



Durham Region Health Department Facts about...



Pneumococcal Disease

What is it?

Pneumococcal diseases are caused by bacteria which can cause infections in the blood (bacteremia), membranes covering the brain (meningitis), lungs (pneumonia), middle ear (otitis media or middle ear infection) and sinuses. Severe infections can be fatal.

Pneumococcal diseases are more common during the winter and early spring months. Infants and young children, the elderly, and people with certain medical conditions and immune deficiencies are at an increased risk for pneumococcal diseases.

How is it spread?

The bacteria that cause pneumococcal disease are found in the nose and mouth secretions of an infected person. The bacteria are spread through close, direct contact (e.g., kissing, coughing, and sneezing). The bacteria are not spread by casual contact or by breathing the air where an infected person has been. Healthy individuals can carry the bacteria in their nose or throat and pass it on to others without becoming ill.

What do I look for?

- In adults and older children, symptoms of pneumococcal **pneumonia** include sudden onset of chills, fever, shortness of breath, cough with phlegm, difficulty breathing, and chest pain that is worsened by breathing deeply. Infants and young children usually have fever, vomiting, cough, rapid breathing, and poor feeding. Elderly may present with fever, shortness of breath and altered mental status.
- Symptoms of pneumococcal **meningitis** include fever, headache, neck stiffness, nausea, vomiting, confusion, sleepiness, and sensitivity of the eyes to light. In babies, meningitis may cause poor eating and drinking, low alertness, fussiness, and vomiting. If these symptoms are present, see a health care provider right away.
- Symptoms of pneumococcal infection in the **blood** include fever, chills, and low alertness. Infants and young children usually present with fever and fussiness.
- Symptoms of pneumococcal infection in the **middle ear** can include sore ear, fussiness, fever, and sleepiness. Infants may pull at ear and cry in pain.

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If you require this information in an accessible format, contact 1-800-841-2729.



How is it treated?

Pneumococcal diseases are treated with antibiotics. When prescribed, people should take antibiotics as directed and take until completed.

If infected, a person is considered not contagious after 24-48 hours of effective antibiotic treatment.

How can I protect myself?

- Pneumococcal diseases are best prevented by vaccination.
- See 'Facts About...Pneumococcal Conjugate (Pneumovax®13) Vaccine'.
- See 'Facts About...Pneumococcal Polysaccharide (Pneumovax®23) Vaccine'.
- Keep up to date with vaccinations and talk to your health care provider about your need for other vaccines.
- Wash hands frequently and thoroughly with soap and water or use hand sanitizer when hands are not visibly dirty.
- Cough or sneeze into your elbow and encourage others to do the same.
- Wash your hands after handling nose and throat secretions (i.e., after disposal of facial tissues containing nose and throat secretions).
- Do not share water bottles, straws, eating utensils, cigarettes, toothbrushes, toys, or anything that has been in contact with saliva, nose, or throat secretions.
- If you are ill, stay at home and isolate yourself from others.

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