



Island County Public Health

Communicable Disease Program

Mycoplasma pneumoniae

You are being provided with this fact sheet:

☐ **because you or your child may have been exposed to *M. pneumoniae*.** If you believe your child has pneumonia, contact your healthcare provider. Notify your childcare provider or school if an infection caused by *M. pneumoniae* is confirmed or diagnosis of pneumonia is made.

☐ **for informational purposes only.**

What is *M. pneumoniae*?

Mycoplasma pneumoniae (*M. pneumoniae*) is a type of bacteria that can cause several different types of infection including chest colds and pneumonia (lung infection). It can also cause a type of lung infection known as "walking pneumonia." Walking pneumonia gets its name because people usually feel well enough to get out of bed and do some of their activities. Other types of pneumonia usually cause more severe symptoms.

Who can get *M. pneumoniae*?

People of all ages are at risk of *M. pneumoniae* infection, but it is most common among young adults and school-aged children. People living or working in crowded settings, such as schools, residence halls, and long-term care facilities, are also at increased risk. People with weakened immune systems or those who are recovering from a respiratory illness are at increased risk for getting a more serious illness from this infection.

What are the symptoms of *M. pneumoniae*?

M. pneumoniae causes illness by damaging the lining of the respiratory system (throat, windpipe, and lungs). Once someone becomes infected with the bacteria, symptoms usually appear after one to four weeks. The most common type of infection is tracheobronchitis, commonly known as a chest cold.

Symptoms of a chest cold often include:

- Sore throat
- Fatigue (being tired)
- Fever
- Headache
- Slowly worsening cough that can last for weeks or months

Children younger than 5 years old who get *M. pneumoniae* infection could have different, cold-like symptoms:

- Sneezing
- Stuffy or runny nose
- Sore throat
- Watery eyes
- Wheezing
- Vomiting or diarrhea

How is *M. pneumoniae* spread?

When someone infected with *M. pneumoniae* coughs or sneezes, they create small respiratory droplets that contain the bacteria. Other people can get infected if they breathe in those droplets. Most people who are exposed for a short amount of time do not get sick. However, it is common for these bacteria to spread between people who live together. If you are sick, be sure to cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze to help prevent spreading the bacteria to others.

How is *M. pneumoniae* treated?

Most cases of *M. pneumoniae* infection are mild and get better on their own without treatment. Antibiotics are used to treat more serious infections.

How can people protect themselves against *M. pneumoniae*?

There is no vaccine to prevent *M. pneumoniae* infections. Practicing good respiratory hygiene is a core prevention strategy to lower the risk from *M. pneumoniae* and other respiratory illnesses.

- Wash your hands often with soap and water, scrubbing your hands for at least 20 seconds.
- Disinfect frequently touched surfaces.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.

In addition, effectively managing chronic conditions, such as diabetes or heart disease, can help keep your immune system strong and prevent infections.

Adapted from materials developed by CDC and Illinois State Department of Health.

References

- CDC. *Mycoplasma pneumoniae* infection. <https://www.cdc.gov/mycoplasma/>. Accessed December 27, 2024.
- Illinois Department of Health. Health Alert: *Mycoplasma pneumoniae* outbreak, Illinois 2024. https://illinoisaaap.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/20241017_Mycoplasma_Pneumoniae_Health.pdf. Accessed December 27, 2024.

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