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## Walking Pneumonia

During the school year, it can seem like kids pick up one bug after another. One week it's a runny nose, the next a sore throat, or both. Most of the time, these bugs only last for about a week. But those that linger on for longer can sometimes turn into **walking pneumonia**.

Walking pneumonia, or atypical pneumonia, is a less serious form of the lung infection pneumonia. It's caused by *Mycoplasma* bacteria, which cause cold-like symptoms in addition to a low-grade fever and a hacking cough.

Most kids with this form of pneumonia will not feel sick enough to stay at home — hence, the name "walking" pneumonia — and usually will feel well enough to go to school. But even a child who feels fine needs to stay at home for a few days until antibiotic treatment kicks in and symptoms improve.

### Signs and Symptoms

Colds that last longer than 7 to 10 days or respiratory illnesses like respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) can develop into walking pneumonia. Symptoms can come on suddenly or take longer to appear. Those that have a slow onset tend to be more severe.

Here's what to look for:

- low-grade fever of 101° F (38.5° C) or below
  - headache, chills, sore throat, and other cold or flu-like symptoms
  - rapid breathing or breathing with grunting or wheezing sounds
  - labored breathing that makes the rib muscles retract (when muscles under the ribcage or between ribs draw inward with each breath)
  - hacking cough
  - chest pain or stomach pain
  - malaise
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vomiting

loss of appetite (in older kids) or poor feeding (in infants)

Symptoms usually depend on where in the body the infection is concentrated. A child whose infection is in the top or middle part of the lungs will probably have labored breathing. Another whose infection is concentrated in the lower part of the lungs (near the abdomen) may not have breathing problems at all, but may have an upset stomach, nausea, or vomiting.

## **Diagnosis**

Walking pneumonia is usually diagnosed through a physical examination. The doctor will monitor your child's breathing and listen for a hallmark crackling sound that often indicates walking pneumonia.

If pneumonia is suspected, a chest X-ray, blood test, or bacterial culture of mucus from the throat or nose also might be done to confirm the diagnosis.

## **Treatment**

Antibiotics are an effective treatment for walking pneumonia. A 7- to 10-day course of oral antibiotics is usually recommended. If your doctor prescribes antibiotics, make sure your child takes them on schedule for as long as directed to recover more quickly.

Once on antibiotics, your child has a minimal risk of passing the illness on to other family members, but encourage everyone in your household to wash their hands frequently and correctly (for at least 20 seconds, rubbing hands together with soap and warm water).

Don't let your child share drinking glasses, eating utensils, towels, or toothbrushes, and remind him or her — and everyone else — to wash their hands after touching any used tissues. Also make sure that your kids are up to date on their immunizations to help protect them from future infections.

## **Home Health**

While recovering from walking pneumonia, your child should drink fluids throughout the day to flush the system and rid the body of toxins (especially if he or she has a fever). Ask the doctor before you use a medicine to treat a cough because cough suppressants stop the lungs from clearing mucus, which may not always be helpful for lung infections like walking pneumonia.

If your child has chest pain, try a heating pad or warm compress on the chest area. Take your child's temperature at least once each morning and each evening, and call the doctor if it goes above 102° F

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(38.9° C) in an older infant or child, or above 100.4° F (38° C) in an infant under 6 months of age.

With treatment, most types of bacterial pneumonia go away within 1 to 2 weeks. However, walking pneumonia can take up to 4 to 6 weeks to resolve completely.

Reviewed by: Kate M. Cronan, MD

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## Walking Pneumonia (from [www.webmd.com](http://www.webmd.com))

"Walking pneumonia" sounds like it could be a character in a sci-fi horror flick. Although this form of infectious [pneumonia](#) can make you miserable, it's actually the least scary kind of pneumonia. That's because it's a mild pneumonia and does not generally require hospitalization. In fact, you could have walking pneumonia and not even know it. Here is information about what causes this illness, how it spreads, and what you can do to avoid it.

### What is walking pneumonia?

Walking pneumonia is a non-medical term to describe a mild case of pneumonia. It can also be called atypical pneumonia because the disease is different from more serious cases of pneumonia caused by typical bacteria.

Pneumonia is a disease of the lungs that often results from a lung infection. Lots of things can cause pneumonia, including:

- bacteria
- viruses
- fungi
- other infectious agents, such as mycoplasma
- chemicals
- inhaled food

Walking pneumonia is often the result of a lung infection from a bacterial microorganism called *Mycoplasma pneumoniae*.

People who have walking pneumonia are seldom confined to bed or need to be hospitalized. Some may even feel well enough to go to work and carry on with other regular routines, just as they might with a cold.

### Who gets walking pneumonia and how is it spread?

Anyone at any age can get walking pneumonia. Walking pneumonia from mycoplasma is most common, though, in older children and adults younger than 40.

People who live and work in crowded places, such as schools, homeless shelters, and prisons have a higher risk of contracting the disease. That's because walking pneumonia is contagious. It's spread when someone comes in contact with droplets from the nose and throat of someone who has it. That commonly happens when the person with walking pneumonia sneezes or [coughs](#).

Cases of walking pneumonia are most common in the late summer and fall. But infections can occur with no particular pattern throughout the year. And, even though the disease is contagious, it spreads slowly. The contagious period in most cases lasts less than 10 days. Researchers also think it takes prolonged close contact with an infected person for someone else to develop walking pneumonia; still, there are widespread outbreaks every four to eight years. When those outbreaks occur, walking pneumonia can account for as many as one out of every two cases of pneumonia.

### **What are the symptoms of walking pneumonia?**

Symptoms generally appear 15 to 25 days after exposure to the mycoplasma and develop slowly over a period of two to four days. Symptoms include:

- a cough that may come in violent spasms but produce very little mucus
- mild flu-like symptoms such as [fever](#) and chills
- sore throat
- headache
- tiredness
- lingering weakness that may persist after other symptoms go away

Some people with walking pneumonia may also have an [ear infection](#), [anemia](#), or a [skin rash](#).

### **How does the doctor know if I have walking pneumonia?**

Some cases of walking pneumonia are never diagnosed because people don't seek medical help. If you do go to the doctor, the diagnosis will depend on your medical history and the results of a physical exam. The doctor will start by asking you about your symptoms and how long you have had them. The doctor may also ask you about where you work and whether anyone at home or at work is also sick.

During the physical, the doctor will listen to your chest with a stethoscope. The doctor may also ask for a chest X-ray and a blood test. There is a blood test that can specifically identify a mycoplasma infection. It's seldom done, though, unless there is a widespread outbreak that's being studied. Another blood test is used that identifies the increased presence of certain immune substances called cold agglutinins. This test won't confirm that you have walking pneumonia, but it can suggest it.

### **How is walking pneumonia treated?**

Walking pneumonia is generally treated with antibiotics. Mild infections are often not treated because they tend to clear on their own. With treatment, most people begin to feel better within a few days.

Many over-the-counter medicines used for colds and flus may not help with complete relief of symptoms of walking pneumonia. It's important to talk with your doctor about any medicines you are taking or planning to take. It's also important to drink plenty of fluids and to give yourself time to rest.

### **If I've had walking pneumonia, can I get it again?**

There is a certain level of immunity that occurs after someone has a case of walking pneumonia. It isn't permanent, though, and it's unclear how long it lasts. So you could at some point develop walking pneumonia again. When it does recur, it may be milder.

### **Can walking pneumonia be prevented?**

There is no vaccine for mycoplasma infections, so there is no way to prevent it. There are things you can do, though, to reduce your chances of getting it:

- Exercise, eat a well-balanced diet, and get adequate [sleep](#). Exercise, rest, and proper [nutrition](#) help keep your body healthy. A healthy body is better able to resist infection.
- Wash your hands frequently. Hand washing is one of the best ways to prevent germs from spreading.
- Don't smoke. [Smoking](#) damages the lungs, and damaged lungs are more susceptible to infection.
- Cover your mouth with your sleeve when you cough or sneeze. And, urge others to do the same. Coughing and sneezing are the primary ways infectious agents are spread.