Droplet Precautions

Transmission-based precautions help prevent the spread of certain infections. Droplet precautions are one type of transmission-based precaution. Always use droplet precautions in addition to standard precautions. Some diseases that require droplet precautions may also require contact precautions or airborne precautions.

WHEN TO USE DROPLET PRECAUTIONS

Some germs are carried in exhaled droplets. Most of these droplets travel a short distance (about 3 to 6 feet) when an infected person coughs, talks, or sneezes. These droplets spread germs when they contact the eyes, mucous membranes, or surfaces. Use droplet precautions with patients who have certain infections, including:

- Whooping cough (pertussis)
- Influenza
- Scarlet fever
- Mumps
- German measles (rubella)
- Diphtheria

PREVENTING CONTAMINATION

Droplets can contaminate patient care equipment and other objects in the room. Follow these steps to help prevent the spread of infection:

- The patient should be in a private room with a private bathroom. All patients who have an unexplained cough or other respiratory symptoms should follow respiratory hygiene/cough etiquette (see standard precautions sheet).
- The infected patient should have his or her own patient care equipment (including stethoscope, blood pressure cuff, thermometer, and commode).
- Don a surgical mask, eye protection, and a gown upon entry into the patient room or cubicle.
- Have family members and other visitors wear surgical masks, gowns, and eye protection.

- Follow standard precautions for transporting the patient.
- Assume that everything within 3 feet of the patient is especially contaminated. However, remember that other areas of the room can also be contaminated.
- Avoid touching your mouth, nose, or eyes during patient care.
- If you touch an object in the room with your gloves, change them before providing care to any patient.
- Change gloves and wash your hands between procedures if your gloves have touched body fluids or substances. Remove your gloves and other PPE before leaving the room. Wash your hands. Use dried paper towels to turn off the faucet and open doors.
- Respirators should be worn during the performance of certain procedures, such as suctioning or bronchoscopy.