

Preventing PCP in Adults & Children



Adapted from materials provided by the
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

For Adults:

What is PCP?

P*neumocystis carinii* (NEW-mo-SIS-tis CA-RIN- nee-eye) pneumonia, or PCP, is a severe illness found in people with HIV. It is caused by a germ called *Pneumocystis carinii*. Most people infected with this germ don't get pneumonia because their immune systems are normal. People whose immune systems are badly damaged by HIV can get PCP. People with HIV are less likely to get PCP today than in earlier years. However, PCP is still the most common serious infection among people with AIDS in the United States.

How do I know if I have PCP?

If you have PCP, you probably will have fever, cough, or trouble breathing. People with PCP may die if the infection is not treated quickly. See your doctor immediately if you have these symptoms. PCP can be diagnosed only by laboratory tests of fluid or tissue from the lungs.



How do you catch PCP?

Most scientists believe PCP is spread in the air, but they don't know if it lives in the soil or someplace else. The PCP germ is very common. Since it is difficult to prevent exposure to PCP, you should get medical care to prevent PCP.

How can I protect myself from PCP?

PCP can be prevented. The best drug for preventing PCP is trimethoprim-sulfamethoxazole, or TMP-SMX. TMP-SMX is a combination of two medicines. It has many different brand names, such as Bactrim, Septra, and Cotrim. Adults and older children can take TMP-SMX as a tablet. You can also get TMP-SMX as a liquid.



I was vaccinated for pneumonia. Won't that protect me against PCP?

No. The pneumonia vaccine protects you against another kind of pneumonia, but not against PCP. There is no vaccine for PCP.

When should I start treatment to prevent PCP?

You should have your blood tested regularly to check the strength of your immune system. Your doctor should prescribe TMP-SMX to prevent PCP if your CD4 cell count falls below 200. Your doctor may also put you on TMP-SMX if you show certain symptoms, such as having a temperature above 100°F that lasts for 2 weeks or longer, or if you get a fungal infection in the mouth or throat (commonly called "thrush"). Having thrush is believed to raise your risk for getting PCP.

What are the side effects of TMP-SMX?

TMP-SMX can make some people have a rash or feel sick. If the drug reaction is not severe, TMP-SMX should be continued because it works so much better than any other medicine to prevent PCP.



Are there other medicines to prevent PCP?

Yes. Check with your doctor about the possibility of other treatments. Take all of your medicines as prescribed by your doctor. Don't change how many pills you are taking without speaking with your doctor.

Can I get PCP more than once?

Yes. If you have already had PCP you can get it again. TMP-SMX can prevent second infections with PCP. Therefore, you should take TMP-SMX even after you have had PCP to prevent getting it again.

Is PCP sexually transmitted?

No. PCP is not sexually transmitted.

For Children:

How do I know if my child has PCP?

If your child has PCP, he or she probably will have fever, cough, or trouble breathing. Children with PCP may die if the infection is not treated quickly. **See your doctor immediately if your child has these symptoms.** PCP can be diagnosed only by laboratory tests of fluid or tissue from the lungs.





How could my child catch PCP?

Most scientists believe PCP is spread in the air, but they don't know if it lives in the soil or someplace else. The PCP germ is very common. Since it is difficult to prevent exposure to PCP, you should get medical care for your child to prevent PCP.

How can I prevent PCP in my child?

The best way to prevent PCP in children is to prevent HIV in children. Pregnant women with HIV should speak with their doctors about taking antiretroviral treatments to prevent passing their HIV infection to their unborn child. Children whose mothers have HIV also can take anti-viral treatments and medicine to prevent PCP. The best drug for preventing PCP is TMP-SMX. Older children can take TMP-SMX in tablet form. You can also get TMP-SMX as a liquid for babies and young children.

Who should get treatment to prevent PCP?

All babies born to mothers with HIV should get TMP-SMX starting at 4 to 6 weeks old, even if it isn't known yet if they have HIV. This will help prevent PCP infection before it starts. If HIV tests

later show that your baby does not have HIV, the TMP-SMX treatment can be stopped. If your baby has HIV, he or she should continue to get TMP-SMX treatment until reaching the age of 1 year. Your doctor will then decide if your child needs to continue the treatment, based on your baby's CD4 cell count.

Babies don't get TMP-SMX treatment until they are at least 4 weeks old because most children will be taking zidovudine (also called AZT), and small children shouldn't take the two drugs together. Also, TMP-SMX can cause liver damage in babies younger than 4 weeks old. Babies don't usually get PCP until they are at least 8 weeks old.

What are the side effects of TMP-SMX?

See answer in "For Adults" section.

Are there other medicines to prevent PCP?

Yes. Check with your doctor about the possibility of other treatments. Your child should take all of his or her medicines as prescribed by your doctor. Don't lower the dosage without speaking with your doctor.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

Free referrals & information:

CDC-INFO

1.800.CDC.INFO (232-4636)

TTY: 1.888.232.6348

In English, en Español 24 Hours/Day

Free materials:

CDC National Prevention Information Network

800.458.5231

1.301.562.1098 (*International*)

P.O. Box 6003

Rockville, MD 20849-6003

Free HIV/AIDS treatment information:

AIDSinfo

800.448.0440

Project Inform

800.822.7422

Drugs undergoing clinical trials:

AIDSinfo

800.448.0440

Social Security benefits:

Social Security Administration

800.772.1213

Child Health Insurance Program

1-877 KIDS NOW (543.7669)