

# Caring for Patients with Chronic Respiratory Diseases during the Coronavirus Pandemic

The novel coronavirus has spread rapidly all over the world during the past weeks, disrupting the normal course of life. While everybody is at risk of catching the virus, some people, such as those suffering from lung cancer, chronic bronchitis, asthma or other respiratory conditions are more likely to develop serious complications. If you are handling this type of patients, taking preventive measures to minimize their risk of infection is essential so here are some recommendations.

## How Might the Coronavirus Manifest in Patients with Respiratory Conditions?

Based on how the narrative of the pandemic unraveled in other parts of the world, here is some of the available data on patients with underlying respiratory conditions:

- The typical symptoms such as shortness of breath are more acute in these people as the lining that protects their lungs might have already been affected by the underlying condition and their breathing capacity is already reduced.
- The fatality rate is 5.6 % higher in cancer patients, with a particularly higher risk for patients suffering from [lung cancer and getting COVID-19](#) because it implies that the patient already has a weak respiratory system. The likelihood for these individuals to need intensive care or a respirator is 79% higher.
- [According to a study based on 45.000 patients](#) who tested positive for the virus in China, less than 1% of the healthy patients died of COVID-19. However, the percentage surged to 6% among people suffering from cancer and respiratory disease.
- Ongoing treatments such as chemotherapy may be detrimental in case of infection with the novel coronavirus because they further lower the body's ability to fight a new infection.

## How to Take Care of Patients with Chronic Respiratory Diseases Amidst the Coronavirus Pandemic

People with chronic respiratory conditions are more at risk of developing complications should they get infected with the coronavirus. This increases the burden of responsibility among medical professionals who handle such patients. Preventive measures that can minimize the risk of infection are imperative when working with these patients and they include:

- Hygiene

While caring for patients with respiratory conditions, proper hygiene measures should be taken to avoid exposing them to the coronavirus. This implies frequently washing your hands with soap and water and using hand sanitizers. Patients should also be encouraged to do the same.

Being extra-careful while sneezing or coughing is also important as this is how COVID-19 transmits; nurses and other members of the medical staff should use and advise their patients to use tissue for this.

Since the virus can also be transmitted by touching contaminated surfaces, both patients and health workers should avoid touching their nose, mouth or eyes after touching surrounding objects, especially while they are at the hospital. Moreover, proper hygiene practices should be implemented thoroughly throughout the hospital so that the surfaces are constantly disinfected.

- Protection

It is important to use the protective equipment provided by the medical institution you work in while handling patients with respiratory conditions during the COVID-19 outbreak. Wearing a medical mask, gloves and other personal protective equipment in order to prevent an infection is the norm. It may also become necessary to ask the patients to use a mask if you signal any new respiratory symptoms that may link them to the coronavirus. After the disposal of the mask, proper hand hygiene should be performed.

- Monitorization

Health workers should continuously monitor the evolution of patients with respiratory diseases in order to promptly identify any coronavirus symptoms. Similarly, they should self-monitor and report any potential signs of infection to the management.

## **How Exposed Are Healthcare Providers to This Virus?**

Given the increasing number of positive cases of coronavirus during the past days, nurses and doctors put themselves at greater risk of getting infected as they come into direct contact with COVID-19 patients. At the moment, it is difficult to say what the impact of the virus among healthcare workers is. However, there is increased concern that the

number of infections among medical professionals may rise, automatically triggering a workforce shortage in this domain.

For example, only in Massachusetts 160 healthcare workers were required to isolate at home as they were exposed to a confirmed case of COVID-19

[According to a statistic](#), 20% of the medical professionals in Lombardy, Italy, the epicenter of the European pandemic, were infected. Also, in China, over 3000 healthcare workers got infected since the outbreak began.

Furthermore, during the previous SARS epidemic which took place in the early 2000s, [healthcare workers represented one-fifth of the number of cases](#) worldwide.

If a medical professional catches the virus, there is a high risk of spreading it further on to a large number of patients they deal with on a daily basis. Moreover, health workers could easily carry the virus at home and end up infecting their families. Unlike other professionals who are able to restrict their direct contact with people during this time of crisis, nurses and doctors are required to be more active than ever as the medical system relies on them.

In this context, the medical staff should take the necessary isolation precautions if they start developing COVID-19 symptoms such as fever.

Up to date, there is no vaccine for COVID-19, which increases the need for strict prevention strategies to be adopted while handling patients with underlying respiratory conditions in order to avoid infection. At the same time, medical professionals should prioritize their own health in this distressful context which sees them as the main protagonists in the fight against this virus.

About the author:

Treven Pyles is the Administrative Director of [Environmental Litigation Group,P.C.](#) an Alabama law firm that focuses on personal injury claims caused by environmental or occupational exposure to toxic substances.

Sources:

<https://www.statnews.com/2020/03/03/who-is-getting-sick-and-how-sick-a-breakdown-of-coronavirus-risk-by-demographic-factors/>

<https://www.cancerhealth.com/article/who-is-most-susceptible-new-coronavirus>

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/covid-19-hits-doctors-nurses-emts-threatening-health-system/2020/03/17/f21147e8-67aa-11ea-b313-df458622c2cc\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/covid-19-hits-doctors-nurses-emts-threatening-health-system/2020/03/17/f21147e8-67aa-11ea-b313-df458622c2cc_story.html)

<https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hblog20200316.393860/full/>