



# THE FACTS:

## Streptococcus Pneumoniae (Pneumococcus)

### What is it?

*Streptococcus pneumoniae* is a bacterium that can cause infection leading to any of the following:

- Pneumonia (lung infection)
- Bacteraemia (infection of the blood)
- Meningitis (infection of the lining of the brain and spinal cord)

It is more common in adults and the most frequent cause of pneumonia among the elderly and those not able to fight off infections. This bacteria is also a frequent cause of ear infections (otitis media). All cases of streptococcus pneumonia that cause invasive disease (isolation of the bacteria from a normally sterile site) are reported to your local public health unit.

### Signs and Symptoms

Symptoms of pneumonia may include sudden onset of fever and chills, a productive cough and possibly chest pain. Symptoms will also be different dependant on the type of infection.

### How is it Spread?

The bacteria are spread from person to person through droplets in the air from coughing or sneezing. Bacteria can also be spread through the saliva of infected person when common items are shared (cups, straws, chewing toys, etc.).

The incubation period (the time from exposure to the time of developing illness) is not well defined but is believed to be as short as one to three days.

This bacterium can live at the back of the nose and throat of approximately 10-40% of healthy people without causing symptoms. People of all ages can be healthy carriers of this bacterium but young children are the most common.

### Who is at Risk?

Anyone can become infected. But those at an increased risk are the elderly, very young children, children that attend group day cares, the homeless and those with underlying medical conditions

### How is it treated?

This type of infection is generally treated with penicillin unless testing shows that the organism is resistant in which case a different type of antibiotic will be ordered.

### How is it prevented?

Vaccination is available to prevent some types of *streptococcus pneumoniae* infections. This should be offered to all at risk individuals.

For Further Information Contact the Infectious Disease Program at 625-8318.

*Adapted from the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, 2006*