



Indiana State Department of Health

Epidemiology Resource Center

Quick Facts

About...*Mycoplasma pneumoniae*

What is *Mycoplasma pneumoniae*?

Mycoplasma pneumoniae (*M. pneumoniae*) infection is a mild respiratory illness caused by a bacteria called *Mycoplasma pneumoniae*.

It is not a reportable disease so the number of cases in Indiana is not tracked.

What are the symptoms of *M. pneumoniae* infection?

Symptoms include fever, cough, bronchitis, sore throat, headache and tiredness. A common result of *M. pneumoniae* infection is pneumonia (sometimes called "walking pneumonia" because it is usually mild and rarely requires people to have to stay at the hospital). About 1 out of 3 sick persons with the infection develop pneumonia. Ear infections can result. Symptoms may last from a few days to more than a month. Symptoms generally begin 1 to 4 weeks after being exposed to the bacteria. The infection may appear more like a cold in children younger than 5 years old.

How is *M. pneumoniae* spread?

M. pneumoniae is spread through contact with droplets from the nose and throat of people with the disease, especially when they cough and sneeze. Spread is thought to require long periods of time with close contact with an infected person. The spread within households, schools and institutions is thought to occur slowly. Diagnosis is difficult and may cause a delay in reporting an outbreak. This makes it hard to prevent more cases during an outbreak.

Who is at risk for getting *M. pneumoniae* infection?

Persons of all ages are at risk of infection but it is more common in school-aged children and young adults. Outbreaks can occur in crowded settings such as military

barracks, college housing, nursing homes and hospitals. Outbreaks in these settings can last many months.

How do I know if I have *M. pneumoniae* infection?

M. pneumoniae infection is usually diagnosed by a doctor or health care professional based on symptoms. A laboratory test may be helpful for a confirmatory diagnosis.

How is *M. pneumoniae* infection treated?

Antibiotic medicines may be prescribed. However, because *M. pneumoniae* infection usually goes away on its own, treatment of mild symptoms is not always necessary.

How is *M. pneumoniae* infection prevented?

At this time, there are no vaccines for *M. pneumoniae* infection. As with any respiratory disease, all people should cover their mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing, and wash their hands frequently.

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information, please refer to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Web site at: <http://www.cdc.gov/pneumonia/atypical/mycoplasma/>.

This page was last reviewed July 1, 2016.