

Education

Anaerobic Pneumonia

What is anaerobic pneumonia?

Anaerobic pneumonia is an infection and inflammation of the lungs caused by bacteria.

The infection is usually not contagious.

How does it occur?

The bacteria that cause this disease are a type called anaerobic bacteria. These bacteria live best in places that have little or no oxygen, such as the mouth and intestine. They can enter your lungs if you breathe food, saliva, or vomit into your lungs.

Anaerobic pneumonia often occurs in people who:

- have mouth and gum disease
- have been unconscious
- have swallowing disorders.

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms of anaerobic pneumonia are:

- fever
- feeling short of breath
- cough that brings up sputum from the lungs
- bad-smelling sputum
- weight loss.

How is it diagnosed?

Your health care provider will review your symptoms and examine you. You will probably have these tests:

- blood tests
- lab tests of a sputum sample (a sample of mucus, also called phlegm, coughed up from deep in your lungs)
- chest x-ray.

Sometimes it is necessary to get a sample of fluid from deep in the lungs for lab tests. The two main ways of doing this are:

- Thoracentesis. After numbing the area, your health care provider inserts a needle through a space between your ribs and draws out some fluid.
- Bronchoscopy. Your provider passes a bronchoscope down your throat and into the airways leading to the lungs. A bronchoscope is a thin tube with a tiny camera. Your provider can then look at your airways and get a sample of fluid or tissue from your lungs. You will be given an anesthetic or other pain medicine before the procedure.

How is it treated?

Anaerobic pneumonia is usually treated with intravenous (IV) antibiotics. Once you start to get better, your health care provider may have you take oral medicine instead. This type of pneumonia often needs several weeks of treatment with an

antibiotic.

If your chest x-ray shows a lot of fluid or pus in your lungs, you may need to have a drainage tube inserted through your chest wall. The tube drains infected material from your lungs. The tube will be removed when the drainage stops and your chest x-ray shows improvement.

How long will the effects last?

With treatment, you may recover in 1 to 4 weeks. If you are over 60 years old or have other medical problems, it may take longer to feel normal.

How can I take care of myself?

- Finish the full course of the antibiotic treatment prescribed by your health care provider.
- Rest until you no longer have a fever, chest pain, or shortness of breath.
- Drink more liquids (water, tea, or fruit juice) every day to help you cough up mucus more easily.
- Cough up lung secretions as much as possible. Use cough medicine only if your provider recommends it.
- Use a humidifier to increase air moisture. Avoid steam vaporizers because they can cause burns.
- Ask your provider about taking aspirin, ibuprofen, or acetaminophen for fever or chest pain.
- Use a heating pad on a low setting to reduce chest pain. Be careful not to fall asleep while you are using the heating pad.
- Call your health care provider if you feel you are getting worse or if you are not getting better in 2 to 3 days.

How can I help prevent anaerobic pneumonia?

There is no known way to prevent anaerobic pneumonia.

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Respiratory System

