Admitting Residents with Respiratory Illness

The COVID-19 pandemic is unprecedented, and nursing homes are taking extreme measures to protect our families and our residents. To ensure the best quality of life for our residents, nursing homes must understand the resident’s medical history when making admissions/readmission decisions.

Respiratory Panel Tests

Respiratory panel tests are used to determine what pathogen may be causing a respiratory infection. A respiratory pathogen panel tests for the presence of bacteria and viruses in a single respiratory sample. The sample may be a nasopharyngeal swab or sputum. Differences in respiratory pathogen panels depend on which micro-organisms they can detect. Some of the common organisms that are included in these tests are Adenovirus, Influenza, Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV), Parainfluenza viruses, Rhinovirus, and Coronavirus. When you see Coronavirus on these panels, it is testing for coronaviruses that have been around for some time such as Coronavirus HKU1, Coronavirus NL63, Coronavirus 229E, or Coronavirus OC43. The respiratory panels are NOT capable of testing for the SARS 2 CoV-2 which is the novel strain of coronavirus most often referred to as COVID-19.

Infection Prevention Precautions

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provides guidance in their Isolation Precautions Guideline Appendix A on the type and duration of precautions for respiratory pathogens. Respiratory infections may require standard precautions, droplet precautions, droplet and contact precautions, or contact precautions depending on the pathogen and precautions typically need to be in place for the duration of illness. This means that if a patient is being transferred to the nursing home because his/her illness has resolved, then the nursing home can remove the precautions at the time of transfer.

CDC does note that at times we may need to consider extending precautions in immunocompromised persons due to ongoing viral shedding even after they are no longer symptomatic. Please refer to the CDC guideline to identify the type of precautions needed and for how long based on the pathogen.

In summary, Respiratory infections are common and may be due to a variety of different pathogens. Florida’s nursing homes have a long history of successfully caring for residents with respiratory infections and need to continue to provide care to these residents. All reasonable efforts must be made to admit residents that have a condition that can be cared for within the capacity of the nursing home.

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