

Keeping Your Family Member Safe While on a Ventilator

A ventilator is a machine that helps a patient breathe by giving oxygen through a tube. The tube can be placed in a patient's mouth, nose, or through a hole in the front of the neck. The tube is connected to a ventilator. A **ventilator associated event (VAE)** is a lung condition that may occur in someone who is on a ventilator.

Causes for Getting a VAE

VAE is one type of hospital-acquired infection. There are many reasons a patient may get a VAE. These reasons may include:

- Stress on the body.
- Medicines that change the normal bacteria in the body.
- Medicines that make it harder for patients to clear their lungs and airways.
- Being on a ventilator for a long time.

To Reduce the Chance of VAE

- We keep the head of the bed raised between 30° to 45° degrees unless other health problems do not allow this.
- We suction when needed. It is normal for saliva to collect inside the mouth and inside the breathing tube. As this fluid collects it can grow bacteria and may cause VAE. We remove this fluid from the mouth and breathing tube when needed.

- We brush the patient's teeth and clean the inside of their mouth a few times each day.
- We reduce acid in the patient's stomach with medicines.
- We give medicines to help keep the patient calm and comfortable while letting them stay awake as much as they can. This is so the patient can be taken off the ventilator sooner.
- We clean our hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer before and after touching the patient or the ventilator.

Why Oral Care Is Important

Teeth can hold onto bacteria that may cause the normal bacteria to change. Oral care can decrease this while your family member is on the ventilator.

Why We Don't use Normal Toothpaste

We use a special mouth rinse that has been shown to decrease the risk of getting a VAE.

How to Help Lower the Chance of VAE

Please clean your hands before you enter your family member's room and when you leave the room. Hand sanitizer is in each patient room and in the hallway.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 8/2023. University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#7282.