Cystic Fibrosis why we're here

Cross-infection Policy

Cross-infection policy for people with cystic fibrosis at events and meetings

This policy gives practical advice for people with cystic fibrosis (CF) on how to minimise their exposure to harmful bacteria and protect their health when taking part in indoor or outdoor events and meetings. This policy should be followed at all events organised by the Cystic Fibrosis Trust and its volunteer branches, groups and committees.

1. Background to cross-infection concerns

Cross-infection is an issue of considerable concern for the CF community. People with CF can carry different bacteria or bugs that grow in their lungs. These bugs are rarely harmful to those who do not have CF but may be harmful to others with the condition who are not carrying the same bugs.

Cross-infection became a real problem in the 1990s in relation to *Burkholderia cepacia*, some strains of which can cause very serious health problems in those with cystic fibrosis. It was agreed by CF clinicians that those with *Burkholderia cepacia* should be segregated from other people with cystic fibrosis. It subsequently emerged that there are several strains of *Burkholderia cepacia* (since referred to as *Burkholderia cepacia* complex) and some are more serious than others so people with *Burkholderia cepacia* complex were then further segregated according to the strain they had.

Pseudomonas aeruginosa is a bug that people with CF regularly acquire, mostly from the environment. *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* can usually be eradicated or kept at bay with early antibiotic treatment. It is expected that people with CF will pick up *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* from time to time.

There are thousands of different strains of *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*, and there is some concern that people with CF are more likely to pick up strains of *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* that are difficult to treat from each other rather than from the environment. For this reason, CF centres and clinics are now encouraged to offer separate clinics for people with CF according to whether or not they have *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* and if so, whether the particular strain is known to be transmissible (shown to have the ability under some circumstances to pass from person to person).

Mycobacterium abscessus is another bug that can sometimes cause complications in people with CF and, if treatment is needed, requires a very prolonged course of antibiotics. Research has also found evidence for cross-infection by some strains of *Mycobacterium abscessus*.

It is possible that some CF bugs can be transmitted from person to person by close personal contact, such as sharing rooms, medical equipment, cutlery or crockery and by kissing or coughing.

More recently, there is an increasing number of people with CF who are post-transplant and are still at risk of developing a bug due to their immunosuppressed status. It is recommended that they should also follow the cross-infection avoidance protocols described below.

2. Cross-infection at outdoor events

For the reasons already explained, we have developed the following policy for outdoor events.

Those with *Burkholderia cepacia* complex or *Mycobacteria abscessus* should not attend any event where anyone with CF may be present.

For those without *Burkholderia cepacia* complex or *Mycobacteria abscessus*, there is little risk of person to person transmission for participants and spectators with CF in an outdoor environment, but prolonged close contact, such as travelling with other people with CF in a car or a coach or joining them for a drink in the pub after the event, may introduce a higher level of risk. Therefore, to reduce the likelihood of cross-infection, people with CF should observe the following rules:

a) Do not travel to and from the event with others with CF unless you usually share a room or house with this person. For example, if this person is your brother, sister, parent or child who also has cystic fibrosis.

b) Observe good basic hygiene, such as hand washing. Wash your hands before and after eating, before and after attending any event, and always after shaking hands with another individual, whether or not they have CF, and after using the toilet. Cover your mouth and nose whenever you cough, and preferably cough into a tissue, which can be kept in a sealed container for later disposal. Do not spit your sputum onto the ground. Do not share drinking or eating utensils, any food or drink, or any medical inhalers or equipment. Do not get involved in the preparation or serving of food for the event if people with CF are going to be present.

c) Do not shake hands with, or kiss on the cheek, others with cystic fibrosis.

d) Do not go into a pub or restaurant after the event if there may be others with CF present. If you find you have accidentally arrived at the same pub or restaurant as someone with CF, try to sit well apart and try to choose an outdoor seat.

e) Whilst participating in or attending the outdoor event, try to avoid being in close proximity to others unless you are sure they do not have cystic fibrosis. If you are having a bout of coughing, try to move further away from others with CF – if you are not sure if they have CF, then move away from all other people while you are coughing, and wash and disinfect your hands afterwards (using alcohol rub). Think carefully before attending if you have a cold, your chest is worse than normal or if you are likely to have to cough so much during the event that maintaining good hand hygiene would be very difficult. Please also think very carefully before bringing very young children with CF to an event as it may be difficult to ensure that they will maintain the same standard of hygiene as an adult.

People attending an outdoor/challenge event should be aware that there may be other people with CF present at the event.

3. Cross-infection at indoor events

Since close contact between people with CF is much more likely to occur at indoor events, which significantly increases the risk of cross-infection, it is our policy for only one person with CF to be present or allocated a place at an indoor event organised by Cystic Fibrosis Trust staff or its volunteer branches, groups and committees.

This place is often reserved for a speaker or guest with CF and no other attendees with CF are invited to ensure there is no contact with another person with CF that could compromise their health status. Alternatively, if there is no speaker or guest with CF attending, this single place for a person with CF is allocated on a ‘first come, first served’ basis. This policy applies to all events and meetings organised by the Cystic Fibrosis Trust’s staff, branches, groups and committees.

This may mean that if a second person with CF arrives without prior arrangement, to protect their health and maintain the highest standard of care, it may not be possible for them to take part, or be present, on that occasion. We are sorry for any inconvenience or upset that this may cause, however the safety and wellbeing of those with CF is our main concern, and we do not wish to expose anyone to unnecessary risk.

Thank you for your co-operation.