

FAQs

(frequently asked questions)

about

“Ventilator-Associated Pneumonia”

What is a Ventilator-Associated Pneumonia (VAP)?

A “pneumonia” is an infection of the lungs. A “ventilator” is a machine that helps a patient breathe by giving oxygen through a tube. The tube can be placed in a patient’s mouth, nose, or through a hole in the front of the neck. The tube is connected to a ventilator. A “ventilator-associated pneumonia” or “VAP” is a lung infection or pneumonia that develops in a person who is on a ventilator.

Why do patients need a ventilator?

A patient may need a ventilator when he or she is very ill or during and after surgery. Ventilators can be life-saving, but they can also increase a patient’s chance of getting pneumonia by making it easier for germs to get into the patient’s lungs.

What are some of the things that hospitals are doing to prevent ventilator-associated pneumonia?

To prevent ventilator-associated pneumonia, doctors, nurses, and other healthcare providers:

- **Keep the head of the patient’s bed raised** between 30 and 45 degrees unless other medical conditions do not allow this to occur.
- **Check the patient’s ability to breathe on his or her own** every day so that the patient can be taken off of the ventilator as soon as possible.
- **Clean their hands** with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub before and after touching the patient or the ventilator.
- **Clean the inside of the patient’s mouth** on a regular basis.
- **Clean or replace equipment** between use on different patients.



Keep the head of the patient’s bed raised between 30 to 45 degrees.

What can I do to help prevent VAP?

- If you smoke, quit. Patients who smoke get more infections. If you are going to have surgery and will need to be on a ventilator, talk to your doctor before your surgery about how you can quit smoking.

- Family members can ask about raising the head of the bed.
- Family members can ask when the patient will be allowed to try breathing on his or her own.
- Family members can ask doctors, nurses, and other healthcare providers to clean their hands.

If you do not see your providers clean their hands, please ask them to do so.

- Family members can ask about how often healthcare providers clean the patient's mouth.

Can VAP be treated?

VAP can be a very serious infection. Most of the time, these infections can be treated with antibiotics. The choice of antibiotics depends on which specific germs are causing the infection. Your healthcare provider will decide which antibiotic is best.

If you have questions, please ask your doctor or nurse.

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