



Dr Wolfgang Muller (Consultant Paediatrician)

Parent Information Guide:

Mycoplasma Pneumonia in Children

What is Mycoplasma Pneumonia?

Mycoplasma pneumonia is a type of lung infection caused by the bacterium *Mycoplasma pneumoniae*. It is often referred to as "walking pneumonia" because symptoms can be milder compared to other forms of pneumonia, allowing children to continue daily activities despite being ill.

Who Gets It?

It is most common in school-aged children (ages 5 and older) and teenagers, but younger children can also be affected. Outbreaks are more common in group settings like schools or camps.

How is it Spread?

Mycoplasma pneumonia spreads through:

- Coughing and sneezing (respiratory droplets)
- Close contact with an infected person

The incubation period (time from exposure to symptoms) is typically 1 to 3 weeks.

Common Symptoms:

Symptoms usually develop gradually and may include:

- Persistent dry cough
- Fever (often mild)
- Sore throat
- Headache
- Fatigue
- Chest discomfort
- Sometimes ear pain or a skin rash

Younger children may have milder or non-specific symptoms, such as irritability, runny nose, or wheezing.



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Diagnosis:

Diagnosis is usually based on symptoms and a physical exam. In some cases, a chest X-ray or blood tests may be used to confirm the infection or rule out other causes.

Treatment:

- **Antibiotics:** Mycoplasma is a bacterium, but it does not have a cell wall, so penicillin and related antibiotics are not effective. **Macrolide antibiotics** like azithromycin or clarithromycin are usually prescribed.
- **Supportive care:** Rest, fluids, and fever management (e.g., paracetamol or ibuprofen) help recovery. Encourage your child to rest as much as possible, especially in the first few days of illness. Avoid sending children back to nursery or school too early. It's best to wait until your child is fever-free and feeling better. After recovery, reduce or avoid participation in sports, PE, or strenuous physical activities for **1 to 3 weeks**, depending on how severe the illness was, to allow the lungs to fully heal and prevent setbacks.

Enclosed is a link to further parent information:

Parent information on supportive measures during infections:

<https://drwmuller.com/information-for-parents-carers/>

See: Infection: Acute infection - what can I do?

Recovery

Most children recover fully within 1–2 weeks of starting antibiotics, though the cough may linger for a few weeks. Children can usually return to school or nursery once their fever has resolved and they are feeling well enough.

When to See a Doctor?

Seek medical advice if your child:

- Has difficulty breathing or fast breathing
- Is very drowsy or difficult to wake
- Has a high or persistent fever
- Appears very unwell or is not improving after a few days of treatment

Enclosed is a link to further parent information:

Parent information on “My child is unwell – When should I see a doctor?”

<https://drwmuller.com/information-for-parents-carers/>

See: Emergencies: “When do I need to see a doctor urgently?”



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Can It Be Prevented?

There is no vaccine for Mycoplasma pneumonia. The best prevention is:

- Encouraging regular handwashing
- Teaching children to cover their mouth when coughing or sneezing
- Keeping children home when they are unwell

Key Points:

- Mycoplasma pneumonia causes mild to moderate lung infections in children.
- It is contagious and spreads through respiratory droplets.
- Macrolide antibiotics are usually effective.
- Most children recover well with rest and treatment.

Always follow your doctor's advice and complete the full course of any prescribed medication.

Written by: Dr W Muller

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