

the infection has cleared, patients will need to take lower doses by mouth either once a day or three-times weekly to prevent it from returning.

### **Can PCP be prevented?**

Yes, it can. As with the treatment of PCP, co-trimoxazole is the most powerful drug to prevent this disease from occurring in the first place. Preventing an infection such as this is known as *prophylaxis*. One double-strength tablet (or two regular strength tablets) of cotrimoxazole is recommended for people in the second, third, and fourth stages of HIV disease.

Unfortunately, between 25% and 50% of HIV-positive people are allergic to co-trimoxazole. Two of the main symptoms seen in people with allergic reactions are fever and rash. Very often, the allergy can be so severe that people need to stop taking the drugs.

Because there are not many other drugs available to help prevent PCP, the HIV/AIDS Policy Guideline recommends a process called desensitisation. In co-trimoxazole desensitisation, the goal is to teach your body to get used to the drugs. To do this, your doctor can start you on tiny doses of the drug, using a liquid formula, and increase it gradually over a few days or over a few weeks. This has been shown to be very successful.

## **Other Respiratory Infections**

PCP and tuberculosis are only two AIDS-related lung infections that can cause serious problems. Other bacteria, including *S. pneumoniae* and *H. influenzae*, can spread from person to person. Because these bacteria can make someone very sick, they usually need to be treated - especially if the patient has a damaged immune system.

### **How are these respiratory infections treated?**

It all depends on the bacteria in the lungs. To find this out, your doctor will want to take an X-ray picture of your lungs and test a sample of your blood and fluid from your lungs (sputum).

The most common medicine used to treat a bacterial respiratory infection is amoxicillin. You will need to take these medicine three times a day and should not stop the drug until your doctor tells you to (usually after one week or 10 days).

Some people are allergic to amoxicillin and will need to take another drug called erythromycin. This drug needs to be taken four times a day, usually for two weeks.

Some people have a form, or strain, of bacteria that does not respond to amoxicillin. This is called *resistance*. If this happens, your doctor will probably switch the amoxicillin for erythromycin.

Erythromycin is also used to treat other types of bacterial pneumonia.

As always, you should take your medicine correctly and finish all the pills given to you by your doctor. If your symptoms get worse while taking the medicine, including difficulty breathing, fevers, and increased heart rate, you should see your doctor immediately.