



Health & Safety Alert #35-8-06

Pneumonia

Pneumonia is the second leading cause of death and unplanned hospitalizations. It is an inflammation of the lung tissue and can be caused by infection or aspiration.

The purpose of this Alert is to identify factors and conditions that may increase the risk, signs and symptoms that would indicate the need to contact a physician, and ways to help prevent pneumonia.

It is suggested that county boards and providers assess individuals that have a high risk and develop a plan to help mitigate the risk. All persons that support the individual should be aware of the signs and symptoms as well as the plan.

Factors and conditions that may increase the risk of contracting pneumonia:

- Age: elderly and young.
- Smoking.
- Recent illness: upper respiratory infection, influenza, viral illnesses.
- Chronic Lung Conditions: Asthma, emphysema, cystic fibrosis, chronic bronchitis.
- Aspiration secondary to: difficulty swallowing, gastro esophageal reflux disease, tube feeding, seizure disorder, cerebral palsy, suppressed or absent cough or sneeze reflex.
- Immune system altered or weakened, alcoholism cirrhosis, spleen removed or not functioning, certain cancers and cancer treatments, HIV infection, malnourished, certain medications (e.g., steroids).
- Hospitalization, sedentary lifestyle, intravenous drug abusers.

Signs and Symptoms of Pneumonia that Indicate the Need to see a Physician

- Sudden onset of cough productive of discolored phlegm (bloody or containing pus colored yellow, green or brown/rust).
- Shaking chill(s) and/or high fever (usually >102.5 degrees F).
- Chest pain, especially sharp pain under the ribs.
- Pulse (heart) rate increase, Respiratory (breathing) rate increase.
- Breathlessness or atypical agitation, restlessness.
- Mental confusion, abdominal pain.
- Blueness to skin, lips, nails (not enough oxygen getting to the tissues).
- Worsening cough: a dry cough that becomes wet, productive of phlegm; elderly with minor cough for more than a few days.
- Symptoms of an upper respiratory infection that do not resolve or steadily worsen.

Prevention of Pneumonia

- Vaccinations: Influenza vaccine, pneumococcal vaccine. Individuals should discuss with their physician if the influenza and pneumococcal vaccine is appropriate for them.
- Exercise: active, passive exercise for those with limited mobility.
- Positioning: elevation of head and trunk, during and for at least 30 minutes after eating.
- Swallowing evaluation if signs of possible swallowing problems.
- Stop smoking.
- Proper diet.
- Always use universal precautions to avoid carrying bacteria and viruses from sick to healthy individuals.

For questions or comments regarding the above Alert, please contact the MUI/Registry Unit at (614) 995-3810.

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