

The Safe Patient

An educational patient safety series with free downloadable brochures, a service of The Patient Channel and Safe Care Campaign, in cooperation with the CDC

When Your Loved One is on a Ventilator: Preventing Ventilator Associated Pneumonia

You may feel helpless when your loved one is on a machine that helps patients who cannot breathe on their own. **These machines, called ventilators can be life saving, but they can also increase a patient's chance of getting an infection.** The longer a patient is on a ventilator, the longer the patient has this tube going from their mouth or nose into their throat and into their lungs, the more likely it is that bacteria can ride down the tubing and get into their lungs and cause an infection. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the primary risk factor for a lung infection, or pneumonia, is having

- breathing assisted by a ventilator. **To prevent ventilator-associated pneumonia, you should ask the hospital personnel to check your loved one's ability to no longer need the ventilator and breathe on his own everyday.**

- There are other steps that can be taken to help prevent infection as well. **Nurses and doctors will make sure that the patient who is on a ventilator gets propped up at a 45 degree angle** to make sure that secretions do not pool in the back of their throats, potentially aspirating into the lungs. In addition,
- **everyone who comes in contact with the patient, doctors, nurses, and visitors alike, must wash or sanitize their hands properly before and after the patient or ventilator is touched.** Often, people on ventilators are sedated and cannot move, cough, or expand their lungs on their own. Talk to the doctor about allowing your loved one to briefly wake up to help get their lungs working.
- Another method to prevent ventilator associated pneumonia is what is called "**sedation vacations**". This is a sort of weaning that occurs where they let up off of the sedation to see if the patient can breathe on their own. Eventually those sedation vacations increase and the patient increases breathing on his own.

Having someone you love on a ventilator can be difficult. But you can help by being aware of the risks and making sure hospital personnel take the appropriate precautions.

