

**Hamilton Hospitals Infection Prevention & Control**  
**Effective at Hamilton Health Sciences, St. Joseph's Healthcare**  
**and Associated Health Care Facilities**

**Posting Date:** 2019-11-01

**Posting History Dates:** 2013-12-16; 2014-10 Reviewed 2015-9, 2016-10, 2018-9

**Next Review Date:** 2020-11-01

**Title:** IC - Respiratory Hygiene/Cough Etiquette in Healthcare Settings

**Applies to:** All healthcare workers, staff, Hospital Affiliates, members of the Medical, Dental and Midwifery staff of the Hamilton Health Sciences, St. Joseph's Healthcare, and associated Health care facilities..

**(This is a Regional Infection Control policy and procedure.)**

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**1.0 Purpose**

To prevent the spread of **ALL** transmissible respiratory infections in healthcare settings. *Infection prevention and control measures should be implemented at the first point of contact with a potentially infectious person.*

**2.0 Policy Statements**

**2.1 Applicability**

2.1.1 This policy applies to all patients and accompanying family members or friends and to **any person** with signs of a respiratory infection (e.g., cough, congestion, rhinorrhea, increased production of respiratory secretions) who enters **ANY** healthcare facility. Although fever will be present in many respiratory infections, patients with pertussis and colds are often afebrile. Therefore, the absence of fever does not always exclude respiratory infection. Patients who have asthma, allergic rhinitis, or chronic obstructive lung disease may also be coughing and sneezing. Although these patients may not be infectious, cough etiquette measures also apply.

Healthcare personnel who have a respiratory infection are advised to avoid patient contact when they are actively coughing and producing respiratory secretions.

**2.2 Visual Alerts:**

2.2.1 Signs will be posted at all entrances of the hospital and outpatient facilities (e.g., emergency department, outpatient clinics and physician offices) instructing patients and persons who accompany them (e.g., family, friends) to inform healthcare personnel of respiratory symptoms when they first register for care and to practise respiratory hygiene/cough etiquette. **See [Appendix A](#)**

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### **3.0 Procedure**

#### **3.1 Routine Practices for Patients:**

**Respiratory Etiquette** - The following measures to contain respiratory secretions are recommended for all individuals with signs and symptoms of a respiratory infection:

- When coughing or sneezing; turn head away from others and cover nose and mouth with tissue or if tissue is not available cough or sneeze into your sleeve.
- Discard tissues immediately after use into waste basket.
- Perform hand hygiene (e.g., hand washing with soap and water, or alcohol-based hand rub) immediately after disposal of tissues.

3.1.1 Waiting areas for patients and visitors will have the material needed to adhere to the Respiratory Hygiene/Cough Etiquette readily available:

- Tissues, masks and receptacles for used tissue disposal
- Conveniently located dispensers of alcohol based hand rub
- Where sinks are available adequate supplies for hand washing (i.e., soap, disposable towels)

#### **3.2 Masking and Separation of Persons with Respiratory Symptoms**

3.2.1 Place a surgical/procedure mask on the person(s) who are coughing to contain secretions (providing the person can tolerate the mask).

3.2.2 When space and chair availability permit, place coughing persons at least two metres away from others in common waiting areas or in a segregated waiting room if available.

#### **4.0 Cross References**

[IC - Acute Respiratory Infection \(ARI\) Surveillance Protocol](#)

[IC - Routine Practices Protocol](#)

[IC - Additional Precautions Protocol](#)

[IC - Hand Hygiene Protocol](#)

#### **5.0 External References**

Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion, Provincial Infectious Diseases Advisory Committee. *Annex B – Best Practices for Prevention of Transmission of Acute Respiratory Infection*. Annexed to: Routine Practices and Additional Precautions in All Health Care Settings. Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer for Ontario; 2013.

Centre for Disease Control. Guideline for Isolation Precautions: Preventing Transmission of Infectious Agents in Healthcare Settings. 2007 Garner, J.S. (1996) Hospital IC Practices Advisory Committee.

Public Health Agency of Canada. Routine Practices and Additional Precautions for Preventing the Transmission of Infection in Health Care (2013)

#### **6.0 Developed By**

Infection Prevention and Control, HHS, SJHH

#### **7.0 In Consultation With**

Joint Health and Safety Committee  
Occupation Health and Safety Services

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**8.0**

**Approved By**

Regional Infection Prevention and Control Committee  
Medical Advisory Committee, HHS, SJHH,  
Joint Health and Safety Committees

**Keyword Assignment** Cough, Etiquette, Respiratory symptoms, Mask

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**Appendix A**

**Stop the spread of germs that make you and others sick!**

# Cover your Cough



Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze or cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve, not your hands.



Put your used tissue in the waste basket.



You may be asked to put on a surgical mask to protect others.

## Clean your Hands

after coughing or sneezing.



Wash hands with soap and warm water for 20 seconds or

clean with alcohol-based hand cleaner.



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