COVID-19 FAQ for
Patients with sleep apnea on CPAP

This information is provided is for educational purposes only and does not constitute medical advice: contact your medical provider to discuss your specific condition or situation.

Does having sleep apnea make me more likely to contract COVID-19? Will I be more likely to have severe complications if I get the virus?

COVID-19 is a new virus and there is limited information regarding risk factors for severe complications, so it is unknown at this point if sleep apnea will make you more susceptible to COVID-19. Based on current information and clinical expertise, older adults and people of any age who have serious underlying medical conditions might be at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19.

There are no studies or data available yet about the increased risk of complications due to COVID-19 in patients with sleep apnea.

If I have symptoms of COVID-19, should I continue using my CPAP?

If you have symptoms of COVID-19, take an online self-assessment at gov.mb.ca/covid19 to determine if you should call Health Links – Info Santé.

You can continue using your CPAP, but isolate yourself in a separate bedroom and use a separate bathroom, if available. In this "isolation room," you can continue to use CPAP while you sleep alone. Be sure to follow these steps for routine CPAP care:

- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water before and after handling the CPAP device, mask, tubing and filters
- Clean your CPAP equipment according to manufacturer's instructions
- Change filters and accessories as directed in your CPAP user guide

If you have been using your CPAP and test positive, simply replace your CPAP filters and disposable accessories after you've recovered from COVID-19.

If I have symptoms of COVID-19, will using CPAP spread the virus to others?

Current evidence suggests COVID-19 spreads between people who are in close contact with one another (within 2 metres). It is transmitted through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes.

However, there is some concern that using CPAP could spread the virus through the exhalation port, which allows carbon dioxide to escape from your mask. This port also may release smaller virus-containing particles as an "aerosol," which can remain suspended in the air for a few hours. It's possible that your bedpartner could inhale these virus particles. Therefore, it is important to sleep alone by isolating yourself in a separate bedroom. You can continue to use CPAP while sleeping in a separate room.

It is very important that your household members also comply with physical distancing and proper hand hygiene. Should one member of your household transmit the COVID-19 infection to you, then using CPAP could spread the virus by aerosolization even further in your household members or health-care providers.

Will a CPAP cleaning machine disinfect my CPAP device and mask?

It is unknown if these CPAP cleaners are safe and effective; you should clean your device according to the manufacturer's instructions, which usually include using soap and water.

If I have COVID-19, should I replace my CPAP accessories more frequently?

No; clean and replace your accessories as usual.

Should I use CPAP if I have symptoms of COVID-19 but can't self-isolate?

If you have symptoms of the coronavirus but are unable to isolate yourself in a separate bedroom, then you should contact your medical provider. It is safer for your household members that you stop CPAP temporarily, until your symptoms resolve and/or you receive negative results for COVID-19. Generally, in most cases of sleep apnea, temporary discontinuation of CPAP is not associated with significant threat for your safety. If your sleep apnea is very severe, you will have to discuss with your doctor if there are short-term interventions or alternative treatments for sleep apnea that could help you while you recover from COVID-19.

If I have COVID-19, will my CPAP be helpful for my breathing? Or could CPAP worsen COVID-19 symptoms?

If you have the coronavirus, you should continue using CPAP while sleeping alone in a separate bedroom. There is no evidence that using CPAP will cause the coronavirus to get worse.

Is it safe to use CPAP if I don't have symptoms of COVID-19?

If you have the coronavirus, you may be able to spread it to others before you have symptoms. Even if you don't have symptoms of COVID-19, you may want to sleep and use CPAP in a separate bedroom during this public health emergency.

It is advisable that your CPAP cleaning takes place in a separate bathroom that other household members do not use. It is very important that you follow proper hand hygiene.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, should I stay home if I have sleep apnea?
During the pandemic, everyone should avoid close contact with others. If you leave home, practice social distancing by maintaining a distance of at least two metres whenever possible. It is important that patients on CPAP and their household members practice vigilant physical distancing and proper hand hygiene.

Is the COVID-19 mortality rate higher in those with sleep apnea?
There is currently no evidence that sleep apnea without other co-morbid conditions increases the mortality rate of persons with COVID-19; however, patients with sleep apnea could have co-morbidities, such as heart and lung diseases, which may increase their risk.

Is there any protective equipment, filters, additives, or chemicals (e.g. bleach) that should be used with a CPAP machine during the COVID-19 pandemic?
CPAP equipment should be cleaned daily according to manufacturers' instructions. Protective equipment and filters are typically used only in a hospital setting.

What precautions should be taken if a patient cannot set up their CPAP unit themselves?

These could be cases where people rely either on family members or health-care workers for their CPAP set up. Providers of CPAP in these patients should wear Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). Ideally, this would include gown, goggles, gloves and mask, with goggles and mask at minimum.

For any other questions, please call the Sleep Disorder Centre at: 204-788-8570.

For more information:

gov.mb.ca/covid19

sharedhealthmb.ca

cdc.gov/coronavirus