

# Talking With Residents and Family Members About Lower Respiratory Tract Infections

My mother has a cough. She's bringing up yellow phlegm. Does she have pneumonia?

- There are many kinds of respiratory tract infections that can cause a cough, such as colds, bronchitis, influenza, and pneumonia.
- A cough by itself—even if it is associated with yellow phlegm—does not need to be treated with an antibiotic.
- Symptoms of a respiratory infection that may indicate the need for an antibiotic are a fever with a productive cough or difficulty breathing.

Last time this happened, the doctor prescribed an antibiotic and she got better.

- If your mother is experiencing a bad cough and fever or difficulty breathing, she should be evaluated for pneumonia and might need an antibiotic.
- If she has a cough without fever or difficulty breathing, she may have a chest cold, caused by a virus.
- Antibiotics will not help if she has a virus.
- Taking antibiotics when there is not an infection can be harmful.

What if she gets worse? She had “double pneumonia” last winter.

- We will check on your mother often to see how she is feeling.
- We will take her temperature and ask about her symptoms regularly.
- She may be given acetaminophen (Tylenol® or other brand) and/or a cough suppressant to help her feel better. We will encourage her to drink more.
- If needed, we can check her bloodwork and get a chest x ray.
- Some viruses, like influenza, can make people very sick. We can diagnose and treat influenza but do not have good medications for other viruses.

I'm still worried about my mother. What else can we do for her?

- Thank you for telling me about your concerns. What else are you noticing?
- We will check her vital signs every 6 hours. You can call us back tomorrow for an update.
- If something changes and she shows other signs or symptoms of a bacterial infection, an antibiotic can be given.