Best practice recommendations

These recommendations are based on the evidence around COVID-19 transmission and are jointly recommended by Infection Prevention and Control (IPC), Workplace Health and Safety (WHS), Nutrition Food Linen Environmental Services (NFLES), and Environmental Public Health (EPH). Recommendations for healthcare settings vary from those for the public and community due to the presence of vulnerable individuals, outbreak management experience and the serious effects of staffing limitations in healthcare.

Selecting decorations

- When removing from storage ensure that the outside of the cleanable container is cleaned before moving it into a patient care area.
- Do not move decor contaminated with dust or those that cannot be cleaned into patient care areas.
- Discard damaged or visibly soiled decor.
- Ensure decor does not elicit hand contact; use decor for viewing, not touching.
- Donated decorations may only be accepted if they meet these guidelines and the site/unit is able to accommodate them.

Placing decorations

- Follow Fire & Life Safety recommendations for all decorations. Guidance information is available on Insite for all AHS facilities.
- Decorations are to be handled only by healthcare providers or others (e.g., volunteers) under healthcare provider supervision.
- Low to no-touch decorations (i.e., wall decorations, wreaths, Christmas trees, posters) are the preferred seasonal and holiday decorations.
- Do not place decorations on high touch or regularly cleaned surfaces (such as handrails). Do not decorate the workstations on wheels or other mobile electronic devices.
- Decorations should not interfere with regular clinical or housekeeping duties and are not to obstruct clinical signs, access to personal protective equipment or hand hygiene locations.
- High touch or tactile decorations should be avoided. If they must be used, these should be wipeable with someone assigned to clean regularly. Cleaning is a shared responsibility between unit staff, environmental services and others. If non-wipeable, remove these decorations.
- Decorations are best in locations out of public reach or under continuous view of staff to monitor for any handling concerns. If there are handling concerns, move decorations out of public reach or remove decorations.
- Any decorations affixed to walls or windows, including wall stickers and “klings” must not damage the paint or other finishes.
- At the end of the season, when decorations are returned to storage, place inside a closed and wipeable bin or bag (i.e., plastic container or tote) to ensure protection from dust and other contamination.
Costumes

- Costumes may be worn, if appropriate, in the care setting.
- Costumes must not interfere with hand hygiene or use of personal protective equipment (PPE).
- Hairpieces, wigs, hats or other costume elements must not have contact with patients when performing tasks including (but not limited to) bending, transferring and assisting with meals.
- Costumes and footwear must be clean.

Hallowe’en activities

- Ensure all children and accompanying adults are asymptomatic prior to entry to the facility.
- Children and accompanying adults must perform hand hygiene at the facility entrance.
  - Acute care: Don a medical mask provided by the facility. Have pediatric sized masks available.
- Any symptomatic patient/resident must remain isolated in their room as per AHS additional precautions (regardless of outbreak status) and, therefore, will not participate in the activity.
- Facilities on outbreak:
  - Continuing care: no events at a site with an outbreak of any kind
  - Acute care: no events in any unit/area with an outbreak of any kind
  - Children’s facility (e.g., school, daycare, etc.): the facility that the children are from cannot have an outbreak of any kind
- Treats/food items:
  - Must be commercially prepared and individually wrapped.
  - May be distributed at the site/unit entrance by a healthcare worker (HCW) wearing a medical mask and eye protection. This HCW performs hand hygiene before handing out treats and at regular intervals while handling treats.
  - Children and accompanying adults should not go room-to-room in any facility.
  - Non-clinical areas: designate an area in which treats will be distributed.
  - Residents and patients may not hand out treats.

Food

COVID-19 is not a foodborne illness. However, the concern is that healthcare workers may congregate while eating/drinking and not be able to maintain continuous masking, physical distancing and clean hands.

Sharing food and/or beverages is considered high risk. Sharing food and/or beverages in healthcare facilities is discouraged at this time.
In addition, consuming food in patient care areas increases risk to HCWs. Refer to [Staff COVID-19 Tips: Eating and Drinking at Work, Personal Clothing, Cleaning Devices and Accessories](#).

Therefore:

1. Staff shall not share food or beverages.
2. AHS management shall not arrange or support group food events (e.g., unit potlucks) and should post the Physical Distancing Poster in all staff break lounge or eating areas.

**Food for personal consumption**

- AHS staff may bring food from home or other external sources (e.g., restaurant take-out) for personal consumption.
- AHS staff may have external food delivered (e.g., personal size pizza, burger meal, entree) for personal consumption. These are for a single individual to consume; there is to be no sharing of external food.
- Staff need to determine how to safely obtain the food from the delivery service while considering current site visitor restrictions.
- With respect to break rooms and common areas where food and beverages may be consumed:
  - Each staff member must perform hand hygiene before and after eating.
  - As masks cannot be worn while eating or drinking, physical distancing of 2m must be maintained.
  - Stagger eating times or locations as required to maintain physical distancing.

**Food donations**

AHS staff/physicians must not accept donated food for personal consumption and/or distribution to other AHS staff/physicians unless all of the following criteria are met:

- Must be individually wrapped or packaged.
  - For the safety of all staff, if any evidence of tampering is visible (i.e., open or damaged wrapping or packaging), do not consume.
- Staff shall not share food or beverages.
- Must be commercially prepared and delivered from a licensed/commercial/trusted (or reputable) source.
- No distribution on patient care units or other clinical areas. Distribute in a non-clinical area.
- Must be distributed by one person who is performing consistent and diligent hand hygiene.
- For consumption only in a non-clinical area while physically distance from others can be maintained since masks cannot be worn while eating/drinking.
- Must follow food expiry dates and safe food storage/refrigeration guidelines.
- Staff/physicians must perform hand hygiene before and after eating.
- Since masks cannot be worn while eating or drinking, physical distancing of 2m from others must be maintained.
Celebrations

Workplace Health and Safety (WHS), Environmental Public Health (EPH), and Nutrition Food Linen Environmental Services (NFLES) have indicated the following during COVID-19 pandemic:

1. Workplace or staff celebrations
   - Follow recommendations in ‘Food’ section above for any celebrations involving food and/or beverages.

2. Patient, family and visitor celebrations
   - All Designated Support Person (DSP)/visitor restrictions apply: [https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/topics/Page17001.aspx](https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/topics/Page17001.aspx).
   - Follow EPH guidelines for bringing food for patients. General food donations are not accepted for non-specific patients at this time.
   - In situations where site NFLES cannot meet the patient’s requests, site and unit management should continue, wherever operationally feasible, to support family bringing external food for patients.

   **Note** the following additional considerations:
   - Site/unit staff need to determine how to get the food from the family to the patient, considering current site DSP/visitor restrictions and usual safe food handling practices.
   - Instruct families to check with site or unit management as to their capacity to receive deliveries and if a delivery can be coordinated. If they cannot, then a delivery should not occur. If they can, then work with the site or unit to arrange a time and place for the delivery to occur.
   - Any delivery needs to be in clean packaging and arranged prior with the site.
   - Deliveries are to be for an individual patient and labelled with the patient’s name.
   - Sites are unable to accommodate DSPs/visitors dining with patients inside healthcare facilities.

3. At home celebrations
Decorations, Costumes, Food, Celebrations and Donations

Donations and gifts

Food donations for staff and/or patients are not accepted at this time unless specific criteria are met. See ‘Food’ section above. This includes gifting between co-workers, if done on site.

Donated plants and decorations are to be handled following the unit, site or areas existing policies and the overarching guidelines about handling items delivered during the pandemic.

Toys, therapy and play items

- Toys, therapy and play items may be donated if they are new and the unit is able to arrange safe delivery of the items.
- Fragile items, such as glass and porcelain, are not accepted on pediatric units.
- Stuffed soft toys may be donated for an individual; these will not be accepted for unit use as they cannot be safely cleaned.
- Liquids such as bubble mix or paints must be sealed and not leak during delivery.
- Unless a unit has existing compatible gaming systems, donations of game cartridges or discs is not recommended.
- Handmade or homemade items must be new and must be cleanable to be accepted.