

Frequently Asked Questions

Mycoplasma Pneumoniae

January 1, 2007

9:45 PM

What is mycoplasma infection?

Mycoplasma infection is respiratory illness caused by Mycoplasma pneumoniae, a type of bacteria.

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. Spread 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, headache and tiredness. 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 infections 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.

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.

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 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.

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.

How do I get more information?

Please consult the Department of Health Website at www.health.ri.gov . Or call the Department of Health, Family Health Information Line 1-800-974-7434.