

PNEUMONIA: PREVENTING RE-INFECTION

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In the hospital, safety precautions will be taken to prevent the spread of your pneumonia to those who take care of you – other patients and your visitors. These methods also protect you from becoming worse or re-infected once you're recovering.

Depending on the severity and contagiousness of your pneumonia, hospital precautions may include: frequent hand washing, or the use of sanitary hand gel by the hospital staff and you, the use of gowns and clean gloves, masks for caregivers and you to wear, and sometimes, isolation during recovery.

Don't be surprised if hospital workers take these precautions when assisting you. They're taken to protect everyone's safety, and depending on your specific condition, may be hospital policy.

If you are able to have visitors, ask the hospital staff what safety precautions guests need to follow. Both in the hospital, and once you return home, don't be shy about asking people to stay away if they have a cold or other illness or asking people to wash their hands before they touch you.

During your recovery and after, you'll continue be at a high risk of developing lung infections, including pneumonia. To prevent the spread of infections, wash your hands frequently with soap and water after touching public objects like keyboards, doorknobs and handrails; handling disposable tissues after coughing or sneezing into them; before meals and after using the restroom. And use hand sanitizer if soap and water are unavailable.

Since you are at a higher risk of becoming re-infected, you need to know the warning signs and symptoms of another lung infection.

"I'm having trouble breathing."

The signs of re-infection are similar to those you may have experienced when you first became ill. If you have any of these symptoms, call your healthcare provider immediately: a fever; feeling tired or fatigued; muscle aches; coughing that expels mucus; an increase in the amount of mucus you may cough up, or a change in its color or thickness; shortness of breath; and painful breathing.

You may experience an increased heart rate, loss of appetite, confusion and vomiting.

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Symptoms may be a bit different for those over 65 and those who suffer from lung, or heart, disease or other chronic conditions. These symptoms include a minor cough that won't go away, confusion or fatigue.

Call your healthcare provider as soon as you recognize any of these recurring symptoms. This can help you begin to get proper treatment as soon as possible.

Preventing and recognizing the spread of pneumonia is everyone's concern. Take proper precautions against re-infection and recognize the signs of re-infection yourself.