

# Community Acquired Pneumonia (CAP)

**Pneumonia can be acquired in the community, in hospital or because of impaired swallowing and aspiration.**

**Many of the features are common to all three, but this leaflet refers specifically to pneumonia acquired in the community (CAP).**

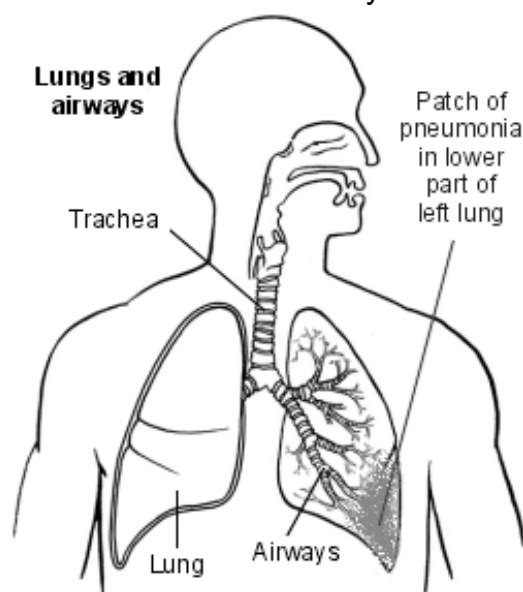
## What is pneumonia?

Pneumonia is an infection of the lung tissue. In your lungs, there are groups of air pockets. When you have pneumonia, these pockets become filled with fluid and inflammatory cells.

## What are the symptoms?

Symptoms can develop suddenly over 24 hours or can gradually come on over several days. Common symptoms include:

- Cough – dry, or productive of coloured or bloodstained phlegm.
- Breathlessness.
- Racing heartbeat.
- Fever and shivering.
- Loss of appetite.
- Chest pain, worse when breathing in.



## Why did I get pneumonia?

- Pneumonia is common; 1 in 100 adults in the UK will develop pneumonia every year. It is more common in the autumn and winter. It can affect anyone, but is more common in certain groups of people, such as the very young, the elderly and those with a weakened immune system.
- It is usually the result of a bacterial infection, but can also be caused by viruses, aspiration (breathing in fluid accidentally) and fungi. You breathe in the bacteria, or other germ, into your lungs. The germs will usually be trapped in your sputum and killed by your immune system. However, sometimes, the germs can multiply and cause pneumonia.

## How is pneumonia diagnosed?

- Pneumonia can be diagnosed by a doctor listening to your symptoms, examining your chest and performing investigations including a chest x-ray, sputum culture (phlegm test) and swabs of your throat.

## How is pneumonia treated?

- Mild pneumonia can be treated at home with rest, tablet antibiotics and drinking lots of fluid.
- If you are more unwell, you will need to be admitted to hospital for intravenous antibiotics.

## Can I infect other people?

Pneumonia is not usually passed between people, so it is safe to be around other people. However, you should avoid being around people with a weak immune system, like those undergoing chemotherapy.

## When will I feel better?

- Now that you have started having treatment, your symptoms should improve steadily and you should start to feel better.
- You should expect to stop getting fevers after one week and chest pain and sputum production should have substantially reduced by six weeks. Your cough and breathlessness may last a little longer, but you should expect this to have improved within three months.
- Most of your symptoms should have gone within six months although you may still feel a little tired.

## How can I prevent this happening again?

- Although pneumonia is not often passed between people, good standards of hygiene do help to prevent germs spreading.
- Cigarette smoke damages the lining of the airways and makes the lungs more prone to infection. Stopping smoking will reduce your chances of getting pneumonia again.
- Excess alcohol can also weaken your defences against infection.
- Immunisation against pneumococcus (the most common cause of bacterial pneumonia) and having the flu vaccine are advised for those at high risk of pneumonia.

## Further information

- [www.nhs.uk/conditions/Pneumonia/Pages/Introduction.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Pneumonia/Pages/Introduction.aspx)
- [www.blf.org.uk/support-for-you/pneumonia](http://www.blf.org.uk/support-for-you/pneumonia)

To find out more about our Trust visit [www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk](http://www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk)

**Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.**

Department of Respiratory Medicine, April 2023

Next review due: April 2025