



5-minute safety talk

Protection from Respiratory Diseases

As an EMS provider, you need to be aware of the signs and symptoms of infectious respiratory diseases and how to protect yourself from them. Respiratory diseases are not all transmitted the same way. Transmission occurs through direct or indirect contact and by large or small droplet nuclei. Respiratory protection best practices and PPE can help you prevent contamination to yourself and others.

Respiratory Disease Transmission

The method of transmission depends upon the etiological agent. Typically, in the field, the etiological agents of infections are unknown. Good infection control practices are a must if you want to prevent exposure.

Respiratory Best Practices

- When evaluating patients with respiratory symptoms, wear a surgical mask.
- Patients with respiratory symptoms should also wear a surgical mask. Inform the patient of how to use and dispose of the item.
- If the mask will restrict or limit medical treatment, provide the patient with tissues to use for nasal secretions, coughing,

and sneezing. Explain how and where to dispose of the tissue(s), and the importance of thorough and regular hand washing.

- When managing patients with respiratory symptoms, continue to use droplet precautions until it is determined the cause is not an infectious agent.
- Prior to transporting the patient, close the door between the cab and the patient compartment. If there is no door, the driver and the passenger should also wear surgical masks or a higher respiratory disease protection device.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) includes gloves, gowns, eye protection, among others, and should also be worn if contact with bodily secretions or a contaminated environment is possible. Be familiar with PPE application and removal procedures. Hands must be immediately cleaned after glove removal. Clean hands with antimicrobial soap and water. If this is not possible, use an alcohol-based hand rub and wash with soap and water as soon as it becomes available. Proper disposal of soiled garments is equally important.

After the patient is transported to the hospital, thoroughly clean the equipment and vehicle. At minimum, vehicle cleaning should include using the approved EPA disinfectant. Be sure to disinfect:

- Any reusable equipment used. Always follow the manufacturer's instructions when cleaning.
- Frequently touched surfaces in the vehicle.
- Visibly soiled surfaces.

An N-95 or higher respirator mask can also provide protection. Education on use and performing "fit checks" are necessary to ensure the device is used properly. Fit checks should be done before each use. To fit check a respirator, place both hands over the respirator and exhale sharply. If an air leak is detected, re-adjust the respirator and recheck.

The risk of respiratory infectious diseases is serious. Always take the necessary precautions to protect yourself. Before rushing to provide aid to your patients, always consider first what you need to do to protect yourself from hazards you may encounter on the scene.

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