

All about Respiratory Illnesses and Pneumonia

This fact sheet provides information about respiratory illnesses, including prevention, symptoms, and tips for feeling better. This fact sheet can be provided to direct support professionals (DSPs) or to individuals with developmental disabilities.

Respiratory Illnesses Can Make You Very Sick

Respiratory illnesses affect your nose, throat, bronchial tubes that bring air to your lungs, and lungs. Common respiratory illnesses include the common cold, the flu, bronchitis, and pneumonia.

Some illnesses may not be serious, making you feel sick for a few days but then get better. Other types can be very serious – pneumonia may need to be treated in the hospital and can even lead to death.

Respiratory illnesses are often contagious, meaning that they can easily spread from person to person. If you spend time with or are around someone who has a respiratory illness, you could catch it from them – from the air around them or from things that they have touched.

Who Is at Risk?

Anyone can get a respiratory illness. You are at a higher risk if you:

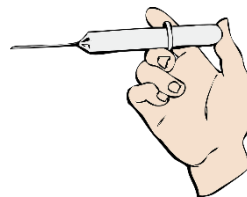
- Smoke or are around people who smoke
- Are an older adult or a young child
- Live where the air is polluted or smoky

Individuals with developmental disabilities may be at greater risk, especially if you:

- Live in a home with other people who may have respiratory illnesses
- Visit the doctor or hospital more often
- Have support staff that helps many people
- Have a health condition, like asthma or down syndrome

Prevention to Keep from Getting Sick

- Ask your doctor about getting a flu shot.
- Wash your hands often with soap and warm water.
 - This is especially important if you are spending time around people with colds and other illnesses.
- Keep your hands away from your nose, eyes, and mouth.
- Stay away from smoke.
- Eat a healthy, well-balanced diet.



Symptoms

The signs and symptoms of different respiratory illnesses can be similar. You may be sick, but not know whether you have a cold, the flu, bronchitis, or pneumonia.

Colds Are Common and Minor

Symptoms can include:

- Feeling tired
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Sneezing or coughing often
- Sore throat



The Flu Is Common but More Serious

The flu can be prevented by getting a yearly vaccination (the flu shot). Symptoms can include:

- Fever
- Body aches
- Headache
- Cough
- Sore throat



Bronchitis Can Be Very Serious

This causes your bronchial tubes to become inflamed, meaning they cannot bring air to your lungs. It can last for 2-3 weeks. Symptoms can include:

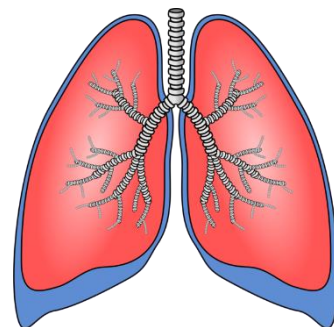
- Cough that may bring up mucus
- Mild fever
- Pain in your chest when you try to breathe deeply
- Shortness of breath

Pneumonia Is One of the Most Serious Respiratory Illnesses

Pneumonia is an infection of your lungs. Most people with pneumonia get better within a few weeks, but sometimes pneumonia can lead to death. This is especially true for older people and those with other health concerns.

If you have pneumonia, you may have:

- A cough that brings up mucus that is green or bloody
- Shaking or getting chills
- A fever
- Fast breathing or shortness of breath
- Chest pain that feels worse when you cough or breathe in
- Feelings of tiredness and weakness
- A fast heartbeat



Older adults (over 65 years old) may have fewer or milder symptoms with a normal temperature or a dry cough with no mucus. They may have a harder time recognizing these symptoms and may have different symptoms, like difficulty thinking clearly.

If you think you might have pneumonia, call your doctor right away! The faster you get treatment for your pneumonia, the faster you will get better. If your pneumonia is being caused by bacteria, the doctor will treat you with antibiotics.

Call 911 if you have serious symptoms, including:

- Feeling like your chest is being crushed or squeezed
- Being worried that you will not be able to keep breathing
- Coughing up large amounts of blood
- Feeling like you may faint when you sit or stand up

Tips for Feeling Better

- If you're sick, tell someone! Your support provider, family, or doctor can help.
- Drink lots of liquids like water, tea, juice, and soup.
- Get lots of rest and sleep.
- Breathe in moist air from a humidifier or a hot shower.
- Take an over-the-counter pain reliever or cough suppressant. (Ask your doctor about these medications.)
- Follow doctor's instructions!



Especially for Pneumonia:

- If your chest is hurting, ask a support provider to help you use a heating pad or warm compress.
 - Be sure that the heating pad does not get too hot.
 - Do not leave it on your body for too long.
- If the doctor gives you medicine, take it every day until it is gone (even if you start feeling better!)
 - Ask your support provider to remind you.