

## Pleurisy <sup>[1]</sup>

Dear Alice,

What is pleurisy? How do you get it? Is it contagious? How do you treat it? Is it chronic or recurring?

### **Answer**

Dear Reader,

Pleurisy (also known as pleuritis) is the term for the painful inflammation of the membranes that line the chest cavity and surround the lungs. These two layers of membrane are separated by a thin layer of fluid that allows them to slide smoothly by one another with each breath. If the membranes become inflamed, they rub against one another, causing sharp pain when breathing or coughing. Other symptoms may include shortness of breath, a cough, or fever. Pleurisy has many different causes — some of which are contagious underlying illnesses. Other causes of pleurisy are non-contagious factors such as genetics, behavior, or environmental exposures. The treatment plan and duration of symptoms largely depend on the underlying cause. Pleurisy itself can't be passed to others, but there are some ways to reduce your risk of experiencing pleurisy in the first place. For more information on causes, prevention, and treatment, read on!

Pleurisy isn't a disease in and of itself; rather, it's a symptom of an underlying condition, such as a viral infection (such as the flu), a bacterial infection (such as pneumonia), or an autoimmune condition (such as lupus or rheumatoid arthritis). People with asbestosis (lung illness from asbestos exposure) or certain hereditary conditions are also at higher risk for pleurisy. In addition to being caused by illness, pleurisy can also develop after a chest injury or heart surgery. In order to try to diagnose the underlying cause, health care providers may listen to the lungs with a stethoscope, take an x-ray, run a blood test, or use thoracentesis (removal of a fluid sample from the chest with a needle). Avoiding smoking (tobacco, e-cigarettes, or marijuana) and treating underlying conditions early can reduce the risk of developing pleurisy.

The symptoms of pleurisy are often addressed by treating the underlying illness. For example, bacterial infections can typically be treated with antibiotics. In some pleurisy cases, a medical provider may remove blood, fluid, or air from the pleural space. Depending on the underlying cause of pleurisy, it can be chronic or recurring, with varying levels of severity. Occasionally,

pleurisy can lead to life-threatening complications. While the outlook for someone with pleurisy depends on the underlying cause, most cases of the condition are successfully treated with medical care. If you're experiencing chest pain or discomfort, it's a good idea to get in touch with a health care provider to assess your condition. Looking for more in-depth clinical information about pleurisy causes, treatment, or diagnosis? Check out the Cleveland Clinic's [pleurisy](#) [2] page.

Alice!

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