

Health Tips About Influenza and Pneumonia



Who gets the flu and pneumonia?

Flu: Anyone can get the flu, but it is most serious in the elderly; people with chronic illnesses such as cancer, emphysema and diabetes; those with weakened immune systems; and children ages 6–23 months.

Pneumonia: You are more likely to develop pneumonia if you smoke; have a chronic medical

condition such as heart or lung disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), or asthma; are younger than one or older than 65; or have an impaired immune system.

When do flu and pneumonia occur?

Flu: The flu occurs most often in the winter months. Illnesses resembling the flu may occur in summer months, but they are usually due to other viruses.

Pneumonia: Pneumonia can strike anyone at any time of the year.

When should I get shots?

Flu: You should get a flu shot every year between September and December.

Pneumonia: A one-time pneumonia shot is recommended for everyone over age 65 and for people younger than 65 with a chronic condition, such as heart or lung disease, diabetes or sickle cell disease. In some cases, a second pneumonia shot is necessary.

A flu shot each fall can help prevent both the flu and pneumonia. Pneumonia is a complication of the flu and other respiratory tract infections.

How are they spread?

Flu: Flu is highly contagious and is easily transmitted through contact with droplets spread from the nose and throat of an infected person during coughing and sneezing. The contagious period varies, but probably begins the day before symptoms appear and extends for a week.

Pneumonia: It's unusual to contract pneumonia from someone else. You will usually develop pneumonia because your immunity is weakened, not because of exposure to germs. Pneumonia generally starts from the flu, a cold virus or other respiratory tract infections.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Flu: The incubation period for flu is one to five days.

Pneumonia: After you've been infected with a pneumonia-causing organism, it takes as little as one to three days or as long as seven to 10 days for symptoms to appear.

How are they diagnosed?

Flu: Usually, a doctor will diagnose a case of the flu based on typical symptoms of fever, chills, headache, cough and body aches. Specific lab tests to confirm the flu are costly and time-consuming and are usually limited to outbreak or disease surveillance.

Pneumonia: You must see your doctor to guarantee appropriate treatment and successful recovery. Your doctor will first listen to your chest for crackling noises and tap your chest to check for dull thuds indicating fluid-filled lungs. If necessary, an X-ray can help confirm if you have pneumonia.

What is the right treatment?

Flu: Rest and plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration are usually adequate. Consult your physician for over-the-counter medications that may help with symptom relief. Antibiotics are not an appropriate treatment for the flu. The flu is caused by a virus, not bacteria, and antibiotics are used for treating bacterial infections.

Pneumonia: Antibiotics (usually five to 14 days, maybe longer if you have an impaired immune system), rest, and plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration. Consult your physician for over-the-counter medications that may help with fever. Be sure to contact your physician if you do not feel better or if you develop a worsening cough, shortness of breath, or feel weak or faint when you stand up.

What's best for prevention?

Flu: An annual flu shot, usually given each fall between September and December, is the best defense against getting the flu and complications related to the flu. It is also important to avoid close contact with people who are sick. Stay home when you're sick, cover your nose and mouth when you sneeze or cough, and wash your hands often with soap and warm water or use alcohol-based wipes or gel sanitizer.

Pneumonia: A one-time pneumonia shot is recommended for everyone over age 65 and for people younger than 65 with a chronic condition, such as heart or lung disease, diabetes or sickle cell disease. In some cases, a second pneumonia shot is necessary. Getting an annual flu shot can also help prevent pneumonia because the flu and other respiratory tract infections can lead to pneumonia.

*Source: <http://www.cdc.gov/nip/recs/adult-schedule.pdf>

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