



Strategies for Swabbing Individuals with Dementia

Remember:

Due to the ongoing concerns related to COVID-19, **Persons Living with Dementia (PLWD)** may experience increased anxiety and/or confusion during this time. PLWD are currently isolated from family, friends and loved ones due to current visiting restrictions which may impact their mental health and ability to socialize with others. The process of having swabbing done for COVID-19 testing, can be confusing, and therefore, invoke fear for PLWD.

Possible Perspective of the Person Living with Dementia:

- PLWD may be asymptomatic, and because they are “feeling fine,” a PLWD may have difficulty understanding the need to be swabbed.
- Due to discomfort or fear, it may make it difficult for a PLWD to cope with the swabbing process, even if they initially consented

Strategies for Approach & Support:

- Allow time for PLWD to process who is approaching them. PLWD may require additional time to understand what is being asked of them, as dementia can result in delayed processing, and additional PPE including masks can distort a PLWD’s ability to recognize faces or process information.
- Understanding that a PLWD may experience fluctuations throughout the day (in cognition, mood, capabilities etc.), **approach PLWD in a way that allows for an assessment of their current capacity in that moment and proceed in a manner that supports them most appropriately, such as:**
 - Adjust use of language to current cognitive ability (simple steps, avoid oversimplifying when unnecessary)
 - Speak in a volume & tone that suits their needs
 - Set-up the environment for their success to process information. Reduce background stimulation (TVs, music) and ensure only one voice is talking at a time.
- Provide PLWD with simple explanations. This may mean you are not providing a full explanation of COVID-19, as we do not provide more information than a PLWD can process, depending on their cognitive abilities. Consider, *“This will help us make sure that we’re taking the best care of you that we can”*.
- PLWD may have difficulty recognizing previously familiar staff members. Be sure to use the PLWD’s preferred name often when providing instructions to maintain attention and promote a reassuring interaction.
- Please ensure only one voice is speaking at a time.
- It would be beneficial to have one staff devoted to providing emotional support during the swabbing process. This allows PLWD to focus on one person during this process.
- When providing Emotional Support consider the following:
 - **Validate:** the person’s reality & emotional state (*“This might be a little uncomfortable, but I’m going to be quick as I can” “I know I look a little frightening with a mask on, but I want to keep us both safe.”*)
 - PLWD may appreciate gentle contact to provide reassurance (*as it is safe to do so*)
 - **Leave the task on a positive note** (*“Thank you for your patience! We’re all done. Thank you_”*)
 - **Redirection:** Once the task is complete, it would be beneficial to change the topic to something less distressing or confusing. (*“I brought you something to drink/snack.”*)
- **It is important to remain calm throughout the swabbing process.** If PLWD sense that staff are tense, anxious, frustrated or rushed, the PLWD are more likely to be fearful/ resistant to swabbing.

Reminder for Self-Care:

These are unprecedented times. Don’t forget about your own Physical & Mental Health during these times.
Be Kind to Yourself! Breathe! Laugh when you can! Dance if you can!

Thank you for all that you do!

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