

Mycoplasma Infection - The Facts

Periodically, we see a number of cases of Mycoplasma infection in our clinic, with outbreaks occurring at a few of the schools attended by our patients.

As this is an infection which is not widely recognized, nor well understood by the community, we hope you find this information helpful as well as reassuring.

What is Mycoplasma Infection?

Mycoplasma infection is a respiratory illness caused by Mycoplasma Pneumoniae, a microscopic organism related to bacteria. The medical term for the lung infection is Atypical Pneumonia or Community Acquired Pneumonia. A common lay term is "Walking Pneumonia" as most patients are able to function quite normally, i.e. able to "walk around".

What are the Symptoms?

Symptoms usually develop around 2-3 weeks after exposure to the organism. Common initial symptoms include; fever, sore throat, tiredness, body aches, headaches, dizzy spells and a persistent dry cough.

The early stages of this infection can be very similar to that of the common cold or even influenza.

With Mycoplasma infection however, the symptoms can be persistent, especially the cough and tiredness, which can linger for weeks and sometimes even months.

How is it contracted?

Mycoplasma, like the cold and flu, is spread by respiratory droplets, by

coughing and sneezing. It is usually spread by close, prolonged contact, which explains outbreaks in schools, institutions and amongst families.

How is it diagnosed?

Most cases are diagnosed by the clinical history, possibly a chest x-ray in combination with a blood test. Confirmation by the blood test is usually best done about 1 week after the onset on symptoms. Absolute confirmation by the blood test requires 2 tests; one during the initial acute or early stage of the infection, and a second test during the recovery or convalescing stage. However, in most cases evidence of recovery obviates the need to perform the second blood test.

What is the Treatment?

Mycoplasma is readily treated with antibiotics. However treatment is not always required, especially in mild cases, as most infections eventually resolve on their own. If treatment is initiated it involves taking antibiotics for 2 weeks.

Are there any Vaccines or preventive measures available?

Currently there are no vaccines available. This is not a concern as Mycoplasma tends to be a relatively mild and a self-limiting infection.

Simple preventive measures include covering one's face during coughing and sneezing, and avoiding close contact with others.

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