

Recognizing Respiratory Problems Flowchart

PALS: Signs of respiratory problems					
Clinical signs		Upper airway obstruction	Lower airway obstruction	Lung tissue disease	Disordered control of breathing
Airway	Patency	Airway open and maintainable/not maintainable			
Breathing	Respiratory rate/effort	Increased			Variable
	Breath sounds	Stridor (typically inspiratory)	Barking cough Hoarseness Wheezing (typically expiratory) Prolonged expiratory phase	Grunting Crackles Decreased breath sounds	Normal
	Air movement	Decreased			Variable
Circulation	Heart rate	Tachycardia (early); bradycardia (late)			
	Skin	Pallor, cool skin (early); cyanosis (late)			
Disability	Level of consciousness	Anxiety, agitation (early); lethargy, unresponsiveness (late)			
Exposure	Temperature	Variable			
PALS: Identifying respiratory problems by severity					
Progression of respiratory distress to respiratory failure*					
Airway	Respiratory distress: open and maintainable Respiratory failure: not maintainable				
Breathing	Respiratory distress: tachypnea Respiratory failure: bradypnea to apnea				
	Respiratory distress: work of breathing (nasal flaring/retractions) Respiratory failure: increased effort progresses to decreased effort and then to apnea				
	Respiratory distress: good air movement Respiratory failure: poor to absent air movement				
Circulation	Respiratory distress: tachycardia Respiratory failure: bradycardia				
	Respiratory distress: pallor Respiratory failure: cyanosis				
Disability	Respiratory distress: anxiety, agitation Respiratory failure: lethargy to unresponsiveness				
Exposure	Variable temperature				

*Respiratory failure requires immediate intervention.