

# Medicare Risk Adjustment Coding Focus

## Pneumonia

Pneumonia is an infection of one or both lungs that causes the air sacs, or alveoli, to fill with purulent (fluid or pus). Pneumonia may cause a cough with phlegm (mucus), difficulty breathing, fever and chills. According to the American Thoracic Society, pneumonia is the most common reason for hospital admissions in the US other than childbirth, with approximately one million cases reported on an annual basis.<sup>1</sup>

### Types and causes

There are over 30 different causes of pneumonia, but the most common types are bacterial and viral. Bacterial pneumonia is most often caused by the streptococcus pneumoniae or hemophilus influenzae.

These strains cause what is commonly referred to as community acquired pneumonia. It can occur after having a cold or the flu, or it can develop on its own, and may affect patches throughout the lungs, or only one part or lobe of the lung, a condition known as lobar pneumonia. People who smoke, abuse alcohol, or who have a weakened immune system are at greater risk for contracting bacterial pneumonia.<sup>2</sup>

Viral pneumonia accounts for about one-third of all pneumonia cases, and is most commonly caused by the influenza virus. In this instance, pneumonia can become severe and sometimes fatal. People with chronic lung disease are at higher risk for viral pneumonia and those who have it are at higher risk for developing bacterial pneumonia.

### Signs and symptoms

Pneumonia signs and symptoms vary depending on the underlying cause. However, typical symptoms can be any of the following: high fever, productive cough, shortness of breath, fatigue, confusion and chills. These symptoms may range from mild to severe.

### Treatment

Treatment for pneumonia is dependent upon the type and severity of the condition. Treatments may include antibiotics, cough medicines, fever reducers, pain relievers and antiviral medications. More severe cases of

pneumonia may require hospitalization. The goal of treatment is to cure the infection and prevent complications.

### Coding guidance

Depending upon the underlying cause, diagnosis codes for specific types of pneumonia can be found in various chapters within the ICD-10-CM codebook. However, the diagnosis codes for the most common types of pneumonia are found in chapter 10, Diseases of the Respiratory System.<sup>3</sup> Codes from categories J12-J17 include viral and bacterial pneumonia, and include instruction to code first associated influenza, or underlying disease, when applicable. When the organism is not known or documented, codes from subcategory J18, pneumonia, unspecified organism, should be utilized. Documentation should include sufficient detail, such as the causative organism, if known, and any underlying causes (for instance, aspiration) to code to the highest degree of specificity.

Chronic Bronchitis (HCC 111)	
J12*	Viral pneumonia, not elsewhere classified (no HCC)
J13	Pneumonia due to streptococcus pneumonia (HCC 115)
J14	Pneumonia due to hemophilus influenza (HCC 115)
J15*	Bacterial pneumonia, not elsewhere classified (HCC 114/115)
J16*	Pneumonia due to other infectious organisms (no HCC)
J17*	Pneumonia in diseases classified elsewhere (no HCC)
J18.1	Lobar pneumonia (HCC 115)
J69*	Pneumonitis due to solids and liquids (HCC 114)
*Additional characters required	

### Resources

- American Thoracic Society. (2019). *Top 20 Pneumonia Facts – 2019*. Accessed June, 2020, from <https://www.thoracic.org>
- Johns Hopkins Medicine. (n.d.). *Pneumonia*. Accessed June, 2020, from <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org>
- Schmidt, A. & Patterson, L. (2020). *ICD-10-CM Experts for Physicians*. Optum Insight, Inc.

Reference the ICD-10-CM Codebook, CMS-HCC Risk Adjustment Model(s) and AHA Coding Clinic for complete code sets and official coding guidance.