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Health Department

fastFACTS

about Sedgwick County Government

Pneumonia

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What is pneumonia?

Pneumonia is an infection of one or both lungs which is usually caused by bacteria, viruses, or fungi. Pneumonia is the sixth leading cause of death in the United States.

What are the symptoms of pneumonia?

Most people who develop pneumonia initially have symptoms of a cold which is followed by a high fever, shaking, chills, and a cough with sputum production. The sputum is usually discolored and sometimes bloody. People with pneumonia may become short of breath. Chest pain may develop and is usually sharp and worsens when taking a deep breath. Children and babies who develop pneumonia often do not have signs of a chest infection but develop a fever, rapid breathing, appear quite ill, and can become sluggish. Elderly people may also have few symptoms with pneumonia.

How do you get pneumonia?

Some cases of pneumonia can be spread by breathing in small droplets that contain the organisms that cause pneumonia. These droplets get into the air when a person infected with these germs coughs or sneezes. In other cases, pneumonia is caused when bacteria and viruses that are normally present in the mouth, throat, or nose inadvertently enter the lung. During sleep, it is quite common for people to breathe in secretions from the mouth, throat, or nose. Normally, the body's reflex response (coughing back up the secretions) and immune system will prevent the organisms from causing pneumonia. However, if a person is in a weakened condition from another illness, severe pneumonia can develop.

Can pneumonia be prevented?

Getting vaccinated is the best way to protect against bacterial pneumonia. There are several vaccines that prevent infection by bacteria that cause pneumonia.

These vaccines include Pneumococcal and Haemophilus influenza type b (Hib).

Pneumonia can also be prevented by following good hygiene practices which help prevent respiratory infections. You can also reduce your risk of getting pneumonia by limiting exposure to cigarette smoke and treating conditions like diabetes.

Who is at risk for pneumonia?

Anyone can get pneumonia but some groups are at particularly high risk. These groups include:

- Persons age 65 and older;
- Persons over two years of age who are taking any treatments that weaken the body's immune system;
- Residents of chronic or long-term care facilities;
- Persons with weakened immune systems due to medical conditions including:
 - * Cancer
 - * Hodgkin's disease
 - * Sickle cell disease
 - * Kidney disorders
 - * Lung disease
 - * Heart Disease
 - * Diabetes
 - * HIV/AIDs
 - * Alcoholism

How is pneumonia treated?

Your doctor may prescribe antibiotics. Pneumonia caused by a virus usually cannot be treated with antibiotics. Home treatment, such as rest and taking care of your cough, is the only treatment.

For More Information:

Contact the Sedgwick County
Health Department Epidemiology Office at
316-660-7392 or visit the Sedgwick County website at
www.sedgwickcounty.org.