

what is mycoplasma?

Mycoplasma is often poorly understood and misdiagnosed. In Singapore there continues to be outbreaks in schools, workplaces and amongst families.

Mycoplasma is an infection caused by the bacteria Mycoplasma Pneumonia. It usually presents as an upper respiratory tract infection. Mycoplasma can be difficult to diagnose as it mimics the symptoms of other bacterial and viral infections, such as the common cold.

how do you contract mycoplasma?

Mycoplasma is spread very much like the common cold, through respiratory droplets — by coughing and sneezing or by direct contact with objects soiled by these. Transmission is thought to require prolonged close contact with an infected person. Mycoplasma infection can occur at any age.

symptoms

Often symptoms are so mild that the infection is not recognised. In the early stages of the illness, Mycoplasma can appear similar to a cold or the flu. It may lead to a persistent cough and fatigue that can last for months.

Typical symptoms include:

- Headaches
- Fever
- Sore throat
- Fatigue
- Lethargy
- Dry cough

The cough is usually worse at night, and may become productive and persistent.

Mycoplasma may lead to:

- Bronchitis
- Wheezing
- Pneumonia
- Ear infections
- Sinusitis

And in rare cases even infections of the heart and brain.

diagnosis

Mycoplasma can be difficult to diagnose, as it mimics the symptoms of other bacterial and viral infections, such as the common cold. Diagnosis is often made by medical examination and may require a blood test and or chest x-ray. There is a blood test that is widely available in Singapore that tests for antibodies in the blood. It does not test for the bacteria itself. Interpretation of results can be difficult as it combines two types of antibodies, one that rises acutely with the illness IgM and IgG that remains positive for years and indicates prior exposure. Interpretation needs to be considered in conjunction with the patient's symptoms. To be certain of a correct diagnosis a repeat blood test can be performed after 2–3 weeks but this is not common.

treatment

Exclusion from childcare, school or work is not necessary. No vaccine is available at present. Effective antibiotic treatment is available, although most people recover completely without it. Antibiotics may speed recovery, but appear not to reduce the period for which a person is able to transmit infection. There is no medical evidence that suggests antibiotic treatment effectively treats the tiredness that can linger with an infection.

prevention

As with any respiratory tract infection, it is important to cover your mouth and nose when coughing and sneezing. Use tissues when coughing, sneezing or wiping the nose, and dispose of these appropriately. It is recommended that good hand washing procedures are followed.

