

# Use of Portable Bedside Fans and Air Conditioners in Healthcare during the COVID-19 Pandemic

**Note:** This information sheet was developed by the IPC Continuing Care Working Group and is updated by the IPC Physicians to address COVID-19 considerations. This document covers infection prevention and control measures only and does not cover 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](mailto: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, continuing care, and supportive living. 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, ice water baths, and appropriate support to avoid injury. [Follow Principles for Environmental Cleaning and Disinfection](#).
    - Block direct sun using window awnings, shutters, thermal curtains/blinds, and outdoor umbrellas.
    - Increase airflow, e.g., cross breezes by opening windows, providing the humidity outside is low (relative humidity of 30 to 50% is normal).
    - Central dehumidification for areas with high humidity. Note: portable dehumidifiers can give off 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 over enhancing the transmission of a pandemic virus with the benefits of the use of fans:
    - on compassionate grounds;
    - to avoid high risk situations for dehydration;
    - as a component of palliative care for end of life considerations and/or patient comfort;
    - when other cooling strategies cannot be employed or are ineffective.
  - 2.1 Consult with Infection Prevention and Control and/or Public Health before use.
  - 2.2 Consult Facilities, Maintenance and Engineering regarding heating ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC), infrastructure and electrical requirements.
3. If use of portable fans or air conditioners is assessed as above and determined to be necessary, follow the manufacturer's instructions to clean, disinfect and maintain the fan on a scheduled basis, e.g., daily, weekly, monthly.

## References

1. Couch R.B., Douglas R.G., Lindgren K.M., Gerone P.J., Knight V. 1970. Airborne Transmission of Respiratory Infection with Coxsackievirus A Type 21. American Journal of Epidemiology, Volume 91, Issue 1, January 1970, Pages 78–86, [Oxford Academic: American Journal of Epidemiology](#).
2. Public Health Ontario. 2020. COVID-19: Fans and Air Conditioning Units. Response to Scientific/Technical Request. Retrieved from [COVID-19: Fans and Air Conditioning Unit](#).

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