



**Infection.
Prevention.
Control.**
You're in safe hands



Community Infection Prevention and Control Policy for General Practice

(also suitable for adoption by other healthcare providers,
e.g. Podiatry)

Respiratory and cough hygiene

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RESPIRATORY AND COUGH HYGIENE

1. Introduction

NHS England states that the guidance in the *National infection prevention and control manual (NIPCM) for England* should be applied by all NHS staff involved in patient care, complementing guidance for General Practice settings. This Policy has been produced in accordance with this recommendation and incorporates the *NIPCM* version as referenced in this Policy with detailed General Practice specific guidance.

This Policy is one of the 'Standard infection control precautions' (SICPs).

Good respiratory and cough hygiene can help reduce the risk of spreading respiratory infections, e.g. viruses, such as COVID-19, TB (pulmonary tuberculosis), the common cold and influenza (flu), which in vulnerable people can cause severe illness, such as pneumonia.

When a person with a respiratory illness coughs, sneezes, talks, millions of bacterial or viral particles are released from the nose and mouth predominantly in the form of droplets which travel in the air, contaminating people and surfaces within a short distance (approximately 1 metre).

Respiratory infections can spread directly from an infected person to another person. If the bacteria or virus lands on mucous membranes, such as the eyes, nose and mouth, of another person, it can then enter the body.

If the environment is contaminated during coughing, sneezing or by contaminated hands touching surfaces, it can spread to others who touch the area and then touch their eyes, nose or mouth.

Microorganisms, such as bacteria and viruses, can survive in the environment from hours to months, e.g. influenza virus up to 24 hours, COVID-19 up to 72 hours.

SICPs may be insufficient to prevent transmission of specific infections and additional 'Transmission based precautions' (TBPs) are required. Refer to the 'Respiratory illnesses Policy for General Practice'.

When caring for patients in relation to any new or emerging infections, staff should refer to the latest infection prevention and control guidance.

2. Signage

It is recommended that signage is displayed at the entrance to the building instructing patients with respiratory symptoms, diarrhoea and/or vomiting or other infectious conditions to inform reception staff immediately on their arrival. A 'Stop the spread of

infection Poster' is available to download at www.infectionpreventioncontrol.co.uk/resources/stop-the-spread-of-infection-for-general-practice/.

3. Good respiratory and cough hygiene

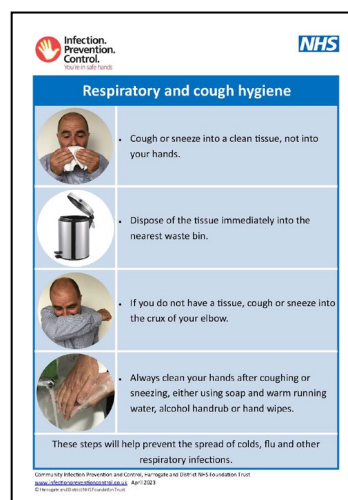
Ventilation is very important to reduce the amount of microorganisms in the air, which will contaminate surfaces. Staff should ensure rooms are well ventilated by regularly opening windows.

Staff should adopt and promote good respiratory and cough hygiene by displaying appropriate posters and advising patients to:

- Cover their nose and mouth with a disposable tissue when sneezing or coughing and using a disposable tissue for wiping and blowing their nose
- On any occasion when there is not a tissue available, cough or sneeze into the inside of the elbow or upper arm. Do not cough or sneeze into their hands and not into the air. Although this won't stop all the respiratory secretions spreading, it can reduce the distance they travel
- Dispose of used tissues promptly into a waste bin or bag
- Wash hands with liquid soap and warm running water after coughing, sneezing, using tissues, after wiping or blowing their nose or after any contact with respiratory secretions or objects contaminated by these secretions
- Where there is no running water available or hand hygiene facilities are lacking, hand wipes may be used followed by alcohol handrub or equivalent products, and hands washed at the first available opportunity
- Keep contaminated hands away from their eyes, nose and mouth

The 'Catch it, Bin it, Kill it Poster' is available to download at www.infectionpreventioncontrol.co.uk/resources/catch-it-bin-it-kill-it-poster/.

The 'Respiratory and cough hygiene Poster' is available to download at www.infectionpreventioncontrol.co.uk/resources/respiratory-and-cough-hygiene-poster/.



4. Evidence of good practice

It is recommended that, for assurance purposes, 'Respiratory and cough hygiene' is audited. This can be achieved by completing the 'SICPs Assurance: Annual IPC Audit Tool for General Practice' available to download at www.infectionpreventioncontrol.co.uk/resources/sicps-assurance-annual-ipc-audit-tool-for-general-practice/.

Following completion of the audit, an 'Action plan' should be drawn up and implemented to demonstrate continuous improvement.

5. Infection Prevention and Control resources, education and training

The Community IPC Team have produced a wide range of innovative educational and IPC resources designed to assist your General Practice in achieving compliance with the *Health and Social Care Act 2008: code of practice on the prevention and control of infection and related guidance* and CQC registration requirements.

These resources are either free to download from the website or available at a minimal cost covering administration and printing:

- 27 IPC Policy documents for General Practice
- Preventing Infection Workbook: Guidance for General Practice
- IPC CQC assessment preparation Pack for General Practice
- IPC audit tools, posters, leaflets and factsheets
- IPC Bulletin for General Practice Staff

In addition, we hold educational study events in North Yorkshire.

Further information on these high quality evidence-based resources is available at www.infectionpreventioncontrol.co.uk.

6. References

Department of Health and Social Care (Updated December 2022) *Health and Social Care Act 2008: code of practice on the prevention and control of infections and related guidance*

NHS England (Updated 2025) *National infection prevention and control manual (NIPCM) for England*

www.nhs.uk/conditions/Respiratory-tract-infection/