

Frequently Asked Questions about...

Droplet Precautions

(for patients, family members, and visitors)

Q. What are droplet precautions and when are they used?

A. Droplet precautions are needed to prevent the spread of a patient's illness to family members, visitors, staff members, and other patients. A patient will be placed on droplet precautions when he or she has an infection with germs that can be spread to others by speaking, sneezing, or coughing. Everyone coming into the room of a patient under droplet precautions will be asked to wear a mask to prevent the spread of germs to themselves. Hand washing is another important part of droplet precautions to keep everyone's hands clean and to avoid spreading germs through touching other people or objects in the patient's room, such as door knobs, light switches, or patient care equipment.

Q. What kind of infections can be spread by droplets?

A. The common cold and influenza are examples of infections spread by droplets. These infections are spread when the sick person talks, coughs or sneezes and releases droplets of saliva and mucus. These droplets can travel through the air for several feet, and can be breathed into the nose and mouth of another person, where the virus can grow and make that person sick.

Q. What should my care providers be doing?

A. If you are on droplet precautions, your care providers should be wearing a surgical mask at all times when they are with you. The mask should be tied or fastened around their head. They should also wash their hands when they enter and exit the room. If they are providing additional care for you (such as bathing or changing a bandage) they should be wearing gloves and, if necessary, a gown.

Q. As a patient, what should I be doing?

A. You should not be asked to wear a mask, except possibly for a very short period of time, such as during transport to another room.

You should be covering your sneezes and coughs with disposable tissues and carefully discarding the used tissues into a trash can. You should be washing your hands often, either with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub.

You should make sure visitors are aware that you are on droplet precautions and receive instructions from your care provider prior to entering your room.

If your physician prescribes medication (an antibiotic or antiviral drug), you should take it exactly as prescribed.

If you have additional questions, you should ask your care providers.

Q. As a visitor, what should I be doing?

A. People who visit someone on droplet precautions should follow facility employee instructions. You should wear a mask and wash your hands before and after the visit. If you are sick, you should stay at home and visit the facility at another time.