

NMCP PROTOCOL FOR RESPIRATORY ETIQUETTE

Policy:

Prevention must begin at the first point at which a person with suspected or probable severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), influenza, or other communicable respiratory infection enters the health care system. Key points include:

1. Triage, reception, and appointment procedures:

Train personnel to query patients about respiratory symptoms and to observe for such symptoms in patients who are symptomatic.

2. Waiting rooms:

As the infected patient (or the infected person accompanying the patient) waits for care, other people in the waiting area could be exposed. Steps for preventing exposures include:

- Post visual alerts instructing patients to immediately report symptoms of a respiratory infection and to use “respiratory etiquette”.
- Encourage coughing persons to sit at least 3 feet away from others in common waiting areas.
- If possible, provide separate sick and well patient waiting areas.
- Create physical barriers between patients and triage/reception personnel to further reduce the risk of exposure.

3. Respiratory etiquette:

To facilitate respiratory etiquette, the Emergency Department (ED) and outpatient facilities, i.e., NMCP clinics and the Branch Medical Clinics (BMCs), should:

- Instruct people with symptoms of a respiratory infection to cover the nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing.
- Provide tissues and no-touch receptacles (i.e., waste container with pedal-operated lid or uncovered waste container) for used tissue disposal.
- Provide conveniently located dispensers of alcohol-based hand rub.
- Provide soap and disposable towels for hand washing where sinks are available.
- Instruct patients to either wash hands or use a hand hygiene product after covering a sneeze, cough, or using a tissue.
- Offer surgical masks to patients who are coughing. Demonstrate their correct use.

4. Protection for the health care worker:

- When a patient with respiratory symptoms presents to the ED or in an outpatient setting, there are numerous contact points at which opportunities arise for transmission: including triage and reception; waiting rooms; and examination by the health care provider.
- Healthcare workers should practice Droplet Precautions (i.e., wear a surgical or procedure mask for close contact) in addition to Standard Precautions when examining a patient with symptoms of a respiratory infection, particularly if fever is present. These precautions should be maintained until it is determined that the cause of symptoms is not an infectious agent that requires Droplet Precautions.