


## Community Infection Prevention and Control Policy for Domiciliary Care staff

# Respiratory and cough hygiene

RESPIRATORY AND COUGH HYGIENE

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**This guidance document has been adopted as a policy document by:**

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**RESPIRATORY AND COUGH HYGIENE**

# RESPIRATORY AND COUGH HYGIENE

## 1. Introduction

This Policy is 1 of the 10 'Standard infection control precautions' (SICPs) referred to by NHS England and NHS Improvement.

Respiratory and cough hygiene can help reduce the risk of spreading respiratory (related to breathing) infections, protecting those in contact with the infected person, e.g. service users, family and staff.

Staff should adopt good respiratory and cough hygiene practices themselves and promote them to services users.

## 2. What are respiratory infections?

Respiratory tract infections (RTIs) are mainly caused by viruses and can affect the upper respiratory tract or the lower respiratory tract.

Upper respiratory tract infections (URTIs), e.g. sore throat, common cold, sinusitis, involve the throat, nose or sinuses.

Lower respiratory tract infections (LRTIs), e.g. pneumonia, bronchitis, tuberculosis, involve the large airways or lungs.

RTIs caused by a virus, e.g. the common cold, usually get better without any treatment over days to weeks.

RTIs caused by bacteria, e.g. pneumonia, tuberculosis, often require antibiotic treatment and in some cases, admission to hospital.

Symptoms of an RTI include:

- A sore throat
- Sneezing
- A cough – you may bring up mucus (phlegm)
- A stuffy or runny nose
- Headaches
- Muscle aches
- Tight chest, wheezing or breathlessness
- Fever (a high temperature)
- General unwell feeling

### 3. How are respiratory infections spread?

RTIs are usually spread by inhaling droplets of the respiratory secretions released from an infected person's cough or sneeze, or from touching surfaces contaminated when they coughed or sneezed, e.g. used tissues, tables, door handles.

Respiratory secretions released during a cough or sneeze can travel up to approximately 1 metre, contaminating people and surfaces in their path.

Other illnesses caused by viruses, e.g. chicken pox, measles, can also be spread by inhaling droplets of the respiratory secretions from an infected person's cough or sneeze, or from touching surfaces contaminated when they coughed or sneezed.

Those most at risk of developing complications of RTIs include:

- Children under 5 years of age
- Adults aged 65 years and over
- Pregnant women
- People age 6 months to 65 years and over who have chronic diseases or lowered immunity levels

### 4. Good respiratory and cough hygiene

To reduce the risk of spreading RTIs when coughing, sneezing, wiping or blowing the nose, staff and service users should:

- Have access to and use disposable tissues
- Dispose of used tissues into a waste bin or bag immediately after use
- Clean hands with either:
  - Liquid soap and warm running water
  - Moist (non-alcohol) skin wipes, e.g. baby wipes, followed by alcohol handrub

For further details please refer to the 'Hand hygiene Policy for Domiciliary Care staff'.

Staff may need to help service users to ensure that:

- Disposable tissues are available and within their reach
- There is a waste bin or bag within easy reach for them to dispose of used tissues

- They are able to or are assisted to clean their hands

Don't:

- Use cloth handkerchiefs
- Touch the eyes nose and mouth until hands have been cleaned after contact with respiratory secretions or items contaminated with them, e.g. tissues, surfaces
- Use skin wipes if suitable handwashing facilities are available
- Contaminate surfaces and pockets with used tissues

If no disposable tissue is available, cough or sneeze into your elbow or upper arm, not your hand or into the air. Although this won't stop all the respiratory secretions spreading it can reduce the distance they travel.




Respiratory and cough hygiene

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cough or sneeze into a clean tissue, not into your hands.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dispose of the tissue immediately into the nearest waste bin.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If you do not have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Always clean your hands after coughing or sneezing, either using soap and warm running water, alcohol handrub or hand wipes.</li> </ul>

These steps will help prevent the spread of colds, flu and other respiratory infections

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[www.infectionpreventioncontrol.co.uk](http://www.infectionpreventioncontrol.co.uk) June 2019  
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A 'Respiratory and cough hygiene Poster' is available to download at [www.infectionpreventioncontrol.co.uk](http://www.infectionpreventioncontrol.co.uk).

## 5. References

Department of Health (2015) *The Health and Social Act 2008: Code of Practice for the Prevention and control of healthcare associated infections*

<https://fitfortraveltest.scot.nhs.uk/advice/disease-prevention-advice/respiratory-hygiene-and-infections#Respiratory>

NHS England and NHS Improvement (March 2019) Standard infection control precautions: national hand hygiene and personal protective equipment policy

[www.nhs.uk/conditions/Respiratory-tract-infection/](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Respiratory-tract-infection/)