

Common COVID-19 Medical Terminology Made Simple

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The Human Element Project
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HOSPITAL TERMINOLOGY MADE EASY

Listed in alphabetical order

ABG - Arterial Blood Gases - A blood test taken from an artery on the wrist or groin that measures oxygen and carbon dioxide levels in the blood. It also measures the body's pH level.

Afebrile - Not having a fever, a normal temperature.

Antibiotics - Medicines that fight bacterial infections. They work by killing the bacteria or by making it hard for the bacteria to grow and multiply. They do not affect viral infections.

Anti-coagulation - Also referred to as blood thinners. This can be achieved by giving oral or IV medicines that prevent blood clots, i.e., Heparin and Warfarin to name a few.

Anti viral medication - Antiviral drugs are a class of medication used for treating some viral infections. Most antivirals target specific viruses, while a broad-spectrum antiviral is effective against a wide range of viruses. Unlike most antibiotics, antiviral drugs do not destroy a virus; instead they inhibit its development.

ARDS (Acute respiratory distress syndrome) - This occurs when fluid builds up in the tiny, elastic air sacs (alveoli) in your lungs. The fluid keeps your lungs from filling with enough air, which means less oxygen reaches your bloodstream. This deprives your organs of the oxygen they need to function. ARDS typically occurs in people who are critically ill.

Aspiration - Breathing foreign objects into your airways; food, saliva, or vomit. This can progress to aspiration pneumonia.

Atelectasis - This is a complete or partial collapse of the entire lung or area (lobe) of the lung. It occurs when the tiny air sacs (alveoli) within the lung become deflated or possibly filled with alveolar fluid.

BiPAP - "Bi level Positive Airway Pressure". Pressurized air with supplemental oxygen given through a special tight fitting mask, or through a ventilator. The pressure changes between inhalation and exhalation (breathing in and breathing out) to help keep the airways open.

Bradycardia - Abnormally slow heartrate less than 60 beats per minute. Bradycardia can be a serious problem if the heart doesn't pump enough oxygen-rich blood to the body.

Bronchoscopy - An endoscopic technique (looking inside with a scope) to visualize the inside of the airways of the lungs for diagnostic and therapeutic purposes using a bronchoscope which is inserted into the airways (nose, mouth or tracheostomy). The patient is sedated for this process.

Catheter - A hollow flexible tube for insertion into a body cavity, duct, or vessel to allow the passage of fluids. One use includes the drainage of urine from the bladder (Foley) through the urethra.

Central line - A catheter placed in a large vein of the central body, usually through the neck or groin. It is like an intravenous (IV) line but it is much longer. It provides easy access for medicine, fluids, blood, or nutrition. It also can be used to draw blood.

CHF - Congestive heart failure - A chronic progressive condition that affects the pumping power of your heart muscle. CHF specifically refers to the stage in which fluid builds up within the heart, into the lungs, and causes it to pump inefficiently.

Convalescent plasma - A therapeutic intervention that uses blood from people who've recovered from COVID-19. This plasma may contain antibodies against COVID-19. Antibodies are proteins that your immune system makes after you have had an infection, that can neutralize or kill the virus and help you to recover.

COPD - Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease - A chronic inflammatory lung disease that causes obstructed airflow from the lungs. Symptoms include breathing difficulty, cough, mucus (sputum) production and wheezing. Also known as emphysema.

CPAP - Continuous positive airway pressure - A form of positive airway pressure (PAP) ventilation in which a constant level of pressure above atmospheric pressure is continuously applied to the upper airway.

CT - Computerized Tomography - An imaging technique that uses a combination of X-rays and a computer to create pictures of your organs, bones, and other tissues. It shows more detail than a simple Xray.

D-DIMER - A blood test that is used to measure and assess clot formation. In COVID-19 patients, elevated D-dimer levels have been associated with disease severity.

DVT - Deep vein thrombosis - This occurs when a blood clot (thrombus) forms in one or more of the deep veins in your body, usually in your legs. Deep vein thrombosis can cause leg pain or swelling, but also can occur with no symptoms.

ECMO - Extracorporeal Membrane Oxygenation - This machine is used to pump blood outside the body to a heart-lung machine that removes carbon dioxide and sends oxygen-filled blood back to tissues in the body. ECMO is used in critical care situations.

Edema - Literally means 'swelling' caused by the abnormal buildup of fluid in the body that often causes swelling in the feet, ankles, legs, arms, hands, or face.

ET Tube - A tube that is inserted through either the patient's nose or throat and into the windpipe (trachea) to allow for mechanical (artificial ventilation).

Extubation - The removal of a previously inserted tube, such as an endotracheal tube, catheter, drain, or feeding tube, from an organ, orifice, or other body structure.

Febrile (Fever) - Having above normal (98.6) temperature. A fever is a temporary increase in your body temperature, often due to an illness. Symptoms of fever are sweating, chills, headaches, and fatigue.

High flow O2 - A special catheter that can deliver up to 100% oxygen to the patient. This is a much more involved process where the O2 heated and humidified and delivered by a larger cannula through the nose or a mask.

Hypercoagulation - A condition that causes your blood to clot more easily than normal. Blood clots can cause pulmonary embolisms and DVT's, heart attacks, strokes, kidney failure and more. Hypercoagulation has been seen with COVID patients.

Hypertensive - Abnormally high blood pressure, the higher your blood pressure levels, the more risk you have for other health problems. High blood pressure can seriously affect your heart, brain, kidneys, and eyes.

Hypotensive - Abnormally low blood pressure can cause dizziness and fainting. In severe cases, low blood pressure can be life-threatening.

Hypoxia - Hypoxia is a condition in which the body or a region of the body is deprived of adequate oxygen supply at the tissue level. Hypoxia may be classified as either generalized, affecting the whole body, or local, affecting a region of the body.

ICU Psychosis - Patients in an intensive care unit (ICU) or a similar hospital setting may experience anxiety, become paranoid, hear voices, see things that are not there or become severely disoriented in time and place. One patient in 3 who spends more than 5 days in an ICU experiences some form of psychotic reaction. ICU psychosis often goes away in a matter of days.

Intravenous - A medical technique that delivers a liquid directly into a person's vein. This route of administration is commonly used for rehydration or to provide nutrition in those who cannot consume food or water by mouth. It may also be used to administer medications or other medical therapy.

Intubation - The process of placing an endotracheal tube into the trachea in order to connect the patient to a ventilator. The patient is sedated for this process. A patient cannot talk while intubated.

Isolation - The state of separation from other people of a person suffering from an infectious disease, or carrying infective organisms, so as to prevent spread of infection.

Lactic acid - A blood test that measures lactic acid levels. These levels increase when the flow of blood/oxygen through the body is lower than normal. Some of the most common conditions which result in higher lactic acid levels include shock, heart failure, and sepsis.

Lung Infiltrate - Fluid or mucus in place of air in a part of the lung as seen on xray.

Monitor - An electronic device used to record, regulate, or control the patient's heartbeat, blood pressure and oxygen levels. All intensive care patients are observed on a monitor.

Multifocal pneumonia - A lung infection that the infection not just affecting one part of the lung but multiple sections. Bilateral means that the infection is present in both lungs.

Nasal cannula - A tube that delivers oxygen through two plastic prongs that fit into the nostrils. Can deliver up to 44% oxygen.

NG tube (nasogastric tube) - A flexible tube of rubber or plastic that is passed through the nose, down through the esophagus, and into the stomach. It can be used to either remove substances from or add them to the stomach. An NG tube is only meant to be used on a temporary basis and is not for long-term use.

O2 - Oxygen. Room air normally contains 21% oxygen which is enough if your lungs are working well. When the lungs are working poorly, medical providers give a patient supplemental oxygen to help the lungs absorb enough to supply oxygen to the body's vital organs.

O2 sat - Oxygen saturation - sometimes referred to as O2 sats, or simply, sats - refers to the extent to which hemoglobin is saturated with oxygen. Hemoglobin is an element in your blood that binds with oxygen to carry it through the bloodstream to the organs, tissues, and cells of your body. Normal saturation is 90-100%.

Paralytics - A paralytic (sometimes called a muscle relaxant) is a category of medications that cause extreme muscle relaxation that renders most muscles of the body unable to move.

Patient-controlled analgesia (PCA) - A method of pain control that gives patients the power to control their pain. The PCA is a computerized controlled pump which delivers pain medication through an intravenous catheter.

PE - Pulmonary embolism - A blood clot which is blocking part of the blood vessels in the lung.

PICC Line - Peripherally Inserted Central Catheter - A catheter that goes into a vein in the upper arm. The end of the catheter winds up in a large vein near the heart. It carries nutrients and medicines and also used to draw blood.

Pneumonia - An infection that inflames the air sacs in one or both lungs. The air sacs may fill with fluid or pus causing cough, fever, chills, and difficulty breathing. A variety of organisms, including bacteria, viruses and fungi, can cause pneumonia. Pneumonia can range from mild to life-threatening.

PPE - Personal protection Equipment worn to minimize exposure and spread of virus from one person to another. Gowns, gloves, masks, face shields, respirators.

Prone - Lying face down. Often done for COVID patients to move secretions out of the lung tissue.

Rales - Abnormal rattling sounds accompanying the breath sounds that are caused by air passing through fluid or mucus in the small air tubes (bronchioles).

Remdesavir - An anti-viral medication that is often used to treat COVID-19.

Respiratory Suctioning - This procedure is used to suction mucus and other fluids (secretions) from the windpipe (trachea) and large airways. It is typically used in people who are on mechanical ventilation.

Ronchi - A low-pitched wheezing, snoring, or squeaking sound heard while listening to the lungs of a person with thick secretions in the airway.

Sedation - The reduction of irritability or agitation by giving sedative drugs to relax a patient or make them sleepy. Generally given before a medical procedure. All patients are sedated before they are intubated.

SOB - Abbreviation for shortness of breath.

Sepsis - A potentially life-threatening complication of an infection. It occurs when chemicals released into the bloodstream to fight the infection trigger inflammatory responses throughout the body. This inflammation can trigger a cascade of changes that can damage multiple organ systems, causing them to fail.

Spontaneous Breathing Trial (SBT) - Assesses the patient's ability to breathe while receiving minimal or no ventilator support.

Steroids used for COVID-19 - Steroids (short for corticosteroids) are synthetic drugs that closely resemble cortisol, a hormone that your adrenal glands produce naturally. Patients with severe COVID-19 can develop an inflammatory response that can lead to injury of the lungs and other organs. The potent anti-inflammatory effects of corticosteroids might help stop this response. Examples are Decadron and Prednisone.

Supine - A person lying supine is face up while a person lying prone is facing downward.

Tachycardia - A heart rhythm disorder (arrhythmia) in which the heart beats faster than normal while at rest (over 100 beats per minute). This can be a response to stress, trauma or illness.

Tachypnea - Abnormally rapid breathing over 20 breaths per minute.

Ventilator - A breathing machine which is connected to the ET tube and blows air and oxygen in and out of the lungs. The ventilator can do all the breathing for the patient or it can assist the patient's own breathing. In order to remove the ventilator, patients must be weaned (taken off the ventilator in small steps) until they can breathe on their own.

X-ray - A quick, painless test that produces images of the structures inside your body, particularly your bones and lungs.

MEDICAL PROVIDERS

Cardiologist - Internal medicine doctor who treats patients with diseases of the heart and blood vessels.

Case Manager - Work to facilitate patient care by assessing patient needs, evaluating treatment options, creating treatment plans, coordinating care and gauging progress.

Emergency physician - A medical speciality concerned with the care of illness or injuries requiring immediate medical attention. They care for all types of patients of all ages with acute emergencies.

Hematologist - An internal medicine doctor that have training in disorders of the blood, bone marrow and lymphatic system.

Hospital Chaplain - Chaplains provide support for the emotional and spiritual challenges that accompany illness, hospitalization or death. Spiritual support and crisis intervention are usually available 24 hours a day. Ask your medical provider or social worker for more information.

Hospitalist - An internal medicine doctor who takes care of non-critical medical floor patients.

Infectious disease specialist - A sub speciality of Internal Medicine specializing in preventing, diagnosing and treating infectious diseases caused by viruses, bacteria, fungi and parasites. They also have extensive knowledge in immunology, epidemiology and infection control.

Intensivist - A critical care physician whose medical practice is focused entirely on the care of critically ill and injured patients while hospitalized. Most common shifts are 12 hours, they switch at night and work one week on at a time.

Medical Social worker - Work with patients to coordinate communication with loved ones, connecting patients and families to necessary resources while coordinating with the medical treatment team.

MD vs DO - An MD is a traditional medical degree, whereas a DO take a more holistic approach to care. In the US, the same licensing boards give licenses to both types of doctor, and they must meet the same standards for practicing medicine,

Nephrologist - Internal medicine doctor who specializes in diseases of the kidneys.

Neurologist - Internal medicine doctor that treats disease of the brain, spinal cord, peripheral nerves and muscles.

Nurse practitioner - An advanced practice registered nurse trained to assess patient needs, order and interpret diagnostic and laboratory tests, diagnose disease and prescribe treatment plans.

Physical therapist - Restore physical mobility and function after an illness. Other rehabilitative support in this area include occupational therapists and speech and language therapists.

Physician Assistant - A medical provider who is licensed to diagnose and treat illness and disease and to prescribe medication in collaboration with a licensed physician.

Pulmonologist - A medical doctor who diagnoses and treats diseases of the respiratory system -- the lungs and other organs that help you breathe.

Respiratory therapist (RT) - A specialized healthcare practitioner trained to handle breathing or airway problems that can stem from the respiratory effects of COVID-19.

DEATH AND DYING TERMONOLOGY

Advance Directive - An advance healthcare directive, also known as living will, personal directive, medical directive or advance decision, is a legal document in which a person specifies what actions should be taken for their health if they are no longer able to make decisions for themselves because of illness or incapacity.

DNR - Do Not Resuscitate - This is a form filled out by the patient giving directions to not resuscitate in the case of a cardiac arrest. No CPR or resuscitation will be performed. A DNR form can be found online or in any hospital or doctor's office. This form can be on file with the hospital.

POLST - Physician Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment - a form that gives seriously-ill patients more control over their end-of-life care, including medical treatment, extraordinary measures (such as a ventilator or feeding tube) and CPR. Printed on bright pink paper, and signed by both a patient and physician, nurse practitioner or physician assistant, POLST can prevent unwanted or ineffective treatments.

Hospice/Spiritual Care Provider - Chaplains and Spiritual Care Providers guide patients and their families through the emotional and spiritual challenges of illness, death and bereavement. They respect all spiritual beliefs and traditions, and never preach or proselytize. However, If you want a chaplain from a specific religious tradition, such as a rabbi, an imam or a priest, you can request one.

Active Dying - There are early, middle and late stages in the dying process. The late stage is known as "active dying." Pain and discomfort at this stage can be relieved with medications. It is best not to disturb a patient during this stage, so be sure to say your goodbyes, express your love, forgiveness, etc., during the earlier stages.

Durable Power of Attorney (POA) / healthcare proxy - A legal document that appoints a trusted individual to make medical decisions on your behalf if you are no longer capable of making your own decisions due to illness or incapacity.

Informed Consent - In order to have true informed consent, a patient must understand all the risks, benefits and alternative options associated with the care being provided.

Medical Power of Attorney - A Medical Power of Attorney is the person selected by an individual to make healthcare decisions on their behalf when they are incapacitated or no longer able to make decisions on their own.