

# Droplet Precautions (for care providers)

**Q. What do droplet precautions require?**

A. Droplet precautions require wearing a face mask (also called a surgical mask) when in a room with a person who has a respiratory infection. These precautions are used in addition to standard precautions, which include the use of a face shield/goggles as well as gown and gloves if contact with blood/body fluids is possible.

**Q. When should I use droplet precautions?**

A. Use droplet precautions whenever you are in a room with a patient who is infected with a virus or bacterium that is transmissible via the droplets of mucus and saliva. These droplets are generated when a patient coughs, sneezes, or talks.

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

A. The most common are influenza and other respiratory viruses like the common cold. A few bacteria, including pertussis (whooping cough), meningococcus, and streptococcus, are also transmitted by droplets.

**Q. Where can I find a list of the viruses and bacteria for which droplet precautions are recommended?**

A. A list is included in the CDC Guideline for Isolation Precautions: Preventing Transmission of Infectious Agents in Healthcare Settings, 2007 (<http://www.cdc.gov/hicpac/pdf/isolation/Isolation2007.pdf>).

**Q. What do I need to know about masks?**

A. The mask used for droplet precautions is a face mask or surgical mask. The mask stops droplets from getting into the nose and mouth. The mask should be worn covering the nose and mouth, and should be secured with ties or bands. These masks are disposable and should be discarded as the worker leaves the patient's room. It is important to remove the mask carefully, because the outside of the mask will have collection of droplets and will be contaminated. A poster showing the right way to put on and take off the mask is available on the VDH website.

**Q. Why can't I have the patients wear the mask to stop the droplets before they get into the air?**

A. The mask will be uncomfortable for a person who is coughing, sneezing, and may feel short of breath. In addition, the mask may become wet from the patient's saliva and mucus. A better strategy is to have the patient use disposable tissues to cover coughs and sneezes and dispose of the used tissues properly. The patient should also wash his/her hands frequently, and should remain separated from other people as much as possible. If the patient must be transported to another room or another facility, it may be appropriate to ask the patient to wear a mask for a brief period, if he/she is able to tolerate it.

**Q. Why is hand hygiene important?**

A. The viruses responsible for most respiratory infections can be carried on the hands to the person's mouth and nose, to other patients, and can be left on environmental surfaces. Careful and frequent hand hygiene removes the viruses from the hands, decreasing the likelihood of transmitting the virus to other locations.

**Q. What else should I do to prevent the spread of respiratory infections?**

A. Follow instructions when your patients are placed on droplet precautions. Other prevention measures include seasonal influenza vaccination, frequent hand washing at home and work, and staying at home from work if you become ill.

*Contact your local health department if you have additional questions about droplet precautions*