

Methods for Diagnosing Pneumonia in Children

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Abstract: This article discusses pneumonia in children and the diagnostic methods used to detect it. It covers the clinical signs, laboratory and instrumental methods of investigation, and modern medical diagnostic approaches. It also analyzes age-specific symptoms and diagnostic algorithms. This article is useful for pediatricians, medical students, nurses, and parents.

Introduction

Pneumonia is an infectious inflammation of the lungs that is particularly widespread among children and poses a serious health risk. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), millions of children are affected by pneumonia annually. If not detected in time, this disease can lead to severe complications. Therefore, early detection and accurate diagnosis of pneumonia are essential steps in the treatment process.

Various diagnostic methods are used to identify pneumonia (inflammatory lung disease) in children. These methods are selected based on the severity of the illness, the child's age, and overall condition. The main diagnostic methods are outlined below:

1. Clinical Examination

- **Physical examination:** The doctor evaluates the child's breathing, presence of cough, fever, general condition, and signs such as bluish lips or fingernails.
- **Respiratory rate:** An increased respiratory rate relative to age is a key indicator of pneumonia.
- **Chest auscultation (listening with a stethoscope):**
 - ✓ Rales (crackles), harsh breathing, and "crepitation" (sounds from the alveoli) may be detected.

2. Laboratory Tests

- **Complete Blood Count (CBC):**
 - ✓ Elevated white blood cell (WBC) count indicates infection.
 - ✓ Elevated Erythrocyte Sedimentation Rate (ESR).
- **C-reactive protein (CRP):**
 - ✓ Helps assess the degree of inflammation.

3. Radiological Investigations

➤ **Chest X-ray:**

- ✓ One of the most reliable methods for diagnosing pneumonia.
- ✓ Shows darkened or lightened areas in lung tissue (inflammatory foci).
- ✓ In some cases, pleural effusion or other complications may be visible.

4. Microbiological Tests

➤ **Sputum analysis (mucus from coughing):**

- ✓ Identifies bacteria or viruses.

➤ **Nasal and throat swabs:**

- ✓ Useful in diagnosing viral pneumonia.

➤ **Blood culture:**

- ✓ Detects bacteremia, especially in severe cases.

5. Additional Examinations (in severe or complicated cases)

➤ **Lung ultrasound:**

- ✓ Used when avoiding radiation exposure is necessary.

➤ **Computed Tomography (CT):**

- ✓ Used in severe or unclear cases for precise diagnosis.

➤ **Pulse oximetry:**

- ✓ Measures blood oxygen levels (SpO₂).

Age-Specific Diagnostic Considerations:

➤ **Newborns:** Symptoms may be vague — loss of appetite, vomiting, decreased alertness.

➤ **Infants under 1 year:** Rapid breathing and chest retractions are key signs.

If you suspect pneumonia in a child (fever, fast breathing, cough, weakness), you should consult a pediatrician or pediatric infectious disease specialist as soon as possible.

💡 Pneumonia Prevention Methods (Prophylaxis)

1. **Vaccination:**

- ✓ **Pneumococcal vaccine (PCV):** Protects against major bacterial causes of pneumonia.
- ✓ **Influenza vaccine:** Prevents flu, which can lead to pneumonia.
- ✓ **Haemophilus influenzae type B (Hib) vaccine:** Especially important for children under 5.
- ✓ Vaccinations against measles, pertussis (whooping cough), diphtheria, and other infections are also essential.

2. Hygiene practices:

- ✓ Frequent handwashing with soap.
- ✓ Keep newborns away from people who are coughing or sneezing.

3. Healthy lifestyle:

- ✓ Proper nutrition (especially breastfeeding) strengthens immunity.
- ✓ Adequate sleep and exposure to fresh air.
- ✓ Avoiding passive smoke exposure from adults smoking at home.

4. Preventing exposure to cold:

- ✓ Dress children appropriately in cold weather.
- ✓ Avoid damp and poorly ventilated rooms.

Q Pneumonia Treatment Methods

1. Home treatment (for mild cases):

- ✓ Antibiotics as prescribed by a doctor (if bacterial pneumonia is suspected).
- ✓ Increased fluid intake to loosen mucus.
- ✓ Antipyretics (e.g., paracetamol) to reduce fever.
- ✓ Cough relievers if prescribed.
- ✓ Rest and fresh air.

2. Hospital treatment (for moderate to severe cases):

- ✓ Intravenous medications (infusion therapy).
- ✓ Oxygen therapy (if respiratory distress is present).
- ✓ Strong antibiotics via IV.
- ✓ Treatment under laboratory monitoring.

⚠ Warning Signs That Require Immediate Medical Attention:

- ✓ Difficulty or rapid breathing.
- ✓ Bluish lips or fingertips.
- ✓ Persistent fever (lasting more than 3 days).
- ✓ Refusal to eat or reduced alertness.
- ✓ Constant vomiting or unconsciousness.

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