DearAlice,

Is there an immunization for pneumonia? I was exposed to it for a week over break and fear coming down with it myself.

Thanks,
Thinking Positive

Answer

Dear Thinking Positive,

There is indeed a pneumonia vaccine; in fact there are two. One vaccine, called the pneumococcal conjugate vaccine, is designed for infants and toddlers under the age of two. The other, called the pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine (PPV) is designed for children over two, adults, and elderly populations. This version provides protection against 23 types of pneumococcal bacteria.

While PPV is considered a safe vaccine, it is not necessarily recommended for otherwise healthy adults, even if they have been exposed to a person infected with pneumonia. People who should receive the vaccine include:

- Adults over 65
- People over two years old who have a variety of chronic health conditions or lowered resistance to infection
- Alaskan Natives and some Native Americans
- Smokers

You may or may not be included in the list of people recommended to get the vaccine, however you are right to be concerned about pneumonia; it is a serious infection. Pneumonia can cause severe infections in the lungs and blood, and is a leading cause of bacterial meningitis. Fortunately, pneumonia is treatable with antibiotics. If you feel like you are coming down with something, you may decide to visit your primary health care provider for an evaluation. They can discuss your exposure, and diagnose you if you are infected.

Pneumonia is typically spread through sneezing, coughing, and other contact with an infected person’s respiratory output. A good rule of thumb is to wash your hands frequently if you or a close friend/family member/roommate is sick to help prevent transmission. If you're feeling ill
and have been exposed to pneumonia, some symptoms to look out for are:

- High fever, cough, and shortness of breath (in combination these symptoms may relate to a pneumonia infection in the lungs)
- Fever and generally feeling bad (could be related to bacteremia, a pneumonial infection of the blood)
- Fever, headache, and thinking slowly (in combination, could be indicative of meningitis)

If you are having severe symptoms, you may visit your closest emergency room or urgent care facility.

Stay well!

Alice!

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