

Mycoplasma pneumoniae infection

Fact sheet

Mycoplasma pneumoniae infection can cause pneumonia (lung infection). Anyone can get infected, but it is most common in school-aged children and young adults. Infections are usually mild, and most people recover without medicine. However, some people can get sick enough to need antibiotics and to go to hospital. There is no vaccine for *Mycoplasma pneumoniae*.

What is *Mycoplasma pneumoniae*?

Mycoplasma pneumoniae (mycoplasma) is a bacterium. It can cause respiratory (chest) infections. In some cases it can lead to severe pneumonia (lung infection) needing admission to hospital.

Mycoplasma infection is most common in school-aged children and young adults but can occur in people of any age.

Mycoplasma infection occurs throughout the year. However, every 3 to 7 years there are increases in the number of people infected.

What are the symptoms of *Mycoplasma pneumoniae* infection?

Mycoplasma affects the respiratory tract (throat, windpipe, and lungs). Infections are generally mild, and it is sometimes called “walking pneumonia”. However, occasionally infections can be severe and need antibiotics.

Symptoms usually appear from 1 to 4 weeks after the person is infected with the bacteria. Symptoms may last for several weeks. Mild infections can be managed safely at home without medicine.

Symptoms of infection may include:

- sore throat
- dry cough (that may last for weeks or months)
- headache
- fever
- feeling tired
- shortness of breath.

Children younger than 5 years of age may have different symptoms to older children and adults. These symptoms may include:

- sneezing
- a stuffy or runny nose

- watery eyes
- wheezing
- vomiting
- diarrhoea.

How is *Mycoplasma pneumoniae* spread?

Mycoplasma is spread by droplets when infected people cough or sneeze. Other people can become infected if they breathe in these droplets. It can also be spread by touching a surface or object that the droplets have landed on.

Most people who spend a short amount of time with someone who is sick from *mycoplasma* do not get infected.

Someone can be infected with *mycoplasma* and show no symptoms, but still be able to spread it to others. People with *mycoplasma* can be infectious for about 20 days.

How is *Mycoplasma pneumoniae* infection diagnosed?

Mycoplasma infection is diagnosed by a nose and throat swab. Sometimes a doctor may also do a blood test or a chest x-ray to check for lung infection (pneumonia).

Who is at higher risk of *Mycoplasma pneumoniae* infection?

Mycoplasma can affect anyone. However, infections are most common in school-aged children and young adults. If you live in the same house as someone with *mycoplasma* infection you are at higher risk of getting infected.

Infection with *mycoplasma* is usually mild but can be serious for people who:

- are recovering from another respiratory viral illness
- already have lung disease
- have a weakened immune system.

Living and working in a crowded setting can increase the risk of getting *mycoplasma* infection. Crowded settings include schools, colleges, and dormitory facilities.

How do I protect myself and others?

There is no vaccine for *mycoplasma*. People can be infected more than once.

The best way to protect yourself from infection is to practice good hand hygiene with regular handwashing, and to gather outdoors or in well-ventilated indoor spaces.

If you have any symptoms, you should:

- stay at home. If you do need to leave home when you are sick, wear a mask
- cover your coughs and sneezes and practice good hygiene, including regular handwashing.
- not visit high risk settings (such as hospitals or aged care facilities) or visit people at higher risk of severe illness. This includes babies, infants, older people and people who have a weakened immune system.

How can I manage *Mycoplasma pneumoniae* infection safely?

Stay at home

You can manage your symptoms safely at home without any treatment if you have a mild infection. Your doctor or pharmacist can recommend over-the-counter medicines to help you recover. Sometimes your doctor may recommend antibiotics.

Monitor symptoms and get help immediately as needed

If you are worried that you or your child's symptoms are getting worse, call:

- your doctor or
- healthdirect on 1800 022 222 (a free 24-hour service to talk to a registered nurse) or
- Triple Zero (000) or go to an emergency department if it is life-threatening. Life-threatening examples include chest pressure or pain lasting more than 10 minutes, difficulty breathing or sudden collapse.