

Preventing Ventilator-Associated Infections

Narrator

You may feel helpless when your loved one is on a machine that helps patients who cannot breathe on their own. Ventilators can be lifesaving, but they can also increase a patient's chance of getting an infection.

Vicki Brinsko, RN

The longer the patient has this tube going from their mouth or nose into their throat and into their lungs, the more likely it is that bacteria can ride down that little highway and get into their lungs and cause an infection.

Narrator

There are steps that can be taken to help prevent infection.

Vicki Brinsko, RN

What the nurses and doctors do is they make sure the patient who is on a ventilator gets propped up at a 45-degree angle and makes sure that the secretions do not pool in the back of their throats; that they can be inadvertently aspirated into the lungs.

Narrator

In addition, everyone who comes in contact with the patient: doctors, nurses, and visitors alike, must wash or sanitize their hands properly before the patient or ventilator is touched.

Talk to the doctor about allowing your loved one to briefly wake up to help get their lungs working.

Vicki Brinsko, RN

One of the other methods that they use to prevent ventilator-associated pneumonia is what they call sedation vacations. And this is a little bit of weaning that occurs where they let up off of the sedation to see if the patient can breathe on their own.

Narrator

Having someone you love on a ventilator can be difficult. But you can help by being aware of the risks and making sure hospital personnel take the appropriate precautions.