



FOR PROFESSIONALS
SINCE 1941

CONSUMERS URGED TO BE AWARE OF DANGERS OF PNEUMONIA - WORLD PNEUMONIA DAY

11 November 2015: According to the World Health Organisation, pneumonia is the leading infectious cause of death of children worldwide, accounting for 15% of deaths of children under five years old. In light of World Pneumonia Day on the 12th of November 2015, more consumers need to educate themselves about this disease in order to avoid contracting and spreading it, especially to people with weaker immune systems.

This is according to Dr Dominique Stott, Executive: Medical Standards and Services at PPS, who says that when a vulnerable person, such as an elderly person or an infant, is exposed to the infection, the symptoms must be taken very seriously. “The symptoms of pneumonia can initially be similar to those of a respiratory tract infection when the patient suddenly develops rapid breathing, fever and a cough. The incubation period between exposure to an infected person and development of the pneumonia can be very short, often only a couple of days.”

She explains that pneumonia is an infection of the lungs which leads to the airspaces being filled with fluid, cells and other body substances, which in turn prevents the lungs from absorbing oxygen and releasing carbon dioxide.

“Most commonly the infection is caused by bacteria or viruses, but could also occur due to fungus, yeast or other microorganisms. These organisms usually reach the lung tissue from the airways, or unusually through the blood stream. The latter is more prone among immune compromised patients like the elderly, the very young or people on chemotherapy.”

When an immune compromised person, and even those with physical disorders such as heart failure or diabetes, get the disease - it is much more serious and it is often required that they are admitted to an Intensive Care Unit (ICU), states Dr Stott. “There are many circumstances in which these pneumonia patients can be treated as outpatients with antibiotics, especially as they face the risk of developing a hospital acquired infection which may be more serious than the pneumonia that the patient was originally admitted for.”

She urges consumers to get an influenza vaccination annually, as this can significantly reduce one’s chances of catching pneumonia as the influenza virus is often the most common cause of viral pneumonia. “Patients with any other form of respiratory problem such as asthma or chronic bronchitis are advised to have the vaccinations annually and to attempt to stay clear from likely infectious patients and areas.”

Years ago, before the development of antibiotics, pneumonia used to be a deadly disease, says Dr Stott. “Luckily modern medicine can effectively treat most forms of pneumonia, provided that it is caught in time and that the patient is relatively healthy.”

She says depending on the cause of the disease, the treatment for pneumonia generally consists of antibiotics, oxygen, bed rest, pain and fever medication, and observation to ensure that the pneumonia is not worsening. “The development of treatment resistant bacteria due to the overtreatment of simple infections, such as head colds, with antibiotics is an increasingly worrisome problem for doctors and patients alike.”

“With the increase in the ‘anti-vaxxers’ campaign who feel that vaccinations for children are unnecessary, it is very likely that there will be an increase in the number of pneumonia patients as a primary disorder (influenza) or as a complication from another disease such as measles,” concludes Dr Stott.