Chest infections and pneumonia

Chest infections are very common, particularly after a cold or a bout of the flu, and especially during the winter. Older people, people with other serious health conditions and people who smoke can be particularly vulnerable to catching chest infections.

If you're experiencing a chesty cough (which may or may not produce phlegm or mucus), pain in your chest that gets worse when you breathe in or cough, or difficulty breathing then you may have a chest infection.

There are two main types of chest infection - acute bronchitis and pneumonia. They both have similar symptoms but pneumonia is more serious and may need antibiotics or even hospital treatment.

Most chest infections clear up by themselves and don't need any medical treatment as long as you're generally in good health. However, you should see your GP if:

- you have a chest infection that lasts for longer than three weeks
- you start coughing up blood in your phlegm
- you're running a high temperature
- you experience sharp or stabbing pains in the chest.

Any of these signs could mean that your chest infection is getting worse and needs to be treated.

- What you can do to get better
- People at higher risk of chest infections
- Chest infections and older people
- Other information and advice