

COVID-19 and Home Positive Airway Pressure (PAP) Therapy

COVID-19 is a new form of Coronavirus disease that causes an infection with respiratory symptoms. Patients with Obstructive Sleep Apnea (OSA) who are treated with positive airway pressure (PAP, such as continuous PAP (CPAP) or bilevel PAP (BPAP)) with either suspected or confirmed COVID-19 may have questions about whether to use their PAP machine, how to clean it, and how to minimize risks to household members.



Positive airway pressure (PAP, such as continuous PAP (CPAP) or bilevel PAP (BPAP)) is used to treat disordered breathing during sleep, such as Obstructive Sleep Apnea (OSA), Central Sleep Apnea (CSA), or hypoventilation (as may be seen in patients with Obesity Hypoventilation Syndrome, COPD, or neuromuscular diseases). If you are using PAP, you may have concerns about using your machine if you get sick with a respiratory infection and are concerned about COVID-19 infection. There are changes you can put into place to make it easier and safer to use your PAP device.

Managing symptoms of respiratory illness

If your nose is congested—try nasal dilator sprays (such as ipratropium or steroid nasal spray) or breathing strips. Nasal saline washes (such as Neti Pot) may also be helpful, but should be cleaned after each use. These can all be obtained over-the-counter, or you can contact your provider for nasal spray prescriptions.

It may be okay not to use your machine for a day or two while you are recovering. But if you still cannot use your PAP machine during a long illness, you are concerned about your breathing at night, or you are not sleeping well at all, contact your sleep provider or your primary care provider.

If you are having difficulty breathing, and feel like you need to come to the Emergency Department (ED) or Urgent Care (UC), contact your primary care provider first and wear a mask when you come to the ED or UC. Directions for how and when to wear a mask can be found at <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novelcoronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/when-and-how-to-use-masks>. It is not advised to use your PAP device for respiratory distress and stay home—you will need to be seen by a medical provider.

If you need to come to the hospital for your illness, bring your PAP device and mask (along with tubing, filters, and power cord) with you. Each hospital will have its own policies regarding using your home machine, but it may be helpful to have it with you. Your hospital may be able to get you a new mask, if needed. If you are COVID-19 positive, your hospital providers may also choose not to treat you with PAP in the hospital (because of risk of spreading the virus to others), but they will monitor you closely.

Using your PAP during illness

It can be difficult to use PAP therapy during illness, due to nasal congestion, coughing and sneezing.

Continue to try to use your PAP machine, as possible.

If you have tested positive for COVID-19, do not

share your sleeping space with others when wearing your PAP device, if possible. You should also follow this recommendation for three days after your viral symptoms have gone away. It is also recommended to use a separate bathroom, whenever possible. If you cannot sleep in a room by yourself, then consider not using your PAP device at home. There is an increased risk of “aerosolizing” or spreading the virus in the air with the use of the PAP machine.

Clean and disinfect frequently touched items and surfaces in the room where you sleep with a regular household cleaning spray followed by an EPA-approved disinfectant such as diluted bleach (0.1%) or alcohol solution (62-71%) or hydrogen peroxide (0.5%). COVID-19 can survive on surfaces for as long as 5 days. For full list of disinfectants, see <https://www.americanchemistry.com/Novel-CoronavirusFighting-Products-List.pdf>

Cleaning and Disinfection of PAP machine and mask during illness

Routine cleaning and disinfection instructions for your PAP machine and mask can be found at <https://www.thoracic.org/patients/patient-resources/resources/pap-care-and-cleaning.pdf>

Clean the machine, humidifier, your mask or cushion/pillows, headgear, tubing, and sponge filter on a daily basis (instead of the usual weekly recommendations). Keep filters clean and humidifier dry when not in use.

It is important to know the name of the provider who prescribed your PAP device, the company who provided the machine (the durable medical equipment (DME) company) and your PAP settings. Write this information down and keep it with your PAP device.

Distilled water is best for the humidifier. But if you cannot get distilled water for your humidifier (due to shortages), you may use tap water that you have boiled and allowed to cool to room temperature. You may need to get a replacement humidifier from your DME if there are calcium or other mineral deposits on the inside of the humidifier chamber after the use of tap water. Your DME company will not be expected to do this routinely.

If your viral illness is not improving after 4-5 days and you are cleaning your device and mask regularly, you

should contact your sleep provider or DME company or sleep provider for a new replacement mask and disposable (paper) filter.

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Rx Action Steps

- ✓ Stay calm and practice social distancing.
- ✓ If you have mild symptoms of a viral infection, you can try nasal saline washes, nasal dilator sprays or breathing strips to help with nasal congestion. Stay at home and self-quarantine, as much as possible.
- ✓ If you test COVID-19 positive, sleep in a separate room whenever possible.
- ✓ If you test COVID-19 positive, clean and disinfect your PAP machine and supplies daily.
- ✓ If you are having shortness of breath while awake, contact your provider, bring your PAP device with you to the ED or UC.

Healthcare Provider's Contact Number:

Resources

American Thoracic Society

- <https://www.thoracic.org/patients/patient-resources/resources/coronavirus-patient.pdf>

Centers for Disease Control (CDC)

- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

World Health Organization (WHO)

- https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus#tab=tab_1

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