



# Health Concerns

## PCP

Last updated September 2003

### What is PCP?

- PCP is the short form for “Pneumocystis Carinii Pneumonia”. It is a lung infection that can be life threatening. It is one of the most common and most serious infections associated with AIDS.
- HIV positive people with CD4 count below 250 are at risk of developing this type of pneumonia.

### How does one get PCP?

- PCP is caused by the germ Pneumocystis Carinii. This germ is very common and most people have been exposed to it. However, it can only cause disease in people with weakened immune system, such as people who have had transplants, chemotherapy for cancer or advanced HIV infection.

### What are the signs and symptoms of PCP?

- Symptoms of PCP include fever, dry cough, tiredness and increasing shortness of breath.
- The cough in PCP is usually dry, especially in non-smokers. However, in smokers there may be sputum (phlegm) that comes with the cough.
- The symptoms may appear mild at first and gradually gets worse over several weeks.
- If PCP is detected early, it can usually be treated. However, if left untreated, PCP can be life threatening. If you have these symptoms you should see your doctor right away.

### How can I prevent PCP?

- If your immune system is healthy (CD4 count of over 500), you would not get sick from PCP. PCP is not a contagious disease that you can get from being around people carrying the germ.
- If your T4 (CD4) count is between 250 and 500, your risk of getting PCP would not be significantly increased compared to a person with CD4 over 500.
- If your T4 (CD4) count is below 250 or if you had PCP before, your risk of getting sick from PCP is greatly increased, you should therefore take one of the medications that can prevent PCP.
- Medications that are used to prevent PCP include:
  - Trimethoprim-Sulfamethoxazole (TMP/SMX or Septra or Bactrim) by mouth
  - Dapsone (Avlosulfon) by mouth either alone or in combination with another drug called Pyrimethamine.
  - Pentamidine by inhalation or by intravenous infusion periodically.
- These treatments will prevent most PCP from occurring but it is not 100 % safe, in some people who takes medication to prevent PCP they may still get sick from it.



## How can PCP be treated?

- There are different treatments that can be used to treat PCP. The choice of treatments depend on a person's general health, her/his drug allergies and the seriousness of his/her symptoms. People who are less sick can be treated at home on oral medications, those with very serious symptoms usually requires hospitalization and treatment by intravenous medications.
- Usually the treatment for PCP needs to be taken for three weeks. It may take a whole week of treatment before a person with PCP starts to feel better. After that the person should stay on medications to prevent PCP for life.
- Medications that are used to treat PCP include:
  - Trimethoprim-Sulfamethoxazole (TMP/SMX, Septra or Bactrim) by mouth or by IV (given through a vein)
  - Pentamidine by IV
  - Dapsone (Avlosulfon) and Trimethoprim (Proloprim) by mouth
  - Clindamycin and Primaquine by mouth
  - Atovaquone (Mepron) by mouth
  - Prednisone may also be used in combination with the above medications in severe cases of PCP.

**Copyright @ACAS 2001 & 2003.** This fact sheet is produced by ACAS (Asian Community AIDS Services) and is available in English, Chinese (Traditional and Simplified), Tagalog and Vietnamese. Funding for this project is provided by the Ontario HIV Treatment Network (OHTN) and Health Canada. Copies can be downloaded at : [www.acas.org/treatment](http://www.acas.org/treatment). ACAS provides comprehensive support and case management services for Asian people living with HIV/AIDS; and HIV/AIDS prevention education to the east and southeast Asian Canadian populations in the Greater Toronto Area. ACAS is located at 33 Isabella Street, Suite 107, Toronto, Ontario M4Y 2P7. Tel: (416)-963-4300, Fax: (416)-963-4371 Email: [support@acas.org](mailto:support@acas.org)

**Legal Disclaimer:** While we make every attempt to ensure the accuracy and reliability of information contained in this website/ fact sheet, the information provided here are designed for reference purposes only. These information should not be relied upon as a substitute for medical advice from a qualified professional health care provider and should not be used for diagnosing or treating a condition or illness. Please consult a physician if you have any concerns about your health, treatment regimen and questions related to HIV/AIDS. ACAS, its employees and board members will not be responsible for any loss or harm, however arising, from the use of, or reliance on this information.