

**Pneumocystis  
pneumonia  
(PcP)**

Information for people who are getting care, their visitors,  
and anyone else who is in a healthcare setting.

## What is Pneumocystis pneumonia (PcP)?

Pneumocystis pneumonia is caused by a fungus (bug) called *Pneumocystis jirovecii*. This fungus is commonly found in the surroundings we live in and rarely causes healthy people to become ill. It was previously known as *Pneumocystis carinii*.

Pneumonia is a severe infection of one or both lungs that can be caused by different types of bugs (viruses, bacteria or fungi). It is most often seen in people who have a weakened immune system as they are cannot fight off infections.

## How will I know if I have PcP?

Your doctor will examine you and ask questions about symptoms you may have. Symptoms can include:

- a cough;
- fever or chills (feeling very hot or cold);
- difficulty breathing – your breathing may be fast or shallow or you may be short of breath when resting;
- a fast heartbeat;
- not feeling like eating; and
- feeling weak and tired.

Your doctor will then carry out tests. These can include:

- blood tests to check for signs of infection;
- a sputum (spit) sample to test for the fungus; and
- an x-ray – to check the condition of your lungs and airways.

Your doctor may decide to do more tests and will talk to you about these before they do them.

You should not feel any discomfort while the samples are taken. Your privacy and dignity will be respected at all times.

Any samples taken will be sent to the laboratory for testing. Your healthcare team will tell you the results as soon as possible. (The results can take around five to seven days)

## What if I test positive for PcP?

If you test positive for PcP it means that you have the fungus in one or both of your lungs. You may feel unwell. Your doctor will give you antibiotics to help fight the infection. Sometimes they will give antibiotics to patients who do not have PcP but have an increased risk of getting it (for example, a patient who has had an organ transplant).

## How did I get PcP?

It can be difficult to say exactly how you got PcP. We do know that PcP is most commonly found in people who have a weakened immune system, such as patients in intensive care units, transplant patients, or patients receiving chemotherapy (cancer treatments).

## How will I be managed in hospital?

PcP can normally only be passed on to patients who cannot fight infections (those who have weakened immune systems). If you are in a care setting where these types of patients are:

- you will be cared for in a single room with your own toilet facilities to protect other patients with weakened immune systems; and
- staff caring for you will wear personal protective equipment (such as gloves and aprons) to prevent spreading the fungus to other patients.

If you are coughing it is very important that you cover your mouth with a tissue and wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water or use the alcohol-based hand rub to prevent the infection from spreading.

## Am I allowed visitors?

PcP is not a problem for fit and healthy people, so family and friends can visit you.

The general advice is as follows.

- Relatives, friends and other visitors who are feeling unwell should not visit you.
- Visitors who have had a recent infection or illness should get advice from nursing staff before visiting.
- Visitors and relatives can still touch you (for example, hold your hand or give you a hug).
- Visitors must wash their hands with soap and water or, if their hands are visibly clean, use alcohol-based hand rub, before entering your room and when leaving it.

## What about when I leave hospital?

- If you are discharged from hospital with PcP, it should not affect you or your family at home.
- Staff from the hospital will tell your GP about your positive PcP result when you are discharged from hospital.
- If you are given medicine to treat the infection (antibiotics), it is important you finish all the tablets, unless your doctor tells you to stop taking them.

## What if I need to go back into hospital or go to an outpatient appointment?

If you have to go back into hospital or go to an outpatient appointment, it is important that you let the staff caring for you know that you have had a positive test result or are having treatment to prevent PcP. It might be helpful to take this leaflet with you to show the clinical team.

## Where can I get more information?

If you would like more information, please speak to a member of the healthcare team caring for you.