SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF INFECTION

Colds and flu are troublesome to everyone but if you have COPD or other pulmonary diseases, a respiratory illness can cause serious complications. Having a pulmonary disease makes you more susceptible to illness and therefore it is even more important to understand how to take care of yourself. The following information will help you to identify different types of illness, and steps you can take to prevent them:

Cold:

A cold is a minor infection of the nose and throat caused by more than 200 different viruses. Symptoms of a cold include runny nose, sinus congestion, sneezing, sore throat, headache and fatigue. Colds are contagious and are spread by droplets of fluid containing the virus becoming airborne and coming into contact with a new host. The virus may also be spread by contact with a surface that has been contaminated. Colds usually last 1 week, but can last longer in young children, the elderly and those who are immunocompromised.

Flu:

The flu is a highly contagious respiratory infection caused by different viruses. It mainly affects the nose, throat and lungs. Symptoms include cough, sore throat, sinus congestion, body aches, headaches, and fatigue. A fever and hot and cold flashes may be a symptom but does not always occur. Vomiting and diarrhea may also be experienced but is more commonly a symptom displayed by children. The flu is spread by droplets entering the nose, or mouth or by touching contaminated surfaces then transferring the virus to nose, mouth or eyes. Because the flu is highly contagious, it is important to note that an individual may be contagious 1 day prior to onset of symptoms and up to a week after becoming sick. The flu can develop into more serious complications such as pneumonia, ear and sinus infections, congestive heart failure, asthma, and diabetes.

Pneumonia:

Pneumonia is an infection in one or both lungs. Pneumonia can be caused by many different things. The five most common causes of pneumonia are bacteria, viruses, mycoplasms (organisms that have traits of both bacteria and viruses), fungi (pneumocystis), and chemical exposure. If a viral pneumonia develops it may also progress into a bacterial infection. Those at risk are older adults, young children, smokers, people with compromised immune systems, and other health conditions (diabetes, autoimmune disorders, cirrhosis of the liver, individuals with neurologic conditions, heart disease, chronic lung disease, recent surgery).

SIGNS YOU MAY BE DEVELOPING AN INFECTION

If you think you may be developing an infection it is important to act fast! Treating a possible infection quickly will help speed up the recovery process and prevent additional complications.

As soon as you think you may be getting sick as yourself these questions…

- Am I more short of breath than usual?
- Am I more fatigued than usual? Is it more of an effort to do daily activities I normally do?
- Do I have a headache (especially in the morning)?
- Do I have a fever?
- Am I coughing more than normal?
- Am I bringing up more mucus? Is the mucus thick and sticky and yellow, green, brown, or blood tinged?
- Have I been using my inhaler or nebulizer more than usual?
- Does my inhaler/nebulizer seem less effective or ineffective?
- Are my ankles or legs swollen? Have I gained 3 or more pounds recently?
- Am I dizzy? Confused? Having trouble concentrating? Irritable?
- Am I experiencing insomnia?
- What were my symptoms the last time I had a respiratory infection?

INFECTION PREVENTION

"Prevention is the best medicine", "Better to be proactive versus reactive". These are great words of advice when it comes to staying well. Practicing good hygiene is your best defense against illness and spreading infection. Follow these tips regularly and year round and before long they will become second nature...

- Talk to your doctor about getting a yearly flu shot and pneumonia shot. The flu shot will prevent some strains of the flu and reduce the severity of the flu.
- Avoid spending time with people who are sick. Let them know it is important that you stay healthy.
- Stay home and rest if you are sick.
- Cough and sneeze into your elbow instead of your hands to prevent the transmission of germs.

- Use disposable tissues instead of handkerchiefs. Reusing the same tissue contaminates hands and reintroduces the bacteria or virus to the body.
- Always wash hands or use hand sanitizer after coughing, sneezing or blowing nose.
- Use your medications regularly and as prescribed.
- Drink water, eat healthy meals, exercise as it helps boost the immune system, and get plenty of sleep.
- Wash hands or use sanitizer when out in public environments. Keep hand sanitizer readily available in the car, purse or with oxygen tank.
- Wash and sanitize your respiratory equipment (nebulizer and aerochamber/spacer). Replace cannulas often, especially if you have been sick or drop the cannula on the floor.