidation") and sometimes a buildup of fluid (an "effusion").

Pneumonia can occur at any age. Hospitalisation is sometimes needed for severe disease, but many people can be safely managed at home. Recovery can take 1-2 weeks.

### What are the symptoms?

Symptoms vary depending on the age of the child and the organism or bug which has caused the illness. Your child may have one or more of these symptoms:

- fever
- fast and/or difficult breathing
- cough

Your child may also:

- have a headache
- vomit
- be irritable or lethargic
- have pain when breathing or abdominal pain
- not want to eat or drink

### How is it treated?

A child with pneumonia may be able to be treated at home. Antibiotic medication will be given if the infection is bacterial. They will need to rest and to drink small amounts of fluids often. They may be more comfortable sleeping propped up on a couple of pillows.

There is no place for cough medicines for children with pneumonia.

Your child may avoid doing energetic activities. Try to get your child to do more restful activities e.g. reading, watching TV, and doing puzzles.

Tobacco smoke will aggravate coughing, so you should not let anyone smoke around your child.

Children may need to be admitted to hospital for treatment. This is usually if they:

- are under one year of age
- are unable to take medicine by mouth
- have become dehydrated
- have severe breathing problems or need oxygen

Children in hospital may receive antibiotics given intravenously (through a drip) if the pneumonia is thought to be caused by bacteria. Some children need oxygen to help them breathe more easily. Intravenous antibiotics can usually be switched to oral antibiotics once your child is improving.

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## How long will my child be unwell?

Children with bacterial pneumonia usually improve a lot within a day or two of starting antibiotics. Their fever will come down, they will have more energy and their breathing will ease.

Viral pneumonia does not need or respond to antibiotics and the recovery is more slow. Your child may continue to cough for days to a few weeks.

**If your child has been prescribed antibiotics, it is important to complete the course prescribed unless instructed otherwise by your child's doctor.**

## When to come back?

If at any stage your child develops breathing difficulty or drowsiness you should contact your doctor. If they vomit and are unable to drink much you will need to return for review.

Some children need to be checked by a doctor after a few days.

A few weeks after the illness you will probably need to see a doctor to make sure your child has recovered completely. A repeat chest x-ray may be needed.

If you are worried about your child at any stage during the illness or you have other questions you should make contact with your doctor to discuss your concerns or take your child to hospital.

### Remember:

- In bacterial pneumonia, treatment with antibiotics usually leads to quick recovery.
- A chest X-ray may be used to confirm the diagnosis.