

Script – Print – What to Know About Pneumonia

Young Children, Elderly Most Susceptible

Pneumonia is often thought of an illness that is common in the young and the elderly. But when celebrities like Savannah Guthrie and Oprah Winfrey make their bouts with pneumonia public, it's an important reminder that anyone is susceptible to coming down with this sometimes scary and dangerous illness.

“There are different reasons why people get pneumonia,” said Dr. Amith Jacob, pulmonologist, OSF HealthCare Saint Anthony Medical Center. “The most common reason the term pneumonia is used is when there is an infection that inflames the air sacs of the lungs and it can involve one or both of the lungs. Usually what happens with pneumonia is the air sacs are either filled with fluid or pus. The people who come with the condition or this infection, like any infection, may experience fever or chills or cough. Some of the less common symptoms can involve having chest pain or being extremely short of breath. Occasionally, they can have nausea, vomiting or severe diarrhea.”

It is especially important for certain groups of people to seek medical attention. Adults older than age 65 and children younger than age 2 are at the highest risk. Dr. Jacob recommends getting a vaccination.

“There are two different recommendations for pneumonia shots,” said Dr. Amith Jacob, Pulmonologist, OSF HealthCare Saint Anthony Medical Center. “The recommendations are to get one pneumonia shot for all children before two years of age and then get two different type of pneumonia shots for people who are 65 and above. It's important that everyone gets the pneumonia shot because with children there is an 80-90 percent decrease in the incidents of pneumonia by getting the shots and for people 65 and older the incidence of pneumonia goes down by 80 percent as well once they get the vaccinations. For anyone else, if you're not sure if you should get a pneumonia shot, it's better to ask your physician.”

In addition to getting vaccinated, Dr. Jacob adds that people can help prevent pneumonia by practicing good hygiene, eating healthy, avoiding smoking and alcohol, and getting plenty of rest and exercising. Still, if symptoms persist, seek medical attention immediately.

“If it's just a cough that subsides in a couple of days that's ok,” said Dr. Amith Jacob, Pulmonologist, OSF HealthCare Saint Anthony Medical Center. “But if it's associated with high grade fever, chills, night sweats, difficulty breathing, always make sure to have it checked out. The earlier you seek medical treatment it is easier to prevent complications down the lane.”