

# Viral Pneumonia

## What is viral pneumonia?

Viral pneumonia is an infection of the lung by a virus that causes fluid to collect in the air sacs (alveoli).

## Symptoms include:

- > Having to work hard with breathing (laboured breathing)
- > Fast breathing
- > Coughing
- > Fever.

Most rattly breathing is not pneumonia. However, your child needs to see a doctor to check if he or she has pneumonia.

## What is the cause?

About 80% of pneumonia cases are caused by viruses. Viral pneumonia is usually milder than bacterial pneumonia.

It is usually a complication of a cold.

## How long does it last?

Viral pneumonia can continue for 2 to 4 weeks.

Recovery from viral pneumonia is gradual but complete.

## How is it treated?

Viral pneumonia does not require antibiotics for its treatment. Because it's difficult to work out if it bacterial or viral pneumonia in all cases, sometimes antibiotics are given to children who have viral pneumonia.

Most children with pneumonia can be cared for at home. Admission to the hospital for oxygen or intravenous (IV) fluids is needed in less than 10% of cases.

Most children admitted to the hospital are young infants or children who have widespread involvement of the lungs (as shown by an x-ray).

## Medicines for fever

Fever does not always need to be treated. It is the body's natural response to infection and helps to fight the infection.

If however, your child is miserable and unwell with a fever over 38.5°C, you may use paracetamol (eg Pandadol) or ibuprofen (eg Nurofen) Paracetamol can be given every 4 to 6 hours, or ibuprofen every 6 to 8 hours. Do not give both.

## Cough

Coughing spasms are often caused by sticky mucus (secretions) in the back of the throat. Warm liquids usually relax the airway and loosen the secretions. Encourage your child to have a lot to drink.

Dry air tends to make coughs worse. Breathing warm moist air helps to loosen up sticky mucus. This can be done by placing a warm wet cloth loosely over your child's nose and mouth. You can use a humidifier in your child's bedroom. Avoid steam vaporizers because they can cause burns.

Don't give medicines to stop the cough (cough suppressant medicines) to children with pneumonia. They need to be able to cough the mucus up.

## No smoking

Smoke makes coughs worse and last longer.



### **When should you see a doctor?**

- > If your child is having to work harder with breathing.
- > If your child is not able to drink well
- > If your child becomes more unwell
- > You have other questions or concerns.

### **For more information**

#### **Paediatric Emergency Department**

Women's and Children's Hospital  
72 King William Road  
North Adelaide SA 5006  
Tel 08 8161 7044  
Fax 08 8161 6750  
<http://www.wch.sa.gov.au>

Reviewed September 2011

© Department of Health, Government of South Australia. All rights reserved.



**Government  
of South Australia**

SA Health



**Women's  
& Children's  
Hospital**