



Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

The Basics of Oxygen Monitoring and Oxygen Therapy during the COVID-19 Pandemic

As a healthcare provider, you know that people with COVID-19 can have a wide range of symptoms – from no symptoms to mild symptoms to severe illness.

Many people with COVID-19 have low oxygen levels, a life-threatening condition.

However, not everyone with a low oxygen level will have difficulty breathing, so you must regularly monitor the oxygen levels of your COVID-19 patients.

You can measure a patient's oxygen level using a device called a pulse oximeter, which you place on their finger, toe, or earlobe.

It's a painless test and takes less than two minutes. Pulse oximeters measure the oxygen saturation, or percentage of oxygen in the patient's blood.

An oxygen saturation of 95 to 100 percent is normal for healthy children and adults.

Warning signs of a low oxygen level include trouble breathing, confusion, difficulty waking up, and bluish lips or face.

Adults may have chest pain that doesn't go away.

Children may flare their nostrils, grunt while breathing, or be unable to drink or eat.

Some COVID-19 patients may show no symptoms at all.

You should start oxygen therapy on any COVID-19 patient with an oxygen saturation below 90 percent, even if they show no physical signs of a low oxygen level.

If the patient has any warning signs of low oxygen levels, start oxygen therapy immediately.

Oxygen therapy is safe for newborns, children, and adults – including pregnant women.

To give oxygen therapy, you will gently place tubes into the patient's nostrils to connect them to an oxygen source. These tubes are called nasal cannula. The tubes are very small so it won't hurt the patient when you place the nasal cannula.

While giving oxygen therapy, monitor the patient's oxygen levels with the pulse oximeter.

In patients without physical warning signs, the goal of the therapy is to achieve an oxygen saturation of 90 percent.

You can discontinue the oxygen therapy when the patient's saturation remains above 90% after the oxygen is turned off.

In patients with physical warning signs, the goal of the therapy is to achieve an oxygen saturation of 95 percent. If a patient's oxygen levels do not improve with oxygen therapy, they will need more intensive

treatment.

Measuring oxygen levels and providing oxygen therapy is simple and painless and can save lives.

For more information, go to [CDC.gov](https://www.cdc.gov).