



# Pneumocystis pneumonia (PcP)

## Patient information

If you have any questions about the information in this leaflet, it is very important that you discuss these with a member of the nursing or medical team caring for you.



## **What is pneumocystis pneumonia (PcP)?**

Pneumocystis pneumonia is caused by a fungus (bug) called *Pneumocystis jirovecii*. This fungus is commonly found in the environment and rarely causes any illness to healthy people. It was previously known as *Pneumocystis carinii*.

Pneumonia is a severe infection of one or both lungs that can be caused by viruses, bacteria or fungi. It is most often seen in people who have a very weak immune system.

## **How will I know if I have PcP?**

Your doctor will examine you and ask questions about symptoms you may have. Symptoms can include:

- a cough;
- fever or chills (feeling very hot or cold);
- shortness of breath;
- fast breathing or a fast heartbeat; and
- feeling weak and tired.

Your doctor will then carry out tests. These can include:

- blood tests to check your blood for signs of infection;
- a sputum (spit) sample to test for the fungus; and
- an x-ray – to check the condition of your lungs and airway.

Your doctor may decide to do more tests and will talk to you about these before they do them.

You should not experience any discomfort while the samples are taken. Your privacy and dignity will be respected at all times.

Any samples taken will be sent to the laboratory for testing. Your care team will tell you the results as soon as possible (the results can take around five to seven days).

## **How did I get PcP?**

It can be difficult to say exactly how you got PcP. We do know that PcP is most commonly found in people who have a weakened

immune system, such as patients in intensive care units, transplant patients or patients receiving chemotherapy.

## **What if I test positive for PcP?**

If you test positive for PcP it means that you have the fungus in one or both of your lungs. You may feel unwell. Your doctor will give you antibiotics to help fight the infection. Sometimes they will give antibiotics to patients that do not have PcP but have an increased risk of getting it, for example a patient that has had an organ transplant.

While you are in hospital:

- you may be cared for in a single room with your own toilet facilities to protect other patients with weakened immune systems;
- staff caring for you will wear personal protective equipment (such as gloves and aprons) to prevent spreading the fungus to other patients; and
- it is very important that if you are coughing you cover your mouth with a tissue and wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water or use the alcohol- based hand gel.

## **Am I allowed visitors?**

PcP is not a problem for fit and healthy people, so family and friends can visit you.

The general advice is as follows.

- Relatives, friends and other visitors who are feeling unwell should not visit you.
- Visitors who have had a recent infection or illness should get advice from nursing staff before visiting.
- Visitors and relatives can still touch you (for example, hold your hand or give you a hug).
- Visitors must wash their hands with soap and water or, if their hands are visibly clean, use alcohol-based hand rub before entering your room and when leaving it.

## What happens when I leave hospital?

- If you are discharged from hospital with a PcP, it should not affect you or your family home.
- Staff from the hospital will tell your GP about your positive PcP result when you are discharged from hospital.
- If you are given antibiotics, it is important you finish all the tablets unless your doctor tells you to stop taking them.

## What if I need to go back into hospital or go to hospital as an outpatient?

If you are admitted back into hospital or go to hospital as an outpatient, it is important that you let the staff caring for you know that you have had a positive test or are having treatment to prevent PcP. It might be helpful to take this leaflet with you to show the clinical team.

## Where can I get more information?

If you would like more information, please speak to a member of the nursing or medical team caring for you, who may contact the local Infection Prevention and Control Team for you.

Please use the space below to write any questions you may have for the care team.

