



Patient & Family Guide  
2025

# Pneumonia

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[www.nshealth.ca](http://www.nshealth.ca)

# Pneumonia

- Pneumonia is an infection in 1 or both lungs. It causes the air sacs in the lungs to get inflamed (swell). It is sometimes called a **chest infection**.
- Pneumonia can be caused by a virus, a bacteria, or a fungus. It is most often caused by a virus.
- You can also get **aspiration pneumonia** if you breathe something (like food or liquid) into your lungs.

## Who is at a higher risk for pneumonia?

You are at a higher risk for pneumonia if you:

- Are 65 years old or older
- Are 2 years old or younger
- Have a weak immune system (your body is less able to fight infection) caused by another health condition, chemotherapy, or medication that weakens your immune system
- Smoke or vape
- Have a viral infection in your nose or throat
- Do not eat healthy meals
- Drink alcohol often
- Have had pneumonia before

- Have a chronic (ongoing) disease, like:
  - › Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
  - › Asthma
  - › Cystic fibrosis
  - › Diabetes
- Have another condition, like:
  - › Heart disease
  - › Stroke
  - › Cancer
  - › Dementia
  - › Long-term liver or kidney disease

## **What are the symptoms?**

The symptoms of pneumonia include:

- A cough that may make mucus
- Chest pain when you breathe or cough
- Tiredness
- Fever (temperature above 38 °C or 100.4 °F)
- Sweating
- Shaking
- Chills
- Nausea (feeling sick to your stomach)
- Vomiting (throwing up)
- Diarrhea (loose, watery poop)
- Trouble breathing
- Fast breathing
- Fast heartbeat

**Contact your primary health care provider (family doctor or nurse practitioner), 811, or Virtual Care NS right away if you have:**

- › A cough that does not go away
- › Fever (temperature above 38 °C or 100.4 °F) that is not getting better
- › Trouble breathing after 3 days of treatment

## **How is pneumonia diagnosed?**

- Your primary health care provider will use a stethoscope to listen to your lungs. They will check for signs of pneumonia.
- You may also have 1 or more of these tests:
  - › Blood work
  - › Chest X-ray
  - › Pulse oximetry (measures the amount of oxygen in your blood)
  - › Sputum (spit) test (to see what is causing the infection)
  - › CT scan
  - › Pleural fluid culture (fluid from your lung area will be checked)

## How is pneumonia treated?

Pneumonia is treated by curing the infection and preventing complications. Treatment may include:

- Fever and/or pain medication (as needed)
- Prescribed antibiotic medication (medication to treat an infection)
  - › **Take all of your antibiotic medication, even if you start to feel better.**

Medications prescribed:

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Keep taking your usual medications:

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**Take all of your medication as prescribed.**

- Oxygen (if needed)
  - › Severe (very bad) pneumonia can make it hard to breathe.

## To help you recover faster:

- Rest as much as you can.
- Drink lots of fluids (if you are not on a fluid restricted diet).
- Turn often while you are lying down, and take 5 or 10 deep breaths, then cough 1 or 2 times.  
**Do this every hour while you are awake.**
- Throw away used tissues after using them and wash your hands well. Cover your mouth and nose when coughing.
- **Do not** smoke or vape.

- **Make a follow-up appointment with your primary health care provider within 5 to 7 days.** You may need an X-ray after 6 weeks to check your lungs.

**Call your primary health care provider or go to the nearest Emergency Department right away if you have any of these symptoms:**

- › Coughing up blood
- › Chest pain that is getting worse
- › Fever (temperature above 38 °C or 100.4 °F) for more than 3 to 5 days
- › More trouble breathing for longer than 5 days, even with treatment
- › You do not feel better in 5 days

## **How can I prevent pneumonia?**

- Get a flu (influenza) vaccine every year. The flu can lead to pneumonia.
- Get a pneumococcal vaccine if you are:
  - › 65 years old or older
  - › 19 years old or older and have a weak immune system
- Keep your immune system strong.
  - › Rest as much as you can.
  - › Drink lots of fluids (if you are not on a fluid restricted diet).
  - › Eat healthy foods.
  - › Exercise regularly.

- Stop the spread of pneumonia by:
  - › throwing away used tissues after using them.
  - › washing your hands well.
  - › covering your mouth and nose when coughing.
- Avoid people who are sick.
- **Do not** smoke or vape.

This pamphlet is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider. The information may not apply to all situations. If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

Find all patient education resources here:  
[www.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources](http://www.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources)

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time:  
Call 811 or visit: <https://811.novascotia.ca>

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