



## Healthcare-Associated Infections (HAIs)

# Frequently Asked Questions about Ventilator-associated Pneumonia

---

### What is a Ventilator-associated Pneumonia (VAP)?

Ventilator-associated pneumonia (VAP) is a lung infection that develops in a person who is on a ventilator. A ventilator is a machine that is used to help a patient breathe by giving oxygen through a tube placed in a patient's mouth or nose, or through a hole in the front of the neck. An infection may occur if germs enter through the tube and get into the patient's lungs.

---

### Why do patients need a ventilator?

A patient may need a ventilator when he or she is very ill or during and after surgery. Ventilators can be life-saving, but they can also increase a patient's chance of getting pneumonia by making it easier for germs to get into the patient's lungs.

---

### What are some of the things that hospitals are doing to prevent VAP?

To prevent ventilator-associated pneumonia, doctors, nurses, and other healthcare providers can do the following things:

- Keep the head of the patient's bed raised between 30 and 45 degrees unless other medical conditions do not allow this to occur.
  - Check the patient's ability to breathe on his or her own every day so that the patient can be taken off of the ventilator as soon as possible.
  - Clean their hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub before and after touching the patient or the ventilator.
  - Clean the inside of the patient's mouth on a regular basis.
  - Clean or replace equipment between use on different patients.
- 

### What can patients do to help prevent VAP?

Patients and family members can do the following things to help prevent VAP:

#### PATIENTS

- Quit smoking. Patients who smoke get more infections. Seek information about how to quit before surgery.
- If healthcare providers do not clean their hands, ask them to do so.

#### PATIENTS AND FAMILY MEMBERS

- Ask about raising the head of the bed.
- Ask when the patient will be allowed to try breathing on his or her own.

- If healthcare providers do not clean their hands, ask them to do so.
  - Ask about how often healthcare providers clean the patient's mouth.
- 

## Can VAP be treated?



Most of the time, these infections can be treated with antibiotics. The choice of antibiotics depends on which specific germs are causing the infection. The healthcare provider will decide which antibiotic is best.

---

## Additional Information



[Guidelines for Preventing Healthcare Associated Pneumonia, 2003](#)

---