

COVID-19 AND INVASIVE FUNGAL INFECTIONS

Information for Patients and Families



Pulmonary Aspergillosis

What is it and how did this happen?

Pulmonary aspergillosis (PA) is a fungal infection that can cause fever, cough, chest pain, shortness of breath and fatigue. It is caused by a common mold found in indoor and outdoor environments called *Aspergillus*. It can affect people with COVID-19 who are critically ill and/or on a ventilator.

How is it treated?

Medicines called 'antifungals' will be used to treat PA. They will be given through the IV line or in pill form by mouth. These are very effective in killing fungus but can sometimes cause unwanted side effects like vision changes, headaches, nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea.

Supplemental oxygen may also be used to ensure the patient's needs are met. Their lungs will have a lot of healing to do so the oxygen (and sometimes a ventilator) will work so that the lungs can rest or at least not have to work as hard.

More information about COVID-19–associated pulmonary aspergillosis can be found at the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](https://www.cdc.gov/disease/prevention-and-control/covid-19-and-fungal-infections/) & [covidandfungus.org](https://www.covidandfungus.org)

VISITATION

- Visitation policies for patients with COVID-19 may vary by hospital. Check with the facility directly for the most up-to-date information.
- Unlike COVID-19, PA is not contagious and usually only affects people with a weakened immune system.

HOW CAN I HELP?

- Provide information to the patient's care team: medical history, current medications, what language they speak, and things they like (e.g., music).
- Try to stay positive. Your loved one needs your emotional support during this tough time.
- Ask if you can bring in a comfort item, like a soft blanket or cozy socks from home.

WHAT ELSE COULD HAPPEN?

- Medications and long stays in the ICU can cause confusion or memory loss.
- Being in bed for an extended period of time can result in significant loss of muscle tone and strength.

Tips for Patients Going Home

- Depending on insurance, the medications needed after the hospital may be expensive. Talk with the case manager or your local pharmacist if you are concerned about cost. Financial assistance may be available.
- Talk with your healthcare provider before taking vitamins, supplements, or over the counter medications to avoid harmful drug interactions.
- Home healthcare may be needed after the hospital to help the recovery process. This can include nursing care, physical therapy or occupational therapy.
- Know when you should call your healthcare provider or seek emergency medical care. Let someone know if you experience fever, chills, chest pain or have bloody sputum.

Preventing Caregiver Burnout

Caring for a loved one may be stressful at times. It can even lead to physical and emotional exhaustion, sometimes called 'caregiver burnout.' Burnout can occur when you have unrealistic expectations of yourself or others, feel like things are out of your control, or even just struggle to separate your role as caregiver from your personal relationship. Caregiver burnout can be prevented by talking with someone you trust about your feelings, accepting help from others, and prioritizing your own health by getting adequate sleep, eating well and staying physically active.

Symptoms of Caregiver Burnout:

- Withdrawal from friends, family and social gatherings
- Loss of interest in activities you used to enjoy
- Feeling helpless or hopeless
- Changes in your appetite or sleep pattern

COMMON QUESTIONS & WHOM TO ASK

NURSE

- How are they doing?
- When / who can visit?
- Something seems wrong - is this normal?
- What can I do to comfort them?
- Can I bring things from home?
- Can I bring them outside food?

PROVIDER

- What is their prognosis?
- What does recovery look like & how long will it take?
- What is the plan of care?
- Who will provide care after the ICU?
- Will rehab be needed?

CASE MANAGER

- Can we choose where to go after the hospital?
- What is the plan after we leave?
- What can home health help with?
- How can I find out what insurance will cover?
- How much will the medicine cost?