



## COVID-19 and CPAP Frequently Asked Questions

This world-wide pandemic with coronavirus (COVID-19) has caused many dramatic changes in almost every part of life. For example, in the community most hospital surgeries are being delayed, many doctor's appointments are being cancelled and people are not able to see a dentist except in an extreme emergency. Public Health and Medical agencies are looking for every possible way to slow the spread of this virus and keep other people from getting it. Everyone is looking forward to the pandemic being controlled so that things can go back to normal.

### **What is CPAP?**

CPAP stands for continuous positive airway pressure and is a small machine that people with sleep apnea use at night to help improve their breathing while they sleep.

### **Do I have a higher risk of getting COVID-19 because I have sleep apnea?**

There is no evidence that people with sleep apnea are more likely to get COVID-19 infection.

### **If I do get COVID-19 infection, do I have a higher risk of getting really sick because I have sleep apnea?**

Sleep apnea alone does not increase a person's risk of severe COVID-19 but some people with sleep apnea have other conditions\* that place them at higher risk for complications if they do get infected with COVID-19.

*\*Age 65 years or older, heart disease, chronic lung disease, diabetes and obesity are among the pre-existing conditions that have been shown to increase the risk for complications of COVID-19 infection.*

### **Is using CPAP during the COVID-19 epidemic dangerous?**

Yes, using CPAP could cause people around you to get sick with COVID-19.

- COVID-19 is spread by tiny drops from someone who is sick with COVID-19 when they cough or sneeze.
- Using a CPAP machine can spread the COVID-19 even further than coughs and sneezes do. This is because the CPAP mask makes even smaller drops. These tiny drops can stay in the air for hours and can travel to the whole room.
- If you or someone in your room has COVID-19 and uses a CPAP machine, other people in the same room could breathe in these tiny drops. This could cause many other people to get sick with COVID-19.

### **What is the plan for persons who use CPAP (or BiPAP) in CDCR/CCHCS?**

For most patients with sleep apnea on CPAP, the short term stopping of CPAP is less risky than continuing CPAP and potentially spreading the virus within the prison during this COVID-19 pandemic.

Therefore, CCHCS medical providers will review the chart of each person on CPAP within CDCR/CCHCS and will recommend temporarily stopping CPAP for most patients, especially those who are sharing sleeping space with other people.

### **But I do not have symptoms of COVID-19, so can't I keep using my CPAP around other people until I get sick?**

Unfortunately it has been shown that people can be infected with COVID-19 and spread the virus for up to 2 days before showing any symptoms.

- People in the community, and both staff and inmates in the prison are getting COVID-19 without knowing when or where they got it.
- Therefore it is safest for us to treat everyone as though they could be infected. This is why everyone is being asked to stay at least 6 feet away from everyone else, keep their hands clean, keep their living areas clean, frequently clean things like door knobs and shared surfaces and why in many locations everyone is being asked to wear a cloth mask.

### **Is it OK for me to stop my CPAP?**

There have been research studies that look at what happens when a person goes off CPAP. This has been studied because in the community many patients choose to go without their CPAP for days or weeks at a time. Sometimes people stop their CPAP because they are traveling and sometimes because the equipment bothers them or the person they are sleeping with.

When a person stops their CPAP:

- They may notice that they are more irritable or sleepy during the day because they are not getting as much restful sleep at night and they can have a small rise in their pulse rate or blood pressure.
- Research has not shown an increase in medical complications from temporarily stopping CPAP usage.

### **Is there anything I can use to treat my sleep apnea while I am off CPAP?**

- Specialists say the most important thing most patients with sleep apnea can do is to try to lose weight. This is hard to do in the short-term but can continue to be a long-term goal.
- Studies have shown that NOT sleeping on your back can help decrease sleep apnea. So as much as possible sleep on your side.
- If you have allergies/stuffy nose, using medication to help open your nasal passages may help.

If you have any questions not answered by these frequently asked questions, please contact your primary care team.