



**University of North Carolina Wilmington  
Abrons Student Health Center**

## **INSTRUCTION SHEET: PNEUMONIA**

The Student Health Provider has diagnosed pneumonia, an infection in your lungs. The infection causes the alveoli (tiny air sacs) in the lungs to fill with fluid.

Cough is the most prominent symptom of pneumonia: The cough may be dry, but often foul sputum (phlegm) is produced. Fever, chills, shortness of breath, pain in the chest, fatigue, and mild headache also occur.

Pneumonia is more common in the winter and early spring; it is spread from person-to-person when infected persons cough germs into the air.

Germs (both bacteria and viruses) cause pneumonia. Viral infections are usually milder and clear with time; they do not respond to antibiotics.

Bacterial infections generally cause a more severe infection; Antibiotics are used for treatment, but several days may pass before symptoms improve. Bacterial pneumonia can be a very serious disease, especially in infants, the elderly, and patients with chronic diseases; healthy adults, when treated early, usually respond well.

Realize that cough is your body's response to infection: it is helpful in getting infection and fluid out of the lungs. Treatment can decrease the frequency and discomfort of a harsh cough, but the goal should not be to stop the cough altogether.

### **MEASURES YOU SHOULD TAKE TO HELP TREAT YOUR PNEUMONIA:**

1. Rest at home. Allow your body time to recuperate and heal.
2. Drink plenty of fluids.
3. Take any prescribed antibiotic as directed, until gone.
4. Over-the-counter cough medicines containing dextromethorphan (labeled DM) can help control cough and do not cause sedation. If stronger cough medicine is prescribed, it may cause sedation; take only enough medicine to decrease but not eliminate the cough. Do not take the stronger medicine and perform dangerous activity such as driving or operating machinery.
5. Over-the-counter medicine such as acetaminophen (Tylenol), ibuprofen, or naproxen can help control fever and aches.
6. If you smoke, STOP!
7. **MOST IMPORTANTLY, SHOULD YOUR CONDITION WORSEN, GO TO THE CLOSEST EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT.** Specifically, seek care if you become significantly short-of-breath, experience increasing chest pain, or your overall condition worsens.
8. Even if you are improving, schedule a follow-up appointment with your personal/referral doctor or return to the Student Health Center in the next few days. You should be followed by a provider until your symptoms are gone and the pneumonia has cleared on X-ray. While infections are the most common cause of pneumonia, other causes should be excluded if the pneumonia does not clear.