Guidance for Long Term Care Facilities around Air Conditioning and Fans During a Cluster of COVID-19
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Background:
The use of portable fans and air conditioners can promote the spread of microorganisms through the air and can pose a risk to patients and staff. Organisms dispersed through the air can contaminate environmental surfaces, patient wounds, and open areas. Portable fans and air conditioners can disturb the normal air flow within a room or patient care area, altering the expected airflow pattern (e.g., disturbance in negative air pressure air exchanges). Propping doors and opening windows causes positive airflow pressure and may cause imbalances in mechanical airflow throughout the facility. Fans and air conditioners may also signal the existence of a temperature control or ventilation problem, which in turn may impact equipment and overall patient care.

Individual organizations must determine whether or not the risks associated with the use of fans and air conditioners in various locations can be appropriately managed. Development of a policy or process whereby your Infection Control practitioner evaluates the risks associated with the use of fans and air conditioners in patient care areas, and establishes their position is recommended.

Procedure:
1. Contact facility maintenance to review and adjust airflow.
2. Provide alternate cooling methods:
   - Cool washcloths and ice packs.
   - Portable patient cooling blankets.
3. Environmental Assessment:
   - Assess the risk of contamination to patient care equipment and healthcare delivery areas.
   - Assess whether the fan or window air conditioner is requested for an isolation room. Portable fans and air conditioners should not be used when transmission based precautions are in place.
   - Ensure cords will not be a tripping hazard.
   - Floor-mounted portable fans cannot be set on top of other equipment, such as tables or chairs.
4. Confirm all alternate cooling methods have been attempted with no success, and the patient is in a non-restricted use location, and the use of a fan is determined to be of benefit to the patient’s clinical condition or well-being.
5. Implementing a portable fan:
   - Clean portable fan before use.
   - DO NOT USE PORTABLE FANS IN PATIENT ISOLATION ROOMS WHERE ANY TRANSMISSION BASED PRECAUTIONS ARE IN PLACE.
   - Do not place portable fan at floor level.
   - Position the portable fan to blow at the patient’s bed level or higher.
   - Do not aim the fan toward the door or across environmental surfaces.
   - The portable fan should be turned off during patient care procedures (e.g., line insertions, dressing changes, etc.).
6. Implementing a portable window air conditioner:
   • Clean window air conditioner and replace filter before use.
   • **DO NOT USE AIR CONDITIONER IN PATIENT ISOLATION ROOMS WHERE ANY TRANSMISSION BASED PRECAUTIONS ARE IN PLACE.**
   • After installation, ensure the window is well sealed and exhaust is not aimed toward a HVAC intake valve.
   • Maintain and monitor positive air pressure in relation to the corridor.
   • Do not aim the air conditioner across environmental surfaces.
   • The air conditioner should be turned off during patient care procedures (e.g., line insertions, dressing changes, etc.).

7. Cleaning and disinfection policies:
   • Have the infection preventionist review cleaning and disinfection procedures before purchasing portable fans and air conditioners. If family members purchase fans and air conditioners for resident, please review instructions for cleaning and disinfection before implementation.
   • Assign someone to be responsible for cleaning and disinfecting portable fans and air conditioners.
   • Develop protocol and policies to clean and disinfect portable fans/air conditioners on a weekly basis or when fan becomes visibly soiled.
   • Fans and air conditioners must be cleaned and disinfected according to manufacturer’s instructions between patients.
   • After discharge of the patient or when the fan or air conditioner is no longer required, it must be cleaned and disinfected before placing in storage. Fans and air conditioners should be covered during storage.

References

2. [https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr5210a1.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr5210a1.htm)