

Coughing? Fever? Ask for a Mask!

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends wearing a face mask when coughing or running a fever.



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ESTABLISHING A RESPIRATORY ETIQUETTE STRATEGY

Respiratory Hygiene/Cough Etiquette in Healthcare Settings

In response to outbreaks of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) published *Public Health Guidance for Community-Level Preparedness and Response to Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS)*—a guideline recommending the initiation of “a universal respiratory etiquette strategy” for healthcare facilities.

The new guideline (available at www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/sarsprepplan.htm) states that the implementation of respiratory etiquette practices can decrease the risk of transmission from unrecognized SARS patients as well as control the spread of other, more common, respiratory pathogens. The CDC has taken this recommendation one step further in its detailed *Respiratory Hygiene/Cough Etiquette in Healthcare Settings* (available at www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/infectioncontrol/resphygiene.htm.)

The CDC recommends the following measures:

For all individuals

- Cover the nose/mouth when coughing or sneezing with a mask or towel
- Use tissues to contain respiratory secretions and dispose of them in the nearest waste receptacle after use
- Perform hand-hygiene (e.g., hand washing with non-antimicrobial soap and water, alcohol-based hand rub, or antiseptic handwash) after having contact with respiratory secretions or contaminated objects/materials.

In waiting areas

- Provide tissues and no-touch waste receptacles for used tissue disposal
- Provide conveniently located dispensers of alcohol-based hand rub; where sinks are available, ensure that supplies for hand washing (i.e., soap, disposable towels) are consistently available.

Additionally, the CDC recommends **posting visual alerts** at the entrance to outpatient facilities (e.g. emergency departments, physician offices, outpatient clinics, etc.) that instruct patients and visitors to notify healthcare personnel of any respiratory infection symptoms they're experiencing when they first register for care. At this time they can be instructed to practice respiratory hygiene/cough etiquette.

Universal Respiratory Etiquette Strategy for Healthcare Facilities

To prevent the transmission of all respiratory infections in healthcare settings, including influenza, the following infection control measures should be implemented at the first point of contact with a potentially infected person. These measures should be incorporated into infection control practices as one component of standard precautions.

- Provide face masks to all patients with symptoms of respiratory illness. Instruct on the proper usage and disposal of surgical masks (typically the type that fasten to the head with ties) or procedure masks (the type with ear loops), which is an effective option and the one recommended for this use.
- Implement use of surgical or procedure masks by healthcare personnel during evaluation of symptomatic patients.
- If masks are unavailable or cannot be utilized by the person exhibiting symptoms, then disposable tissues should be used to cover the mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing.
- Provide and encourage the use of hand-hygiene materials in waiting room areas for patients and visitors with symptoms.
- Designate an area in the waiting room for patients with respiratory symptoms and place them in the private area as soon as possible for further evaluation.
- Consider isolating symptomatic patients from the staff during triage, utilizing a plexiglass barrier to avoid contact with respiratory droplets.
- If no barriers are utilized, instruct registration and triage staff to remain at least three feet from unmasked patients and consider wearing surgical masks during respiratory infection season.
- Continue to use droplet precautions to manage symptomatic patients until it is determined that the cause is not an infectious agent that requires precautions beyond standard precautions.

Educating patients (and visitors) with respect to respiratory etiquette should be a concurrent program. Many hospitals and health care providers are already utilizing similar programs in their efforts to control the spread of the flu virus.

Help Prevent the Spread of Respiratory Infections

PUTTING ON A FACE MASK

1. Pinch the nose wire to conform to the bridge of your nose.
2. Hold against your nose and hook ear loops over your ears.
3. Hold against your nose and pull the bottom of the mask so that it extends under your chin. (The pleats should open up).
4. For small faces, tie knots in the ear loops to shorten them before putting on the face mask.

TAKING OFF A FACE MASK

1. Using two hands, pull the ear loops over the ears, holding the ear loops only.
2. Drop the mask into a waste can, making sure not to touch the outside of the waste can with the mask.
3. Clean hands with soap and water or waterless cleaner after disposal of the mask.

HAND WASHING TIPS

1. Use tepid (not hot) water.
2. Wet hands before applying soap.
3. Rub together fronts and backs for 15 seconds.
4. Rinse thoroughly.
5. Dry completely, then use the towel to grab the door handle when exiting.
6. Apply lotion to limit chapping.

Additional documentation on SARS and respiratory etiquette can be found at www.cdc.gov/ncidod/sars/; www.cdc.gov/flu/; or www.cdc.gov/ncidod/hipor. Or, call the CDC public response hotline at (888) 246-2675.

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