

Mycoplasma pneumoniae Infection

Mycoplasma pneumoniae is a type of bacteria that can cause several different types of infection including chest colds and pneumonia (lung infection). To best protect yourself and others from this bacteria, practice good hygiene by washing your hands often and covering your mouth when you cough or sneeze.

Signs and Symptoms of Infection

M. pneumoniae causes illness by damaging the lining of the respiratory system (nose, throat, windpipe, and lungs). *M. pneumoniae* infections have long incubation periods (the time between first catching the bacteria and developing symptoms). Symptoms appear and worsen after a period of 1 to 4 weeks. The most common type of illness is tracheobronchitis, commonly known as a chest cold. Symptoms of a chest cold often include:

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

Children younger than 5 years old often do not have a fever, but may wheeze, vomit, or have diarrhea.

M. pneumoniae can sometimes cause mild pneumonia, often referred to as “walking pneumonia” since the illness usually does not require treatment in a hospital. Less often *M. pneumoniae* causes more serious pneumonia, which does need treatment in a hospital. Symptoms of pneumonia caused by *M. pneumoniae* include fatigue, fever, pain when breathing, and a dry cough that produces little mucus.

M. pneumoniae can rarely cause swelling in the brain (encephalitis). Symptoms of encephalitis typically include fever and severe headache, but can also include confusion, seizures (jerking or twitching of the muscles or staring), or problems with movement.

Certain People Are at Increased Risk

People of all ages are at risk for getting *M. pneumoniae* infection, but it is most common among young adults and school-aged children. *M. pneumoniae* infections

most often spread among families who live in the same household as well as people who work or live in crowded settings, such as schools, nursing homes, and hospitals. People with weakened immune systems, those who have asthma, or those who are recovering from a respiratory illness are at increased risk for getting a more serious illness from this infection.

Spreads from Person to Person

M. pneumoniae is spread when a person who is sick coughs or sneezes while in close contact with others who then breathe in the bacteria. Most people who are exposed for a short amount of time do not get sick. However, it is common for this illness to spread between family members 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.

Treatment for Infection

Most cases of *M. pneumoniae* infection are mild and get better on their own without treatment. Antibiotics (medicines that kill bacteria in the body) are used to treat more serious infections, like pneumonia.



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