

Pneumonia: Diagnosis and Treatment for Special Populations

With every breath you take, your lungs pull air and oxygen into your body. When you breathe out, the lungs push carbon dioxide out of your body.

Oxygen-rich air travels through the bronchial tubes and into even smaller tubes called bronchioles.

At the end of each bronchiole are tiny air sacs called alveoli. Each alveoli is wrapped in tiny blood vessels.

When you have pneumonia, the alveoli are infected.

They fill with fluid and mucus. So your lungs have to work harder; and breathing becomes more difficult.

To diagnose pneumonia, your doctor will examine you. You may get a chest x-ray, blood tests and other tests.

To discover any complications caused by pneumonia, you may have a bronchoscopy. A lung biopsy may sometimes be done as well.

Bronchoscopy is a procedure that lets a doctor look inside your airways with a long, thin tool with a camera on it.

A lung biopsy removes a small piece of lung tissue that can be looked at under a microscope.

If you are diagnosed with pneumonia, how it is treated depends on the type and severity.

For many people, medicines, rest, fluids, and home care are all that is needed.

However, you may develop complications.

Your lungs are protected and cushioned by two thin layers of tissue called the pleura. The very thin space between the 2 layers is called the pleural space.

A liquid, called pleural fluid, is in that space.

Sometimes pneumonia can cause the fluid to build up. This is called a pleural effusion.

If the pleural effusion gets infected, pus forms in the pleural fluid. This is called pleural empyema.

People with these types of complications from pneumonia may need a procedure to help drain fluids from the lungs, such as thoracentesis or inserting chest tubes.

Thoracentesis removes fluid with a long, thin needle or a thin plastic tube, called a catheter, between two of your ribs. The doctor will use the needle or catheter to take fluid out.

A chest tube is a hollow plastic tube. Your doctor puts the tube into the space around your lungs to drain away fluid, blood, or air.

Being tested and treated for pneumonia complications can be stressful. Healing and recovery will take time.

If you have any questions, you can always contact your doctor.