NICE National Institute for
Health and Care Excellence

Pneumonia (community-acquired): antimicrobial prescribing

Information for the public
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Pneumonia: do I need antibiotics?

Pneumonia is a type of chest infection, which can be serious. Symptoms include a cough, bringing up phlegm (mucus), fever, difficulty breathing and chest pain. If you develop pneumonia and you are not in hospital it is called community-acquired pneumonia. This advice is about community-acquired pneumonia.

Using antibiotics when they are not needed means they may not work as well in the future. This is a serious health risk so NICE has written advice about when to offer antibiotics for some common conditions.

Because pneumonia is usually caused by bacteria and can be serious, you should be offered antibiotics.

You should be started on antibiotics as soon as possible, and definitely within 4 hours of being diagnosed.

Your doctor should explain that antibiotics can cause side effects, such as diarrhoea and nausea (feeling sick).

Your symptoms should start to improve within a few days of starting antibiotics. You should see your doctor if you don't start to feel better 3 days after you start antibiotics, if your symptoms suddenly get worse at any time or you feel extremely unwell. They may refer you to hospital if you have signs of a serious illness. Pneumonia can take a few weeks to clear up, depending on how bad your symptoms are.

Where can I find out more?

Decisions about treatment and care are best when they are made together. Your health professionals should give you clear information, talk with you about your options and listen carefully to your views and concerns.

The NHS website has more information about:

- pneumonia and
- antibiotics.

We have also written information on why antibiotics should be used wisely.

We wrote this guideline with health professionals and members of the public. All the recommendations are based on the best research available.

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