

PNEUMONIA

- Pneumonia is infection within the lung tissue
- There are a number of different types of pneumonia, this section deals only with 'community-acquired pneumonia', the most common form
- Pneumonia is very common, and may be a serious illness, even resulting in death
- Young or previously healthy people with pneumonia generally improve relatively quickly with treatment
- Elderly people or people with other medical conditions may become very ill with pneumonia, and there is even a significant risk of dying
- Cigarette smoking increases the risk of developing pneumonia

What causes pneumonia?

- Community-acquired pneumonia is caused by infection with any of a number of bacteria or 'germs'
- There are a few 'germs' that most commonly cause this infection, particularly '*streptococcus pneumoniae*' ('pneumococcus')
- Viruses can occasionally cause pneumonia also

How is pneumonia contracted?

- Pneumonia generally results from organisms within the mouth and nose overcoming the normal defence mechanisms within the lungs and causing infection
 - viral infections and cigarette smoking both allow these defence mechanisms to be overcome
- The organisms that most commonly cause 'community-acquired pneumonia' can be passed from one person to another, but do not generally result in pneumonia
- Occasionally, pneumonia can result from direct transmission from another person
- Other specific lung infections such as tuberculosis ('TB') and influenza virus (the 'flu') certainly are contagious

Can pneumonia be prevented?

- In most cases there is little that can be done to prevent pneumonia
- Cigarette smoking increases the risk of developing pneumonia and therefore smoking cessation will reduce this risk
- Illnesses or situations that suppress the immune system can certainly increase the risk of pneumonia, such as old age and other medical conditions, diabetes, cancer, alcohol abuse, and other infections – so control of these situations will reduce the risk of developing pneumonia
- There is a vaccine for the most common cause of pneumonia, 'pneumococcus', which should be administered every 5 years to patients with lung diseases or risk factors for the development of pneumonia (including people over 65 years of age) – this vaccine does not appear to reduce the chance of developing pneumonia but does reduce the chance of this infection causing the most severe and life-threatening complications of this infection such as 'septicaemia'
- Vaccination with the influenza vaccine or fluvax also reduces the chance of dying from lung conditions including pneumonia, and all patients with lung disease or over the age of 65 years should receive a yearly fluvax

How is pneumonia treated?

- Antibiotics are used to treat pneumonia
- In many cases, pneumonia can be safely treated without admission to hospital, particularly in young people with mild pneumonia
- It may be necessary to be admitted to hospital, particularly in older people, those with other medical conditions, or those with features of more severe pneumonia