

School Nurse Infection Control Guidance:

Suctioning and tracheostomy care



Airway management is essential for students with compromised respiratory status, and extra precautions should be taken to lessen the risks associated with performing AGP during the school day.

Aerosol-generating procedures (AGP) are more likely to generate higher concentrations of aerosolized infectious respiratory particles than coughing, sneezing, talking or breathing. These procedures potentially put staff at increased risk for pathogen exposure and infection.

Oral and nasal suctioning and closed system tracheostomy suctioning may not generate higher concentrations of aerosolized particles, but open tracheostomy care is a high-risk procedure. Staff should exercise caution when performing all AGP's during the school day.

Students in the school environment who have chronic respiratory conditions that may require oral or nasal suctioning, tracheostomy suctioning, or similar care should have both physician orders and an Individual Health Plan (IHP) on file in the school nurse clinic. As you write your student's action plan, encourage open discussion and collaboration between school nurses, school staff, families, and medical providers to develop a plan of care that seeks to avoid or minimize the opportunity for urgent procedures like suctioning while providing essential airway management during the school day.

Considerations that should be addressed to safely care for this student population:

Recommendations while performing suctioning oral, or nasal suctioning or closed tracheostomy care:

- PPE for nursing or school staff: The nurse or school staff member should use PPE (surgical mask, eye protection and gloves). While not considered as high risk as other procedures, school staff could choose to use a KN-95 if available and not in short supply. A gown is optional.
- Dedicated space, and space-cleaning requirements to ensure the safety of students and staff:
 - The space should be separate with good ventilation and the ability to close the door. Use of a portable HEPA filtration unit can provide additional protection and should be strongly considered.
 - If not feasible to have a separate space, the student should be separated from others in the room by at least **6 feet** from others in the room, ideally at the back of the classroom where other students are not facing the child. A barrier such as plexiglass could be considered as well. If suctioning is performed in the classroom, the nurse or staff member should focus suction in the oral cavity as much as possible and avoid the back of the throat where it would be more likely to generate cough.
- Any space where respiratory procedures are performed should have frequent and careful cleaning, including hard surfaces. Cleaning should be performed at least 60 minutes after oral cavity or closed tracheostomy suctioning.

Recommendations while performing open suctioning of a tracheostomy:

- PPE for the nurse or school staff should include surgical mask (or KN95 if preferred), eye protection and gloves (gown optional).
- The space should be separate with good ventilation and ability to close the door. Use of a portable HEPA filtration unit can provide additional protection and should be strongly considered.
 - Limit the people in the room to the student and staff performing the procedure.
 - When the procedure is completed, the room should be closed for at least 2 hours to allow aerosolized particles to settle prior to cleaning.
 - The room should undergo complete cleaning and wiping down of hard surfaces after the procedures are done and the room air has settled. When cleaning, staff members should wear appropriate PPE (surgical mask, eye protection, gloves and optional gown).

References:

- Plano Independent School District School Health Tracheostomy Care Administrative Guideline:
https://www.dshs.texas.gov/sites/default/files/uploadedFiles/Content/Prevention_and_Preparedness/schoolhealth/shpguide/Schoolhealthservicesguide/1.-TracheostomyAdministrative-Guideline.docx
- Additional Information for School Health Offices:
<https://www.mass.gov/doc/information-for-school-health-offices/download>
- Tracheal Suctioning-Clean Technique – Originally Published by the Wisconsin Improving School Health Services (WISHeS) Project:
<https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/sspw/pdf/trachsuctionprocCOVID.pdf>

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