

Title: Acute Bronchitis

Author: Jon Papic

Date: 11/6/08

Key words: Acute bronchitis, Cough, Respiratory tract infection

Abstract: This is a patient educational tool on acute bronchitis covering some common questions regarding etiology, symptoms and treatment.

This document was created by a medical student enrolled in the Primary Care Clerkship at the University of Minnesota Medical School as part of the course project. The aim of the project is to present information on a medical topic in the format of a patient education handout. It does not necessarily reflect the views of the University of Minnesota Medical School physicians and faculty. These materials are provided for informational purposes only and are in no way intended to take the place of the advice and recommendations of your personal health care provider. The information provided may no longer be up to date since it has not been reviewed since the date of creation. The information provided should not be used to diagnose a health problem or disease, or as a means of determining treatment. In the event of a medical emergency, immediately contact a doctor or call 911.

Acute Bronchitis

Jon Papic

What Is It?

Acute bronchitis is inflammation of the lower respiratory tract in a normally healthy person. Basically, the bronchi, which are tubes located in your lungs, become irritated and swell up.

What Causes It?

A virus usually causes acute bronchitis. These are some of the same viruses that cause the “common cold”. Rare causes include bacteria.

What Are the Symptoms?

Common symptoms include a productive cough meaning sputum often clear or green in color comes up when coughing. A sore throat and runny nose is usually present. Wheezing may also be present.

How Is It Diagnosed?

Acute bronchitis is a clinical diagnosis. This means it is diagnosed based on symptoms and exclusion of other causes. There is no one test that can tell if someone has acute bronchitis.

How Is It Treated?

Acute bronchitis will usually go away on its own in 2 weeks. Cough suppressants, Tylenol, and bronchodilators can be used to help symptoms.

Should I Take Antibiotics?

No, large studies have shown minimal or no benefit in those patients who have been treated with antibiotics. Also, antibiotics carry risks. Antibiotics should only be used if a bacterial cause is suspected.

How Can I prevent It?

Frequent hand washing will help reduce the risk.

Is Acute bronchitis The Same Thing As Pneumonia?

No, pneumonia is an infection caused by bacteria and requires antibiotics.

What are Signs and Symptoms Should I Be Concerned About?

- High fever (Greater than 100.4 F)
- Shaking chills
- Fast shallow breathing
- Shortness of breath
- Chest pain
- Worsening symptoms after 1 week

What Other Important Information Should I Know?

Acute bronchitis occurs in normally healthy people. People who have a current medical condition such as asthma, COPD, cystic fibrosis or infants require different testing and treatments.