

Mycoplasma pneumoniae Infection

This is infection caused by *Mycoplasma pneumoniae*. *Mycoplasma* are the smallest free-living cells known and are like very small bacteria with no cell walls. *M. pneumoniae* occurs worldwide and is a common cause of mild pneumonia, bronchitis and sore throat. It causes 15-50% of cases of pneumonia in adults and an even higher percentage in school aged children. Infection is most common in people aged between five and 20 years, but can occur at any age.

Symptoms develop over one to three weeks and include:

- > fever
- > dry cough
- > headache
- > chills
- > heavy sweating
- > scratchy sore throat
- > sore trachea (the large airway between the mouth and the lungs)
- > sore chest
- > malaise (feeling of being unwell).

Mycoplasma pneumoniae usually resolves without any serious complications, although they may occur. Cough and weakness may persist for more than one month.

Spread is by contaminated droplets produced by coughing or sneezing, or by direct contact with objects soiled by these.

Diagnosis is usually made by blood tests and a chest X-ray.

Incubation period

(time between becoming infected and developing symptoms)

2 – 3 weeks.

Infectious period

(time during which an infected person can infect others)

Probably less than 20 days.

Treatment

Effective antibiotic treatment is available, though most people recover completely without it. Antibiotics may speed recovery, but appear not to reduce the period for which a person is able to transmit infection.

Control of spread

- > Cover the mouth when coughing or sneezing.
- > Use tissues when coughing, sneezing or wiping the nose, and dispose of these appropriately.
- > Follow good hand washing procedures.
- > Exclusion from child care, school or work is not necessary.
- > No vaccine is available at the present time.

- > Hand Hygiene