# Doctor warns of rising summer pneumonia cases due to mild 'walking pneumonia' strain



# Beware the Summer Risks of Pneumonia: An Urgent Call to Awareness

In a stark warning echoed recently on BBC's *Morning Live*, Dr Xand van Tulleken has highlighted a pressing concern regarding pneumonia, a condition that, despite popular belief, is not confined to the winter months. This cautionary message comes in the wake of alarming statistics and growing instances of this severe respiratory infection across the UK.

Dr van Tulleken emphasised that pneumonia can develop in individuals of all ages, countering the misconception that it predominantly afflicts the elderly or those with pre-existing health conditions. "You've got to be alert to it even in the summer; it's not just a winter problem," he stated. This misinformation can lead to complacency, thereby increasing the risk of untreated cases, which can have catastrophic consequences.

The disease stems from various sources, including bacterial and viral infections or other foreign substances entering the lungs. Once inside, these irritants provoke an immune response, causing white blood cells, or leukocytes, to flood the area in an attempt to fight off the infection. Unfortunately, this surge can lead to complications, as these cells may obstruct airflow, resulting in breathing difficulties.

Currently, the NHS anticipates that during the winter months, it sees between 2,000 to 4,000 pneumonia cases weekly. However, in summer, there can still be a significant influx of between 700 to 1,500 cases, a statistic that underscores the year-round presence of this illness. This past year witnessed a surge in incidences of 'walking pneumonia', particularly due to a species of bacteria known as *mycoplasma pneumoniae*, with recorded cases more than seven-fold higher than previous years. This particular strain allows patients to maintain daily routines due to its initially mild symptoms, inadvertently facilitating its spread.

The correlation between pneumonia and previous respiratory infections, such as colds or bronchitis, highlights a precarious cycle. As Dr van Tulleken articulated, an upper respiratory tract infection alters the lung microbiome, creating conditions in which harmful bacteria can flourish and lead deeper infections. Symptoms such as coughing, chest pain, and fatigue can manifest suddenly or develop over several days; however, in some instances, the signs may be deceptively mild, making diagnosis challenging.

To address these risks, both the CDC and the American Lung Association advise proactive preventive measures. Vaccination remains a pivotal strategy, as immunisations can significantly reduce the risk of pneumonia caused by various bacteria and viruses, including pneumococcus. Moreover, maintaining rigorous hygiene practices such as handwashing, alongside a healthy lifestyle characterised by regular exercise and adequate sleep, strengthens the immune system, providing additional layers of defence against this insidious disease.

Treatment for pneumonia typically involves antibiotics for bacterial infections, with most individuals recovering within two to four weeks. However, those at increased risk may require hospitalisation, where they can be closely monitored and provided with oxygen to aid breathing.

As mentioned by Dr van Tulleken, “Imagine a sponge that's been left by the sink; you never squeeze it out and let it dry, it gets a bit 'rotty' and smelly," explaining the fluid buildup in the lungs that characterises pneumonia. This graphic analogy underscores the importance of seeking medical attention promptly to avert severe outcomes.

In conclusion, the call for heightened awareness regarding pneumonia should resonate on all fronts — from healthcare professionals to the general public. With the potential for serious implications lurking even in the balmy days of summer, understanding and recognising the signs of pneumonia is crucial.

The potential ramifications of ignoring these warnings are stark, particularly as the UK grapples with a troubling increase in pneumonia cases. Persistent education on this topic could save lives, especially among the vulnerable populations who may be unaware of the dangers posed by this year-round illness.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-14690663/doctor-warns-deadly-bacteria-summer-pneumonia.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[7]](https://www.lung.org/blog/you-can-still-get-pneumonia-in-summer)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-14690663/doctor-warns-deadly-bacteria-summer-pneumonia.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[6]](https://www.webmd.com/lung/can-you-prevent-pneumonia)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-14690663/doctor-warns-deadly-bacteria-summer-pneumonia.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[5]](https://www.cdc.gov/pneumonia/prevention/vaccination.html)
* Paragraph 4 – [[2]](https://www.cdc.gov/pneumonia/prevention/), [[3]](https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/pneumonia/symptoms-causes/syc-20354204)
* Paragraph 5 – [[4]](https://www.lung.org/lung-health-diseases/lung-disease-lookup/pneumonia/preventing-pneumonia), [[6]](https://www.webmd.com/lung/can-you-prevent-pneumonia)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-14690663/doctor-warns-deadly-bacteria-summer-pneumonia.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/pneumonia/symptoms-causes/syc-20354204)
* Paragraph 7 – [[4]](https://www.lung.org/lung-health-diseases/lung-disease-lookup/pneumonia/preventing-pneumonia), [[5]](https://www.cdc.gov/pneumonia/prevention/vaccination.html)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-14690663/doctor-warns-deadly-bacteria-summer-pneumonia.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.cdc.gov/pneumonia/prevention/> - The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provides comprehensive information on pneumonia prevention, emphasizing the importance of vaccinations and healthy living practices. Vaccines can help prevent pneumonia caused by pneumococcus bacteria and the flu virus. Good hygiene, such as regular handwashing, quitting smoking, and maintaining a strong immune system through regular physical activity and a healthy diet, are also recommended to lower the risk of pneumonia. The CDC highlights that pneumonia affects millions of people worldwide each year, but many cases can be prevented and treated effectively.
3. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/pneumonia/symptoms-causes/syc-20354204> - The Mayo Clinic offers detailed insights into pneumonia, describing it as an infection that inflames the air sacs in one or both lungs, which may fill with fluid or pus, leading to symptoms like cough with phlegm, fever, chills, and difficulty breathing. Pneumonia can be caused by various organisms, including bacteria, viruses, and fungi. The clinic notes that pneumonia can range from mild to life-threatening and is most serious for infants, young children, older adults, and individuals with health problems or weakened immune systems.
4. <https://www.lung.org/lung-health-diseases/lung-disease-lookup/pneumonia/preventing-pneumonia> - The American Lung Association provides guidance on preventing pneumonia, emphasizing that many cases can be prevented by following simple steps. These include getting vaccinated against pneumococcal pneumonia, which is caused by Streptococcus pneumoniae bacteria, and other respiratory infections. The association also recommends practicing good hygiene, such as washing hands frequently, avoiding smoking, and maintaining overall health through a balanced diet and regular exercise to strengthen the immune system.
5. <https://www.cdc.gov/pneumonia/prevention/vaccination.html> - The CDC outlines the role of vaccinations in preventing pneumonia, highlighting that vaccines can help prevent infections by some of the bacteria and viruses that cause pneumonia. Vaccines are available for bacterial infections like Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib), pertussis (whooping cough), and pneumococcal, as well as viral infections such as COVID-19, influenza (flu), measles, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), and varicella (chickenpox). The CDC emphasizes that immunizations and appropriate treatments could prevent many deaths from pneumonia each year.
6. <https://www.webmd.com/lung/can-you-prevent-pneumonia> - WebMD discusses preventive measures for pneumonia, emphasizing that regular handwashing with soap and water for at least 20 seconds is one of the best ways to avoid getting sick. The article also highlights the importance of quitting smoking, as smoking damages the lungs and makes it harder for them to fight off infections like pneumonia. Additionally, maintaining a healthy lifestyle through regular exercise, a balanced diet, adequate sleep, and stress management can strengthen the immune system and reduce the risk of pneumonia.
7. <https://www.lung.org/blog/you-can-still-get-pneumonia-in-summer> - The American Lung Association addresses the misconception that pneumonia is only a winter illness, stating that pneumococcal pneumonia can occur any time of the year, including summer. The article notes that while there may be an uptick in cases during the cold, wet months, it is still possible to be sidelined with a respiratory infection during the summer months. The association emphasizes the importance of vaccination, especially for adults over the age of 65, and highlights that the risks are higher for individuals with chronic lung diseases, such as COPD and asthma.