

Family Medicine Clerkship Plain Language Summary

Title: Routine follow-up chest radiographs for confirmation of resolution of uncomplicated community acquired pneumonia is unnecessary.

Name: Daniel Kebed, MS4

Plain Language Summary:

Community acquired pneumonia (CAP) is a disease of the lungs caused by a number of infectious organisms. These organisms are commonly present in the community. These include bacteria and viruses. The most common organism that causes CAP is a type of bacteria called *Streptococcus pneumoniae*. The infection makes breathing difficult by collapsing part or all of the lungs. Sometimes it might also fill the lung spaces with fluid leaving no space for air. People affected by the illness almost always require treatment with a type of medication called antibiotic. Some people might even need hospital admissions. Normally healthy people with the disease usually recover without any further complications. Sometimes a complication of the infection may occur. Patients with additional preexisting conditions are prone to developing these complications. Elderly patients and those with other lung and heart disease may be at higher risk of developing complications. The complications at times may lead to permanent disability or death.

For those patients who are at risk of these type of infections, prevention is a priority. Prevention can be achieved by vaccines against the most common organisms. The disease is diagnosed by signs and symptoms of the patient. Chest x-ray is a type of image of the chest which can aid in the diagnosis of the disease. The part of the lung with the infection may appear white on the image. For patients with the disease early treatment leads to a good outcome. There are well studied treatment options for the disease. Once treated, patients with uncomplicated course do not need subsequent chest x-ray on follow up as long as they are responding to treatment. This is because the chest image may take a while to clear up and offer no additional value. This avoids exposing patients to unnecessary procedures. It also saves money, time and resources for everyone involved. Please inform your doctor if your symptoms worsen or develop new symptoms after treatment. In this case you might need another chest image.

Additional Resources:

American thoracic society: www.thoracic.org

The Mayo Clinic: <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/pneumonia/DS00135>

National Guideline Clearinghouse: www.guidelines.gov

Infectious Diseases Society of America: www.idsociety.org

Key Words:

Community acquired pneumonia, pneumonia follow-up, chest radiographs, chest x-ray, chest infection.

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