



Pulmonary Embolism

What Is Pulmonary Embolism (PE)?

Pulmonary means “lungs,” and embolism means “blockage or obstruction.” A **pulmonary embolism (PE)** happens when a blood clot gets trapped in an artery in the lung. The clot usually travels from the deep veins in the legs.

Symptoms

The most common symptoms of PE are unexplained shortness of breath and/or chest pain with difficulty breathing. But warning signs can be different for each person.

Some people may experience:

- Chest pain that is worse when taking a breath
- Feeling nervous or anxious
- Fainting and/or losing consciousness
- Coughing up blood or bloody mucus
- Excessive sweating
- Fever
- Leg pain or swelling, or both
- Discolored skin (appearing blue or gray)

A pulmonary embolism is a medical emergency. If you experience these symptoms and have any risk factors for PE, get medical attention right away.

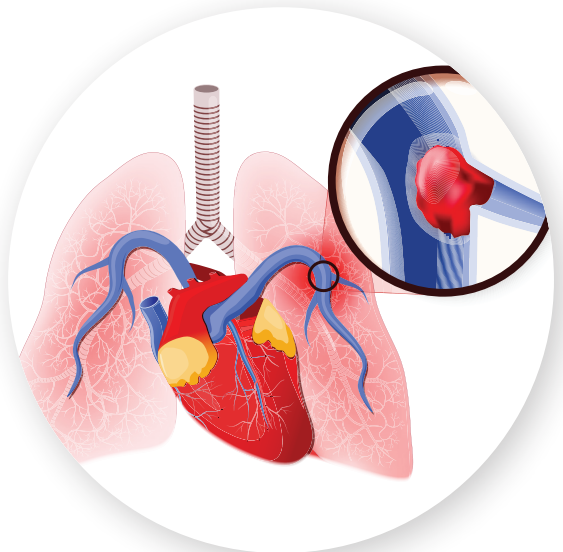
Diagnosis

PE can be difficult to diagnose, especially if you already have heart or lung disease. It’s been called “the Great Masquerader” because it can mimic pneumonia, congestive heart failure, and **pleurisy** (a condition that causes lung tissue inflammation).

Your health care provider may order more than one test to figure out if you have PE:

- **Blood test:** A D-dimer blood test looks for a protein that’s made when a blood clot dissolves in your body. If levels are high, you might have PE. Other blood tests can check the amount of oxygen and carbon dioxide in your blood. They can also reveal if you have an inherited clotting disorder.
- **Chest X-ray:** An X-ray shows images of the heart and lungs. They help rule out other health conditions that may mimic PE.
- **Computed tomography pulmonary angiography (CTPA):** This imaging test creates 3D pictures of the arteries of the lungs. It can detect abnormalities such as PE.

- **Lung V/Q scan:** Special X-ray scanners show which parts of your lungs are getting blood flow and airflow. This can tell providers if there’s a blood clot in your lungs.



For more information, review these related flyers:

- Focus on Blood Clots
- Understanding Deep Vein Thrombosis

