Pneumonia: Know the signs

Take control of your health care

Get connected ... Join My HealtheVet today!
To our readers

Welcome to your fall issue of Veterans’ Health. In this issue, we’ve included a lot of important topics to help you take charge of your own health. By taking an active role, you’re helping yourself get safer health care.

On page 3, we provide information on the signs and symptoms of pneumonia and how to prevent it.

Do you have trouble talking with your physician? Not sure what to ask when he or she prescribes medicine? On pages 4 and 5, we offer some guidelines and important questions to ask your health care provider. Another way to stay on top of your health is to keep up with immunizations and screenings. On page 7, we offer common screening tests that help find diseases early.

As you enjoy the fall season, remember to keep watch over your own well-being.

— Jack Hetrick, Network Director

About our mailing list

We make every effort to ensure our mailing list is accurate. If you have questions or would like to be added to or deleted from the list, let us know. Please include your entire address. To make a change, you must mail the mailing panel to:
Veterans’ Health
VA Healthcare System of Ohio Network Office
11500 Northlake Drive
Suite 200
Cincinnati, OH 45249

Take charge of your health care!

With more than 200 common health topics, “Healthwise for Life” is a good resource. Use it to help recognize and prevent common health conditions and help you manage your health. This book provides a guide on how to take care of health problems at home and what you can do to prevent them. And, it lets you know when to call Tele-Nurse, our advice nurse phone service. A call to an advice nurse may save you a visit to the clinic. If you do need to see a health care provider, there’s a chapter with tips on how to better partner with your care provider. From first aid to managing chronic disease, this book covers most health care needs from A to Z. Ask your VA for a copy of this book.

Veterans' Health is published quarterly as a patient education service by VA Healthcare System of Ohio, one of the 21 integrated networks of the Department of Veterans Affairs. The publication is intended to provide information to help you stay well, manage your health care and learn about the many health services available through VA. This publication is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice, which should be obtained from your doctor. All articles may be reproduced for educational purposes.

The Mission of VA Healthcare System of Ohio is:
• To provide Veterans a continuum of care that is accessible, value-added and cost-effective, and of the highest quality, within an environment of outstanding education and research.
• To promote a culture that supports and develops a caring, compassionate, competent and quality-oriented workforce.

ON THE COVER: VA PATIENT BARRY HURBURT AT A CINCINNATI VAMC MY HEALTHEVET KIOSK

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Pneumonia:

Know the signs and how to prevent it

Pneumonia is an inflammation of the lungs. It can be caused by a:
- bacteria
- virus
- fungus (less often)

Often, it follows an upper respiratory infection. Pneumonia can vary from mild to severe and can be life-threatening. Per the CDC*, it causes more deaths than any other infectious disease.

Pneumonia can look like the flu. Since your symptoms may start with a cough and fever, you might not think you have a serious illness. People at the greatest risk for pneumonia are children younger than age 2 or adults ages 65 and older. You have a higher risk for pneumonia if you:
- smoke
- have lung, heart or kidney disease
- have diabetes
- have sickle cell disease
- have an impaired immune system from or during cancer treatment

Contact your health care team right away if you have a constant cough, shortness of breath, chest pain and a fever higher than 100 degrees.

Your provider will decide how to treat you based on your age, symptoms and overall health. If bacteria is the cause of your pneumonia, you may need to take an antibiotic. You may be given an antiviral medicine if a virus is the cause. Sometimes, pneumonia will even heal on its own.

Prevention

Since the flu virus can cause pneumonia, it’s important to get a flu shot each year. Also, wash your hands often to prevent colds and flu. Those ages 65 and older should receive a one-time vaccine against pneumococcal pneumonia. This vaccine is also given to some people younger than age 65 who are at high risk.

If you received the vaccine prior to age 65, and it’s been more than 5 years since you last had the shot, you’ll need a booster.

*Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Signs and symptoms of pneumonia:
- chest pain that changes with breathing
- cough
- fatigue
- fever
- headache
- lower-than-normal body temperature in older people
- muscle pain
- shaking chills
- shortness of breath
- sweating
Take charge of your life!

The prevention of errors and adverse effects to patients is an important U.S. health care challenge, and has a high importance at the VA. Patient safety laws are in place to protect you. But, your role is very important!

Talk with your doctor

There are many ways that you can help yourself get safer health care. Start by making sure you talk with your provider and ask questions during your visit or while you’re a patient in the hospital. The guidelines listed to the right were developed by the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, along with the American Hospital Association and the American Medical Association.

1. Ask questions if you have doubts and concerns. Make sure you understand the health care information you receive.

2. Keep and bring a list of all the medicines you take. Describe all of your allergies. Know what side effects to expect and anything that you should avoid while taking a prescribed medicine.

3. Get the results of tests or procedures. Know when and how you’ll receive test results. Don’t assume that everything is all right if you don’t get the results. Don’t be afraid to ask your provider what the results mean in terms of your care.

4. Make sure you understand what will happen if you need surgery. Communication is key if you
need surgery. Ask your surgeon to explain the procedure. Find out who’ll manage your care when you’re in the hospital.

**Facing surgery?**

Most surgeries are elective, not emergencies. This means you’ll have time to research your condition, learn about the procedure and ask questions to be sure surgery is the best option for you. Bring along a list of questions when you visit your primary care provider or surgeon to discuss your surgery.

- What procedure is recommended?
- Why do I need the procedure?
- Are there alternatives to surgery?
- What are the risks and benefits of having the surgery?
- Where can I get a second opinion?
- Will I have to stay overnight in the hospital?
- What kind of anesthesia will I need?
- How long will it take me to recover?
- Can you mark the part of my body you will operate on?

**Understanding your medications**

Medication reconciliation is a process of cross-checking your prescribed medications and over-the-counter (OTC) medicines you take. This is done to help lessen the chance of interactions that cause negative side effects. It’s important to tell your physician about every drug you take. This includes supplements such as vitamins and herbs, or any special foods or drinks from health food stores. Make sure your health care provider has a current list of your medications and treatments and use one location for your primary health care.

When your doctor prescribes medication, ask for information about it. If you don’t understand how to take the medicine, speak with your provider or pharmacist. Here are some helpful questions to ask:

- Why do I need this medicine?
- How long will I need to take it?
- How should I take it?
- What side effects are likely?
- What should I do if I experience side effects?
- What side effects do I report?
- What side effects would cause me to immediately stop taking the medicine?
- What foods, drinks or activities should I avoid while taking this medicine?
- Is this medicine safe to take with my other medicines or dietary supplements?
Get online with your VA health care team today

How to find Secure Messaging on My HealtheVet

Log on to: www.myhealth.va.gov

Select

Log into your My HealtheVet account. If you don’t have an account, you will need to register online (enter name as it appears on your VA ID card.) Complete a one-time in-person authentication process at a VA facility to access Secure Messaging.

Once logged in, you can access Secure Messaging by selecting the Secure Messaging tab that appears across the top of the My HealtheVet home page. Then, select

Open Secure Messaging

Join thousands of other Veterans who take advantage of all that My HealtheVet has to offer at www.myhealth.va.gov. Our website now offers Secure Messaging, which allows you to send secure messages to your VA health care team. (You don’t need a personal e-mail account to use Secure Messaging.) Use it to:

• ask nonurgent, nonemergency health care questions
• request test results and health information
• request medical appointments
• request prescription renewals

Once you register online for My HealtheVet, you can:

• refill VA prescriptions online and track your blood pressure, blood sugar and weight
• start journals for family and military health histories
• select, download, save or print your health information

Upgrade your My HealtheVet account with a one-time, in-person authentication at the closest VA. You can:

• view VA appointments and wellness reminders
• access chemistry and hematology lab results
• view information about drug allergies and adverse reactions
• send secure messages to participating health care teams

Call the My HealtheVet coordinator at your local VA Medical Center with any questions.

“It’s really helpful to be able to access all my appointments and test results. I feel good about the changes I see in my test results after making lifestyle changes suggested by my doctor. I wish I had this type of feedback my entire life; maybe I’d be healthier than I am now.”

—Barry Hurburt, VA patient
Take action!

Keep up with immunizations and screening tests

It’s true. An ounce of prevention really can go a long way toward maintaining good health. If you’re a healthy adult, you may not spend a lot of time thinking about immunizations and screening tests, but they’re an important part of staying healthy.

An immunization is usually a shot that helps protect you from a disease by boosting your immune system. Shots may hurt a little, but the diseases they can prevent can hurt a lot more. It’s recommended that you receive a flu shot every year. And you should get a tetanus shot once every 10 years. Other adult immunizations include:
- meningococcal vaccine
- pneumococcal vaccine
- Herpes zoster vaccine

Early detection is key

Another way to protect your health is to check for health problems on a routine basis. When a disease is found early, it’s often easier to treat. A health screening may be done as a preventive measure or when your provider thinks it’s needed based on your health history. The VA may perform other screening tests based on your age, gender, health status and family history. Veterans should be screened for alcohol and tobacco abuse, depression, high blood pressure, HIV, military sexual trauma, obesity and PTSD. 

Common screening tests

- blood pressure
- blood tests to check for cholesterol and diabetes
- bone mineral density
- colorectal cancer
- dental exam
- glaucoma and vision tests
- hearing test
- HIV test
- mental health exam

Men only
- prostate specific antigen (PSA) blood test and digital rectal exam (DRE) to check for prostate cancer

Women only
- clinical breast exam and mammogram
- pelvic exam and Pap test
Reaching us is easy

Keep this information handy—when you need us, we'll be there.

Northeastern Ohio

Wade Park VAMC
10701 E. Blvd.
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216-791-3800

Akron Annex
95 W. Waterloo Road
Akron, OH 44319
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330-724-7715

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Canton, OH 44702
330-386-4303

Lorain CBOC
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Lorain, OH 44052
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Mansfield CBOC
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Mansfield, OH 44906
419-529-4602

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New Philadelphia, OH 44663
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Warren, OH 44485
330-392-0311

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Youngstown, OH 44505
330-740-9200

Southeastern Ohio

Chillicothe VAMC
17273 state Route 104
Chillicothe, OH 45601
740-773-1141 or 1-800-358-8262

Athens CBOC
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Athens, OH 45701
740-593-7314

Cambridge CBOC
2146 Southgate Parkway
Cambridge, OH 43725
740-432-1963

Lancaster CBOC
1550 Sheridan Drive, Suite 100
Collonade Medical Building
Lancaster, OH 43130
740-653-6145

Marietta CBOC
415 Colegate Drive
Marietta, OH 45750
740-568-0412

Portsmouth CBOC
840 Gallia St.
Portsmouth, OH 45662
740-353-3236

Wilmington Outreach Clinic
448 W. Main St.
Wilmington, OH 45177
937-382-3949

Southwestern Ohio area

Cincinnati VAMC
3200 Vine St.
Cincinnati, OH 45220
513-861-3100 or 1-888-267-7873

Bellevue, KY CBOC
103 Landmark Drive, 3rd Floor
Bellevue, KY 41073
859-392-3840

Brown County Outreach Clinic
4903 state Route 125
Georgetown, OH 45121
937-378-3413

Clermont County CBOC
4600 Beechwood Road
Cincinnati, OH 45244
513-943-3680

Dearborn, IN CBOC
1600 Flossie Drive
Greendale, IN 47025
812-539-2313

Florence, KY CBOC
7711 Ewing Blvd.
Florence, KY 41042
859-282-4480

Hamilton CBOC
1750 South Erie Highway
Hamilton, OH 45011
513-870-9444

Western Ohio area

Dayton VAMC
4100 W. Third St.
Dayton, OH 45428
937-268-6511

Lima CBOC
1303 Bellefontaine Ave.
Lima, OH 45804
419-222-5788

Middleton CBOC
4337 N. Union Road
Middleton, OH 45050
513-423-8387

Richmond, IN CBOC
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Richmond, IN 47374
765-973-6915

Springfield CBOC
512 S. Burnett Road
Springfield, OH 45505
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420 N. James Road
Columbus, OH 43219
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Grove City, OH 43123
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Marion CBOC
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Marion, OH 43302
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Newark CBOC
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Newark, OH 43055
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