Special Pathogens and EMS Response

Patient Management During Infectious Disease Outbreaks and Disasters

Special pathogens (SPs) are infections that are both contagious and dangerous to EMS personnel, including novel influenza strains (e.g., H5N1), viral hemorrhagic fevers (e.g., Ebola virus disease/viral hemorrhagic fever [EVD/VHF]), smallpox, and newly emerging infections.

Early recognition of patients who may be infected with an SP can help healthcare professionals protect themselves while caring for these patients.

Scan the QR code to find detailed information from the Administration for Strategic Preparedness & Response EMS Playbook for Infectious Diseases.

Dispatch

- Screen for exposures within the past 21 days (sick contacts, international travel), especially during known outbreaks.
- Relay information to first responders so that they can prepare themselves and their equipment.
- Recommend transport to an appropriate facility equipped to care for a patient with a suspected SP.

Response

- EMS responders should be vigilant for travel history and evidence of communicable disease (fever, rash, cough, gastrointestinal symptoms).
- Avoid direct contact until proper PPE is donned.
- Some patients, such as those with suspected hemorrhagic fevers, may require specialized vehicles for transport.

Patient Care

- Place a surgical mask on the patient (over the oxygen delivery device, if tolerated).
- Vehicles and patient care items such as stethoscopes and blood pressure cuffs must be decontaminated after use.
- Hand hygiene with soap and water is preferred for many SPs, especially if gloves are visibly soiled.

Personal Protective Equipment

- Multiple types exist for different SPs.
- Use checklists to ensure safety (especially for EVD/VHF).
- Understand and drill in different forms of PPE to ensure your own safety and minimize delays in care.
- Doffing for suspected EVD/VHF is a high-risk activity and must be done in a dedicated PPE removal area.
- Items marked below with an asterisk (*) may be appropriate in some circumstances but are never wrong to use if uncertain.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of precaution</th>
<th>Components</th>
<th>Diseases</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Standard</td>
<td>Gloves, Eye protection, Surgical mask</td>
<td>All patient contact involving body fluids or non-intact skin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact</td>
<td>Gloves, Impermeable gown, Eye protection, Surgical mask</td>
<td>Infectious diarrhea, Draining wounds, Scabies and lice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Droplet</td>
<td>Surgical mask, Eye protection, Gloves, N95 (optional)</td>
<td>Meningitis, Most respiratory infections (viruses, pneumonias)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Airborne</td>
<td>N95 or PAPR, Eye protection, Gloves</td>
<td>Tuberculosis, Chickenpox, Measles</td>
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<tr>
<td>Special respiratory</td>
<td>N95 or PAPR, Impermeable gown, Eye protection, Gloves</td>
<td>COVID-19, Novel influenza, e.g., H5N1, MERS, Mpox, Smallpox</td>
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<tr>
<td>EVD/VHF</td>
<td>N95 or PAPR, Impermeable gown, Eye protection (face shield), Double gloves, Shoe coverings</td>
<td>VHF, e.g., Ebola, Marburg</td>
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</tbody>
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