

Use of Fans and Portable Air Conditioners in Healthcare Settings

Note: This document primarily addresses infection prevention and control considerations. It does not focus on operational issues such as cost, noise, electrical requirements, responsibility for purchase, or assignment of cleaning responsibility.
If you have any questions or comments contact IPC at ipcsurvstdadmin@ahs.ca.

Best practice recommendations

1. Portable bedside fans and air conditioners are considered a risk for enhancing transmission of respiratory droplets in all healthcare settings, including (but not limited to) acute care, and continuing care homes type A and B. As such, they should **not** be routinely used in these settings.
 - 1.1 Use other cooling strategies (adapted from the [Public Health Ontario](#) recommendations) such as:
 - Adequate hydration, e.g., easy access to liquids, adding water coolers, popsicles.
 - Provide cooling supplies, e.g., cool washcloths, ice packs, cooling jackets, cooling blankets, and appropriate support to avoid both heat and cold injury. Follow Principles for Environmental Cleaning and Disinfection.
 - Block direct sun using window awnings, shutters, thermal curtains/blinds, and outdoor umbrellas.
 - Central dehumidification for areas with high humidity. Note: Portable dehumidifiers can release heat and may raise the temperature in the room.
 - Consider evacuating the room on a case-by-case basis if extremely high temperature occurs.
2. Portable fans and air conditioners may be considered on a case-by-case basis using a risk-based approach, balancing the risks of enhancing transmission of respiratory viruses (including SARS-CoV-2) with the benefits of using fans:
 - To avoid high-risk situations for dehydration
 - As a component of palliative care for end-of-life considerations and/or patient comfort
 - On compassionate grounds (other than end-of-life), and
 - When other cooling strategies cannot be employed or are ineffective.
 - 2.1 Consult with Infection Prevention and Control, Workplace Health and Safety and/or Public Health before use.
 - 2.2 Consult Facilities, Maintenance and Engineering regarding heating, ventilation, and air conditioning, infrastructure and electrical requirements. Fans must comply with all fire safety/electrical safety and facility requirements for the use of electrical appliances.
3. If use of portable fans or air conditioners is determined to be necessary after assessing as above:
 - 3.1 Ensure fans are not blowing directly from one person to another (patient, resident or healthcare worker).

For more information contact
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- 3.2 Follow the manufacturer's instructions to clean, disinfect and maintain the fan on a scheduled basis, i.e., daily, weekly, or monthly.
- 3.3 Follow Workplace Health and Safety recommendations so the fan does not create a safety hazard in clinical or staff only/non-clinical areas.
- Position the fan so it does not create a tripping hazard, i.e., so staff do not trip on the fan itself or its electrical cord.
 - Consider electrical safety. Do not use a fan with a damaged electrical cord. Do not place the plugged-in fan on the edge of a sink filled with water.
 - Place the fan on a stable surface where it is not easily bumped off, e.g., do not place the fan high on a bookshelf where someone could brush against the cord, causing it to fall.
 - Do not leave personal fans on when unattended, e.g., do not leave the fan on in an office when going home.
 - Use of the fan should not result in detrimental work conditions for the individual using the fan or for others.
 - Fans should not create disturbance or annoyance to others. The noise of the fan should be tolerable for bystanders/co-workers. The fan should not result in uncomfortable air currents or temperature changes for bystanders/co-workers.
 - Fans should not interfere with other equipment required to perform work tasks, e.g., clip-on fan interfering with personal protective equipment use, desk fan blocking access to a printer.

4. Ceiling fans

- 4.1 Ceiling fans may be used in continuing care only. Ceiling fans are not used in acute care.
- Follow the manufacturer's instructions to clean, disinfect and maintain the ceiling fan on a scheduled basis, e.g., annually, and as required.
- 4.2 In common areas, e.g., dining rooms, recreation areas:
- To decrease risk of transmission, residents with symptoms of respiratory infection should not be in common areas with ceiling fans in use.
 - If there is an outbreak in the facility, follow Public Health guidance. Ceiling fans may need to be switched off in common areas for the duration of the outbreak.
- 4.3 In resident rooms:
- May be used to keep the resident comfortable.
 - If the resident has respiratory symptoms, staff may switch off the fan while in the room.

5. Portable bedside air conditioners

- 5.1 Portable air conditioners are not used in acute care.
- 5.2 Portable bedside air conditioners may be permitted in continuing care settings on a case-by-case basis if approved by the facility or unit management following evaluation of safety, maintenance and care requirements.

5.3 Portable air conditioner drip pans and other components can become contaminated if they are not cleaned and maintained properly. Once contaminated, air conditioners may spread healthcare associated pathogens leading to severe infections or outbreaks. If portable bedside air conditioners are used:

- Perform hand hygiene when cleaning, handling, or maintaining air conditioner components.
- Follow the manufacturer's instructions to clean, disinfect and maintain the air conditioner on a scheduled basis, e.g., daily, weekly, monthly.
- Never leave water sitting in the air conditioner when it is not in daily use. The following are recommended:
 - Empty, clean, and disinfect the drip pan; and
 - Allow the drip pan to dry before storing.

5.4 Consult Facilities, Maintenance and Engineering regarding heating ventilation and air conditioning, infrastructure and electrical requirements.

6. Portable neck fans

IPC does not recommend the use of portable neck fans. If portable neck fans are used a risk assessment needs to be done to ensure staff and patient safety.

6.1 Do not use portable neck fans during direct patient care.

6.2 Portable neck fans should not interfere with other equipment required to perform tasks, e.g., personal protective equipment.

6.3 Follow the manufacturer's instructions to clean, disinfect and maintain the portable neck fan on a scheduled basis.

6.4 Consult with site Facility Maintenance and Engineering for any concerns regarding charging and electrical use. Canadian Standards Association and Underwriters Laboratory certification are requirements for use in facilities.

Definitions

Portable neck fans are personal electronic devices. Portable neck fans are small, battery-powered personal cooling devices designed to be worn around the neck. They typically include one or more integrated fans that direct airflow upward toward the face, head, and neck of the wearer. These devices draw in ambient air from the surrounding environment and discharge it near the user's breathing zone.

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Version history

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If-hp-ipc-info-sheet-portable-fan		
Version		
V1-V3	2017-2023	Previous updates – details consolidated and archived
V4	2026-06-10	Minor update to identify portable neck fans



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