

## Frequently Asked Questions on *Mycoplasma Pneumoniae*

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6:00 AM

### **What is the Department of Health trying to determine in the investigation?**

HEALTH is looking to determine the cause of these pneumonia-like illnesses. We specifically want to know if the affected students were exposed to the mycoplasma pneumonia bacteria. HEALTH is always concerned with the prevention of the spread of disease.

### **What is mycoplasma infection?**

Mycoplasma infection is respiratory illness caused by *Mycoplasma pneumoniae*, a type of bacteria. Usually mycoplasma infection is mild, causing symptoms, such as fever, cough, bronchitis, sore throat, and headache. A common result of mycoplasma infection is a mild form of pneumonia. It is **very rare** for this bacteria to cause serious illness such as encephalitis or meningitis.

### **Who gets mycoplasma infection?**

Anyone can get the disease, but it most often affects older children and young adults.

### **When do mycoplasma infections occur?**

Mycoplasma infections occur sporadically throughout the year. Widespread community outbreaks may occur at intervals of four to eight years. Mycoplasma infection is most common in late summer and fall.

### **How is mycoplasma spread?**

Mycoplasma is spread through contact with droplets from the nose and throat of infected people especially when they cough and sneeze. Transmission is thought to require prolonged close contact with an infected person. The spread of bacteria in families, schools, and institutions occurs slowly. The contagious period is probably fewer than 10 days.

### **What are the symptoms of mycoplasma infection?**

Typical symptoms include fever, cough, bronchitis, sore throat, and headache. A common result of mycoplasma infection is pneumonia (sometimes called "walking pneumonia" because it is usually mild and rarely requires hospitalization). Infections of the middle ear also can result. Symptoms may persist for a few days to more than a month.

### **How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?**

Symptoms generally begin 2-3 weeks after exposure. The symptoms generally develop slowly, over a period of two to four days.

### **How is mycoplasma infection diagnosed?**

Mycoplasma infection is usually diagnosed on the basis of typical symptoms. A nonspecific blood test is helpful but is not always positive. The use of more specific laboratory tests is often limited to special outbreak investigations.

### **How can I get my child and/or family tested?**

Parents/Guardians can contact their child's health care provider to arrange for laboratory testing. If a family is contacted by the CDC for additional follow-up, they may suggest laboratory testing and will provide assistance making those arrangements. At present, the Department of Health is only providing screening and antibiotics for parents/guardians of Greenwood Elementary School students. Call the Department of Health, Family Information Line 1-800-942-7434 for more information.

**When will screening results be available?**

Results will be available in 2-4 weeks.

**Why does it take so long to get the results?**

The normal time frame for any serologic testing is 10-14 days. The Health Department first consulted with CDC on December 21 and the first positive test results were received on December 29.

**Who pays for laboratory testing fees?**

HEALTH is only paying for the costs of laboratory testing on blood samples as ordered by HEALTH as part of the CDC investigation. Parents/Guardians of children participating in the CDC investigation should have lab orders signed by Dr. Gifford, Director of HEALTH. If a parent/guardian has misplaced their Department of Health laboratory orders, he/she should contact the Department of Health, Family Health Information Line, 1-800-942-7434. HEALTH has established an agreement with East Side Clinical Laboratories to perform CDC investigative blood tests.

The Department of Health and CDC are not requiring throat or nasal pharyngeal swabs. If parents/guardians voluntarily choose to have blood tests performed on their children, the parents/guardians will need to pay any fees associated with the testing.

**Who will be notified of the results?**

Parents/Guardians will be notified of screening results for children. Adults will be notified of their own results.

**Does past infection with mycoplasma make a person immune?**

Immunity after mycoplasma infection does occur, but is not lifelong. Second or repeat infections are known to occur, and are generally milder. The duration of immunity is unknown.

**What is the treatment for mycoplasma infection?**

Antibiotics such as azithromycin, erythromycin, or clarithromycin are effective treatment. However, because mycoplasma infection usually resolves on its own, antibiotic treatment of mild symptoms is usually not necessary.

**What do I do if my child experiences an adverse reaction to the antibiotics?**

Please call the Department of Health, Family Health Information Line, 1-800-942-7434 to report any adverse reactions to the antibiotics. Be prepared to share your name, your child's name and the symptoms.

**What can be done to prevent the spread of mycoplasma?**

At this time, there are no vaccines for the prevention of mycoplasma infection. As with any respiratory disease, all people should cover their mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing, and stay home from work or school when they are sick.

**What is going on in Coventry and West Warwick?**

On January 2, the CDC classified mycoplasma as the "probable" cause of a case of encephalitis at the John F. Deering Middle School in West Warwick. That child is currently recovering at home. Usually mycoplasma infection is mild, causing symptoms, such as fever, cough, bronchitis, sore throat, and headache. A common result of mycoplasma infection is a mild form of pneumonia. It is **very rare** for this bacteria to cause serious illness such as encephalitis or meningitis.

HEALTH is also investigating reports of higher than normal absenteeism over the past two months related to pneumonia in two Coventry schools: Black Rock Elementary and Oak Haven Elementary. We do not yet know if these illnesses are related to mycoplasma. We have not confirmed an outbreak at the John F. Deering Middle

School or elsewhere. An informational meeting for parents/guardians will be held on Thursday, January 4 at 6:30 pm at the Knotty Oak Middle School in Coventry, where a large number of people can be accommodated.

**Are there any other clusters in Rhode Island?**

HEALTH continues to monitor the state for potential disease clusters. At this time, HEALTH in collaboration with the CDC is investigating possible cases of mycoplasma related illness in West Warwick and Coventry. HEALTH has not confirmed an outbreak of mycoplasma in West Warwick or Coventry.

**Why were previous school meetings in Warwick and West Warwick only open to parents/guardians at those schools?**

Parent/Guardian meetings were closed to media and people not affiliated with the school because the information shared may be considered confidential. Parents/Guardians were offered the opportunity to ask specific questions about their children’s health which means the communications were treated like patient-provider interactions and therefore confidential.

**Why is CDC here?**

It is unusual to have a mycoplasma cluster. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) were initially invited to rule out rabies and Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE) as causes of the neurological conditions. The CDC remains here to provide specialized laboratory support and technical assistance in the investigation.

**What do daycare facilities need to know?**

Daycare providers should reinforce two key principles:

1. Daycare providers should implement and reinforce hand hygiene and cough etiquette principles. Hand hygiene means frequently washing hands with soap and water or using alcohol gels. Cough etiquette means coughing or sneezing into the crook of your arm to prevent contaminating hands. Preventive measures are extremely effective in preventing the spread of illness.
2. Daycare providers should apply routine policies for exclusion at daycares. Sick children should be sent home and remain home for 48 hours after symptoms subside.

**How do I get more information?**

Please consult the Department of Health Website at [www.health.ri.gov](http://www.health.ri.gov) . Or call the Department of Health, Family Health Information Line 1-800-942-7434.

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***Questions Specific to Parents/Guardians of Greenwood Elementary School Students:***

**What is the Department of Health recommending for pupils from Greenwood Elementary School who may have been exposed to the bacteria?**

The Department of Health, the city of Warwick and the CDC are recommending that pupils and staff from Greenwood Elementary School and their immediate household contact received a 5 day course of antibiotics.

**What antibiotics are you giving out?**

The Department of Health is offering a five day course of azithromycin (Zithromax) or doxycycline.

**How can the pupils and staff of Greenwood Elementary School and their immediate household contact get the antibiotics?**

The antibiotics were distributed at Greenwood Elementary schools earlier this week. All families were reached.

**If I am taking the antibiotics, can we resume normal activities?**

Yes, and it is important for everyone to remember to cough or sneeze into the inside of their elbow and wash their hands frequently with soap and warm water.

**I'm pregnant (or I'm nursing a baby). Can I take these antibiotics?**

Pregnant women and nursing mothers can take azithromycin.

**My child spent time in another household, can that family receive medication?**

Antibiotics were offered to Greenwood Elementary students, staff and immediate household contacts.

**My child who goes to Greenwood Elementary School just spent a few days with his/her other parent/guardian/cousins/friend/camp. Should that family/group receive antibiotics?**

No, spread of mycoplasma is thought to require prolonged, close contact with an infected individual.

**I run a home daycare center and my child goes to Greenwood Elementary School. Should the children in the home daycare center receive antibiotics?**

Yes, children in a home daycare center are considered member of the household. They may receive antibiotics at the distribution site.

**Should I allow siblings of Greenwood students to attend my preschool/daycare?**

Yes, spread of mycoplasma is thought to require prolonged, close contact with an infected individual.