

Pneumonia is an illness that seems to affect seniors in a radically different way than it does people in other age groups. But does it actually target seniors the way it seems to? Find out more about what pneumonia is, what causes it, how to prevent it, and whether seniors contract it in different ways from people in other age groups. If you aren't sure what pneumonia is or you are curious about why it's such a concern in the world of elder care, take the time to learn more about this illness.

Pneumonia is an infection of the lungs that affects the tiny air sacs known as alveoli. In some cases, the alveoli become inflamed as a result of infection, which makes breathing difficult and makes the lungs function less effectively to oxygenate our blood. In other cases, the alveoli become infected and fill up with fluid such as pus. Alveoli are not designed to hold fluid. They're designed to hold air. The presence of any fluid in the alveoli makes it impossible for our lungs to work at their full capacity. This makes pneumonia a very dangerous illness with serious potential consequences.

One of the things that makes pneumonia so difficult to understand is that its causes are a bit difficult to pin down. There is no single cause of pneumonia and no single risk factor for the disease. Older age is one of several risk factors, though, which is why elderly people over age 65 are considered to be at particular risk for this type of infection. In seniors, these adult risk factors compound and pose an even greater threat.

Pneumonia can also be either mild or very severe and, in seniors, the infection tends to fall on the severe end of the spectrum; pneumonia can be severe enough to warrant emergency medical treatment and those who suffer from it may require oxygen therapy to make up for decreased lung capacity.

Viral, bacterial, parasitic, and even fungal infections can cause the buildup of lung fluid known as pneumonia. There is a specific bacterium *Streptococcus pneumoniae* that is responsible for many cases of bacterial pneumonia, but it is not the only cause in spite of its name. Essentially, anything that causes inflammation and fluid accumulation in the lungs can be considered to be a cause of pneumonia. Even liquid inhaled while drinking is technically a cause of pneumonia.

Pneumonia generally piggybacks other illnesses and can become far more severe and life-threatening than the initial illness itself was. This means that there are myriad different potential causes of pneumonia and no single way to address those causes.

If your loved ones shows signs of having pneumonia seek medical attention immediately.