Respiratory Etiquette and Hand Hygiene in Healthcare Environments

Germs can be easily spread by coughing, sneezing, or talking, touching your face with unwashed hands after touching contaminated surfaces or objects and touching surfaces or objects that may be frequently touched by other people[1].

Covering coughs and sneezes and keeping hands clean can prevent the spread of serious respiratory illnesses like influenza, respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), pertussis (whooping cough) and COVID-19[1].

How can Health Care Workers decrease the risk of spread?
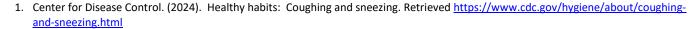
✔ Understand the 4 Moments for Hand Hygiene and properly implements them

✔ Understand the importance of decreasing germ transmission for the safety and health of staff and those they care for

RECOMMENDATIONS[1, 2]

1. Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
2. If you are ill, try to distance yourself from others so you so not spread your germs.
3. Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you sneeze or cough, dispose of tissue and immediately clean your hands.
4. If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your elbow, not your hands. Clean your hands as soon as you can.
5. When patients are coughing or sneezing, encourage them to cover their cough, use a tissue and offer hand hygiene.
6. Wear masks (patients and staff) when appropriate. Change mask when it becomes contaminated.
7. Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
8. Disinfect high touch surfaces regularly.
9. You may still be able to spread the virus that made you sick, even if you are feeling better, so it is important to always adhere to proper respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene.
10. Consider vaccinations to protect against respiratory illness and keep them up to date.

1. Center for Disease Control. (2024). Healthy habits: Coughing and sneezing. Retrieved https://www.cdc.gov/hygiene/about/coughing-and-sneezing.html

2. Ottawa Public Health (2024). Respiratory illnesses. Retrieved https://www.ottawapublichealth.ca/en/public-health-topics/covid-reducing-risks.aspx#Reducing-the-spread-of-respiratory-illness