

## Respiratory advice - Caring for people with Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities (PMLD) during Covid-19

Please consider this guidance alongside the government and NHS advice for the people you look after. The following are some tips and advice on how to keep people with PMLD you are looking after well and if they become unwell, some advice on helping them at home and when to escalate to hospital.

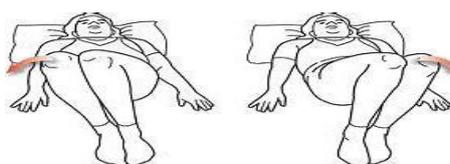


### Keep moving

**Regular change of position-** Repositioning should be every 2 hours as a minimum, varying positions and equipment as each one restricts the chest in different ways. Specific postural care equipment is important to use consistently as this will help at this time. Consideration around head position is really important as certain positions may make breathing more challenging. Generally people with PMLD should not lie completely flat on their backs as this is the worst position for their breathing, although each individual is very unique and may have specific plans for their positioning requirements.

**Breathing exercises-** If patients can follow instructions encourage 4 big breaths completed twice, with a rest in between, a few times a day as this will help keep the chest clear. Any activity or game that would mean someone took a deep breath such as blowing bubbles or blowing balloons away may really help keep peoples chest clear. Also some time (up to an hour) without constraining postural care equipment might be enough to help maintain respiratory health for people who cannot follow instructions. Consideration around whether this is on alternating sides or on their back with their head up is important. The position which gives the most chest movement is best.

**Body movements-** Stretches you would usually complete to keep the person healthy are important to continue with. Adding in rotation of the body by rotating the legs together from one side to the other, while they are on their backs with their heads up, is a good way to keep their chest well expanded and working as well as it can. See picture below. This doesn't need to be vigorously done just within comfort for the person and with the legs fully supported. This cannot be completed on people with spinal rods in place. If any further advice is needed to complete this please contact your LD team for further advice.





## Environment

Changes in temperature and humidity can have a big change on people's chests especially if they have secretions. There is no right or wrong answer, certain environments will work better for different individuals. For example if its colder people is asthma might find breathing more difficult and if too hot and dry people with secretions will find they find it harder to cough of phlegm. Also as spring is upon us hayfever will be starting as well so individuals could start taking their antihistamines now to rule out hayfever symptoms affecting their health.



## Normal treatments/chest physio

It is really important that normal chest clearance routines and medication use is maintained as the clearer the persons chest the better the individual will be if they become unwell. This is the advice from most professional groups looking after patients with respiratory conditions. It is also important to ensure the person has the normal healthy diet and also to monitor the patients swallowing if they are eating orally and notify the LD team of any changes early. If you feel that a person has respiratory symptoms(wheezy, short of breath, coughing and secretions) when well and these are not well managed, please give your LD team a call and discuss possible day to day measures you can introduce on specific patients to help to keep them well now.



## Medication supply

Please ensure that you have adequate supplies of your medication. At this time it is particularly important to consider additional medication use in an event of being unwell e.g. additional nebuliser and inhaler use. You can also discuss with you GP about having a rescue pack of medication at home to start immediately when unwell as other illness will also happen e.g. antibiotics/steroids to start at home.



## What to do if unwell

If you have covid-19 symptoms then you **MUST** follow the Public Health England and NHS advice and contact 111 to escalate care needs further

If you are unwell for another reason then your GP would be your first contact point. They may call and discuss the issue over the phone first before visiting.

**If someone is unwell and in the home to recover some of the below measures may help recovery**

- Keeping the person hydrated
- Maintaining nutrition as possible
- Regularly repositioning and completed chest physio techniques if trained to do so on the individual patients.
- Following their care plans if they have one, including additional measures which can be completed in an event of illness e.g. 2hrly saline 0.9% nebs or salbutamol inhalers 5 puffs every 4 hours via a spacer.

**Some signs someone is becoming critically unwell and may need hospital care:-**

- Breathing faster and more deeply than normal for longer than 30 mins
- Looking tired and sleeping more
- Colour of lips are pale/blue in colour
- If can normally speak now cannot due to being out of breath
- Coughing a lot and unable to get a breath and struggling to recover form this
- Breathing looks a lot of effort to complete and their stomachs or necks are sucking in because of their breathing



**If someone is critically unwell and needs to go to hospital then calling 999 and making it clear if covid-19 is suspected is helpful for ambulance staff to be able to care for the individual as well as possible.**

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