Pneumonia

Pneumonia (new-MOAN-ya) is a lung infection. It is usually caused by a virus but sometimes it’s caused by bacteria.

When a baby or child gets pneumonia from bacteria, it often happens after a normal cold. The cold may weaken the body’s immune system and let bacteria get in the lungs. Children, especially babies, can also get pneumonia by breathing in their food or vomit.

What are the symptoms of pneumonia?

Children with pneumonia may have some of these symptoms:

- Fast breathing
- A cough that won’t go away
- Coughing up mucus
- Vomiting
- Belly pain
- No interest in eating or eats poorly
- Bluish or gray fingernails, lips, or tongue (due to lack of oxygen in the blood)
- Fever
- Chills and sweating
- Body aches
- Trouble breathing
- Chest pain
- Restlessness (younger children may be fussy)
- Unusually fast breathing with a grunting, wheezing, or crackling sound
- Widening nostrils or sucking under the ribs (in babies)

How is pneumonia diagnosed?

Healthcare providers may need to do chest x-rays or test your child’s blood to diagnose pneumonia. They will also listen to your child’s breathing and do a physical exam.

How is pneumonia treated?

Pneumonia caused by bacteria can be treated with antibiotics. If the pneumonia is caused by a virus, antibiotics do not help. Sometimes, after a virus, your child can get pneumonia caused by bacteria. If this happens, the bacteria can be treated with antibiotics.

Give your child all of the antibiotics on schedule. Even if your child looks and feels better after a few days, the bacteria can come back if they don’t take all of the antibiotics. Sometimes children need antibiotics for a longer time to make sure their infection is gone.
Your child may need to stay in the hospital if they have:

- Whooping cough
- Low oxygen levels
- Difficulty taking medicine by mouth
- A chronic (long-lasting) illness that affects their immune system

How can I help my child?

- Help your child drink plenty of fluids, especially if they have a fever.
- Ask your child’s healthcare provider before using any cough syrups or cough drops. They may not be helpful because your child needs to cough up the mucus in their chest.
- Keep your child away from smoke and keep them inside if outside air is full of dust or smoke.

How do I prevent pneumonia?

- Wash your hands and your child’s hands often with soap and water.
- Keep your child away from sick people, especially those with a cough or the flu.
- Do not let your children share utensils or drinking cups.
- Make sure your child is vaccinated.
- Have your child (older than six months) get a flu shot every year.

Call your child’s healthcare provider if your child:

- Shows any signs of pneumonia
- Has trouble breathing or is breathing very fast
- Has bluish or gray lips or fingernails
- Still has a fever or looks very ill after taking antibiotics for 24–48 hours
- Has red, swollen joints, a stiff neck, bone pain, or chest pain
- Vomits
- Can not drinking fluids well or take their antibiotics

Notes