

What to do if you experience symptoms of fever and respiratory infection

In addition to NHS England and NHS 111 advice give consideration to the following if you are experiencing symptoms of fever and respiratory infection.

Respiratory infection

Tetraplegia and high-level paraplegia results in changes in breathing due to paralysed muscles of respiration and abdominal muscles. It can also mean that you have a weakened cough reflex. During times of respiratory infection the following advice may be beneficial.

- When sat upright lowering of the diaphragm can occur due to paralysis of the supporting abdominal muscles. Thus, increasing the effort required to breathe. If you are breathless avoid sitting upright. Sitting up at an angle of less than 45 degrees can make breathing easier
- If increased secretions develop, additional support may be required to help clear your airway. For example, assisted cough performed by your carers, pressing on your abdomen or sitting forward can increase the force at which you cough. If you have a tracheostomy and ventilation, increased frequency of bagging and suction may be required
- Regular change of position encourages drainage of secretions
- Remember that constipation can distend your abdomen and make breathing more difficult, so continue with your bowel care routine
- Ensure that you and your carers follow the advice from the NHS website regarding hand washing with soap and water often, for a minimum of 20 seconds. Particularly prior to any interventions around the face, nose, mouth and eyes. This should always be done anyway!
- Clean frequently touched surfaces around the home with anti-bacterial cleanser
- Be vigilant with the disposing of tissues
- Your carers may need to wear a mask to protect themselves from infection

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Controlling body temperature and managing fever

Spinal cord injury can affect your body's ability to regulate body temperature. Those with fever are therefore at high risk of heat exhaustion if cooling methods are not commenced. Signs of heat exhaustion include headache, confusion, slurred speech, increased heart rate and uncontrollable shivers (rigors). To prevent this occurring if you have a fever consider employing the following actions:

- Reduce environmental temperature by turning down heating
- Remove clothing and use modesty sheet only
- Use an oscillating/turning fan. Do not have the fan continually blowing at you
- Have frequent cold drinks
- Place a cold damp flannel around the back of your neck and in your armpits
- If appropriate use paracetamol to reduce fever
- Monitor temperature closely and cease cooling interventions as soon as your temperature returns to normal limits (typically 36.5–37.5 °C or 97.7–99.5 °F) to prevent hypothermia. If temperature does not return to normal please consider calling NHS 111 again for further advice, do not go directly to your GP. Continue other routine spinal cord injury care interventions

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