

VENTILATOR-ASSOCIATED PNEUMONIA (VAP)

Fact Sheet for Patients and Visitors

This fact sheet provides basic information only. It must not take the place of medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always talk to a health care professional about any health concerns you have, and before you make any changes to your diet, lifestyle or treatment.

WHAT IS VAP?

VAP is defined as pneumonia (a serious lung infection) that can occur in patients (specifically ICU patients) who need assistance breathing with a mechanical ventilator for at least 48 hours.

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS?

The most important symptoms include:

- Fever
- Low body temperature
- New purulent sputum (foul smelling infectious mucous or phlegm coughed up from the lungs or airway into the mouth)
- Hypoxia (decreasing amounts of oxygen in the blood)

WHAT ARE THE RISK FACTORS FOR VAP?

Risk factors include:

- Being on a ventilator for more than five days
- Recent hospitalization (last 90 days)
- Residence in a nursing home
- Prior antibiotic use (last 90 days)
- Dialysis treatment in a clinic

WHAT SHOULD HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS DOING TO PREVENT VAP?

Health care providers are:

- Practicing proper handwashing techniques
- Keeping the patient's head of the bed elevated at a 30 to 45 degree angle
- Discontinuing mechanical ventilation as soon as possible

PREVENTING VAP: WHAT FAMILIES OF PATIENTS CAN DO

Families of patients can:

- Ask lots of questions. Ask what precautions your hospital is taking to prevent VAP.
- Wash their own hands often. Use soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub containing at least 60 per cent alcohol.

HOW IS VAP TREATED?

Since VAP is caused by bacteria in the lungs, it is treated by using antibiotics.

REFERENCE

For more information about the importance of good hand hygiene practices, read about the *Clean Hands Protect Lives* campaign at www.oha.com.