

What to do when you see a resident with a cough and congestion

Project Firstline

Micro-Learn Discussion

Angelina County and Cities Health District

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Team Discussion



What do you do when you see a resident with a cough and congestion that you don't know the cause of?



Do you worry that you might catch something?



When would you call for help or assistance?



Do you have all the tools and information that you need to do your job safely?



As a team how can you assist each other in taking the right infection control actions (when you see a resident who is coughing and has congestion) to keep germs from spreading?



What is the protocol for dealing with residents that appear to have a respiratory viral infection (Flu, Covid-19)?

Respiratory Germs (a review)

Where do respiratory germs live?

Respiratory germs (bacteria and viruses) live in the mouth, throat, airway, and lungs¹.

How do respiratory germs spread?

- Respiratory germs can spread when droplets are produced when an infected person talks, breathes, coughs, or air is released from the mouth or nose¹.
- Poor ventilation and overcrowding contributes to greater spread of respiratory germs¹.
- People can become infected with respiratory germs from their hands when they touch inside their eyes, mouth or nose¹.

What increases your risk for infection?

- Performing health care tasks involving the respiratory system¹:
 - Aerosol generating procedures (intubation, extubation).
 - Throat examinations.
- Interacting closely with patients in an enclosed space¹.

Infection Control Actions

Things that health care workers can do to reduce the risk of infection with respiratory germs¹:

- Use appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) for each situation.
- Control the source of the infection.
- Ensure that the space is properly ventilated.
- Practice hand hygiene.
- Clean and disinfect the environment and shared equipment.
- Screen patients/residents to contain the infection.
- Follow triage policy.

When should I be concerned about a respiratory virus spreading in a long-term care (LTC) facility/ health care facility?

Signs of a viral infection in a resident - A cough accompanied by common signs of a respiratory virus infection (stuffy nose, runny nose, runny eyes, and a nasally voice) is often the result of a viral infection².

Why does this Matter?

Germs can spread from one resident or patient who is infected with a virus to several people in a facility in a short time².

While some viruses may not affect healthy individuals or may cause only minor health issues, vulnerable patients may become very ill when infected with them².

How can I protect myself from becoming infected with a respiratory virus?

To protect yourself from becoming infected use a face mask and possibly a NIOSH-approved respirator depending on your facility's policy if you must be close to or are caring for a patient who has a cough and is congested, and you don't know why².

What should I do with the patient that is showing signs of an infection with a respiratory virus?

Isolate the Patient

As soon as possible, place the patient in a separate room, away from others².

Put a mask on the patient if possible

If it is safe for the patient to wear a mask, i.e., they are 2 years old or older and are able to remove the mask on their own, they should, to keep their germs from reaching you and others².

What else can I do to reduce the spread of respiratory germs in my facility?

Make sure the air vents in the room are not blocked as that could cause the ventilation system not to work properly.

Key Takeaways

Use	If you're near a patient with cough and congestion and you don't know what's causing it, use a facemask or respirator to keep from breathing in the patient's germs.
Know	Know your facility's specific policy for handling symptoms of respiratory viruses.
Know	Know your facility's triage and screening procedures.
Know	know where to find a respirator and who to call if there is none left.

References

1. CDC. (2025, March 26). *Respiratory System Infographic*. Project Firstline. <https://www.cdc.gov/project-firstline/hcp/training/infographic-respiratory.html>
2. CDC (2025, March 26) Cough Micro-Learn, Project Firstline. <https://www.cdc.gov/project-firstline/hcp/training/micro-learn-cough.html>.

More information on how to prevent or limit the spread of respiratory infections can be found at the Project Firstline website at:
<https://www.cdc.gov/projectfirstline>

Thank You!