

# VENTILATOR-ASSOCIATED PNEUMONIA (VAP)

## Fact Sheet for Patients and Visitors

This fact sheet provides basic information only. It must not take the place of medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always talk to a health care professional about any health concerns you have, and before you make any changes to your diet, lifestyle or treatment.

### WHAT IS VAP?

VAP is defined as pneumonia (a serious lung infection) that can occur in patients (specifically ICU patients) who need assistance breathing with a mechanical ventilator for at least 48 hours.

### WHAT ARE THE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS?

The most important symptoms include:

- Fever
- Low body temperature
- New purulent sputum (foul smelling infectious mucous or phlegm coughed up from the lungs or airway into the mouth)
- Hypoxia (decreasing amounts of oxygen in the blood)

### WHAT ARE THE RISK FACTORS FOR VAP?

Risk factors include:

- Being on a ventilator for more than five days
- Recent hospitalization (last 90 days)
- Residence in a nursing home
- Prior antibiotic use (last 90 days)
- Dialysis treatment in a clinic

### WHAT SHOULD HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS DOING TO PREVENT VAP?

Health care providers are:

- Practicing proper handwashing techniques
- Keeping the patient's head of the bed elevated at a 30 to 45 degree angle
- Discontinuing mechanical ventilation as soon as possible

### PREVENTING VAP: WHAT FAMILIES OF PATIENTS CAN DO

Families of patients can:

- Ask lots of questions. Ask what precautions your hospital is taking to prevent VAP.
- Wash their own hands often. Use soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub containing at least 60 per cent alcohol.

### HOW IS VAP TREATED?

Since VAP is caused by bacteria in the lungs, it is treated by using antibiotics.

## REFERENCE

For more information about the importance of good hand hygiene practices, read about the *Clean Hands Protect Lives* campaign at [www.oha.com](http://www.oha.com).