

**Lancaster County Emergency Management Agency**  
**Lancaster County Health Advisory Council**  
**Important Information: *White Lung Pneumonia and Mycoplasma Pneumoniae***  
**12/07/2023**

Recently, multiple media outlets have reported an upswing in child pneumonia cases in China, and Ohio, and dubbed a new condition known as “white lung syndrome.” Despite references to “white lung” and “white lung syndrome” floating around right now, it’s not a medical term. Though the illness is usually not severe, it can affect people of all ages and may require medical attention for proper management by your primary care provider.

**What it is...**

Mycoplasma pneumonia (M. pneumoniae) is a type of bacteria that can cause respiratory infections in humans. It commonly leads to a mild form of pneumonia, also known as "walking pneumonia," characterized by symptoms such as cough, fever, and difficulty breathing. This bacterium is transmitted through respiratory droplets, and infections often occur in crowded or close-contact settings. Unlike other bacteria, mycoplasma pneumonia doesn't respond to typical antibiotics, necessitating alternate treatments by your primary care provider. Now that data has been examined more closely, it appears that what we are experiencing is a seasonal increase in respiratory infections.

**What it does...**

People can have the bacteria in their nose or throat at one time or another without being ill. However, when someone infected with M. pneumoniae coughs or sneezes, they can project small respiratory droplets that contain the bacteria. Other people can get infected if they breathe in those droplets, depending on their health status. In general, most people who spend a short amount of time with someone who is sick with M. pneumoniae do not get infected, however the bacteria spreads easily between people who live together due to proximity and time.

**What to expect...**

The symptoms of walking pneumonia are generally milder than those of typical pneumonia, and many people with this condition can continue with their daily activities. Common symptoms include:

- **Persistent Cough:** A cough is a primary symptom. It may start gradually and persist for an extended period.
- **Fatigue:** Individuals with walking pneumonia often experience fatigue and a general feeling of being unwell.
- **Fever:** While the fever is usually lower grade compared to typical pneumonia, some individuals may still experience an elevated body temperature.
- **Sore Throat:** A sore or scratchy throat may be present, along with other respiratory symptoms.
- **Headache:** Headaches are common, and they may range from mild to moderate.
- **Shortness of Breath:** While not as severe as in typical pneumonia, some people with walking pneumonia may experience mild shortness of breath, especially during physical activity.
- **Chest Pain:** Chest pain is typically mild and may be experienced during coughing or deep breathing.

It's important to note that the symptoms of walking pneumonia can be like those of other respiratory infections, please contact your primary care provider for an accurate diagnosis.

**What to do...**

Basic “seasonal” sickness precautions work well to prevent illness, including handwashing, cough and sneeze etiquette. People can get infected with *Mycoplasma pneumoniae* more than once. While there is no vaccine to prevent *M. pneumoniae* infections, there are things people can do to protect themselves and others. Most people will recover from an infection caused by *Mycoplasma pneumoniae* without antibiotics. Ask primary care provider about treatments that can help you feel better while you are recovering.

### **Final Thoughts...**

Most recent emergency department information suggests that infection levels are consistent with seasonal trends. Hospital data remains consistent with previous years for children ages 0 to 4 years, with slight increases above typical levels for children ages 5 to 17 years, but still in line with pre-pandemic years. The rise in cases highlighted by the media is most likely due to viruses and bacteria we expect to see during the respiratory illness season, and not caused by a pathogen from another country.

### **Resources:**

Center for Disease Control (2022) *Mycoplasma Pneumoniae*  
[Mycoplasma pneumoniae | CDC](#)

Prevention (2023) What Is White Lung Syndrome and How Is It Treated? Doctors Explain  
[What Is White Lung Syndrome? Signs, Symptoms, and Treatment Options \(prevention.com\)](#)

Everyday Health (2023) The Truth About White Lung Syndrome and Mycoplasma Pneumonia  
<https://www.everydayhealth.com/pneumonia/white-lung-syndrome-and-recent-pneumonia-outbreaks/>