

Cough Etiquette and Respiratory Hygiene

Influenza and the common cold are familiar respiratory infections to many. They often appear to be seasonal in nature but can persist in the community at any time. This persistence ensures ease of transmission especially in crowded living environments through airborne and droplet spread. The SARs epidemic and avian influenza have heightened the awareness of respiratory infections to both health care workers and the general public. As new infections emerge it is extremely important to be prepared for such threats.

There are many stages of being prepared; from development of global and national strategies to the simple common sense applications that are often taken for granted yet have the greatest impact in preventing transmission of respiratory illness.

Cough etiquette and respiratory hygiene protocols for staff, patients and visitors have become a key component in the prevention of respiratory illness.

Cough Etiquette/Respiratory Hygiene guide for health care workers

1. Cover your nose or mouth with your hand or a tissue when coughing or sneezing.
2. Dispose of the used tissue into the nearest garbage bin.
3. Remember to wash your hands with soap and water (if available) or you may use an alcoholic hand gel (if available).
4. It is important to see your doctor if you have a cough which lasts longer than a week.
5. Encourage cough etiquette/respiratory hygiene with patients and visitors.
6. If people are coughing in waiting areas, offer them a surgical mask or encourage them to sit a metre away from others.



Cover your nose or mouth with your hand or a tissue or another item when coughing or sneezing

2



Dispose of used tissue into the nearest garbage bin

3



Remember to wash your hands with water and soap (if available)

4



Encourage cough etiquette/respiratory hygiene with patients and visitors by offering a tissue or encouraging them to cover their nose or mouth with their hand when coughing or sneezing

5



Offer a surgical mask to people or encourage people to sit a metre away from others if coughing in waiting areas

This cough etiquette/respiratory hygiene guide is also available on the SafeHandS website (http://www.uow.edu.au/health/safehandS/useful_links_resources.html) as a fact sheet which you can download and print to display in your health care setting.