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Seasonal Decorations, Costumes and Gifts

Purpose

- To provide Infection Prevention and Control guidance on the selection, display, storage, and handling of decorations in IH acute and long-term care settings.
- To provide Infection Prevention and Control (IPAC) guidance for costumes, character visits, and gifts (material and food).

Overview

Infectious microorganisms are present everywhere, including in water, soil, animals, the human body, as well as within healthcare facilities. Surfaces can become contaminated with microorganisms that may persist for weeks or even months, posing a health and safety risk to vulnerable patients and visitors.

When adding non-essential items like decorations, it is imperative they do not become sources of transmission for infectious organisms or interfere with routine infection control practices such as environmental cleaning and disinfection.

Food and water contaminated with bacteria, parasites, and viruses can cause severe illness in health care providers and patients. Food not commercially (unlicensed) prepared, sharing food (i.e., potlucks), and consuming food in patient care areas increases the likelihood of food contamination and foodborne illness.

Notes: in this document the term “patient” is inclusive of resident and client.

Best Practices

Decoration Selection

- When selecting seasonal decorations, the following should be considered:
 - Choose decorations that can be easily cleaned and disinfected such as laminated or plastic items.
 - Discard visibly soiled, worn, porous, or damaged decorations.
 - Consider consulting with other departments such as Facility Maintenance Operations (FMO) for safety considerations such as potential fire hazards.
- When selecting seasonal decorations, the following should be avoided:
 - Plants or flowers (with or without soil).
 - Real pumpkins and live trees in patient care areas or in team care stations.
 - Decorations that require lifting or compromise ceiling tiles.

Adapted from Vancouver Coastal Health

Interior Health would like to recognize and acknowledge the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories of the Dākelh Dené, Ktunaxa, Nlaka’pamux, Secwépemc, St’át’imc, syilx, and Tšilhqot’in Nations where we live, learn, collaborate, and work together.

For more information contact IPAC@interiorhealth.ca

Decoration Display

- Decorations should not interfere with regular clinical or Environmental Services duties and are not to obstruct clinical signage, access to personal protective equipment or hand hygiene locations.
- Keep team care stations and other work surfaces clear to allow for environmental cleaning and disinfection.
- Artificial trees may be placed in public spaces (e.g., main lobbies). They should be placed in a way that allows regular cleaning and disinfection of the area.
- Decorations should be placed using adhesives that are easily removed and do not leave behind sticky residue (difficult to clean up) or damage the walls.
 - Consider the use of Command™ Strips, Velcro tape, and poster putty.
 - Refer to [IPAC Signage and Posted Materials](#) for decision-making framework and considerations before hanging decorations.
- Do not use decorations in the following areas:
 - Soiled utility rooms
 - Clean or sterile storage areas
 - Areas where medication is stored or prepared.
 - Treatment or procedure rooms
 - Medical device reprocessing department
 - Operating Rooms
 - On the floor (except for artificial trees in public spaces)
 - On high touch surfaces (e.g., doorknobs or light switches)

Note: Patients and families may choose to bring personal items (i.e., religious, sentimental, decorative) for display in their rooms. Personal items can assist with relationship-building and trigger positive memories and emotions in the patient. Advise them to minimize clutter to allow for adequate environmental cleaning and disinfection and to not place decorations on meal tray tables or surfaces used for clinical purposes. For posting decorations on walls, request easy to clean adhesive as indicated above. The clinical care team retains the right to request for the removal of any items if they pose as potential safety or infection control risk.

Storage and Handling

- Decorations are to be stored in a plastic container with a sealed lid to minimize accumulation of dust (e.g., artificial holiday trees).
 - Avoid storing in cardboard boxes as they cannot be cleaned and disinfected and are susceptible to water, moisture, mice, insects, and microorganisms.
 - Cardboard can be a source of bacterial and fungal growth when wet refer to [IPAC Cardboard Boxes poster](#)
- Plastic bins containing decorations should not be stored in:
 - patient care areas,
 - soiled utility rooms
 - Clean or sterile storage areas
 - Areas where medication is stored or prepared.
 - Treatment or procedure rooms
 - Medical device reprocessing department
 - Operating rooms
- When moving from storage, ensure that the outside of the cleanable container is cleaned and disinfected before moving it into a patient care area.

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- Clean and disinfect decorations with IH approved hospital-grade disinfection wipes prior to storage and again when displayed.
- Decorations contaminated with dust or those that cannot be cleaned and disinfected must not be displayed in patient care areas.
- Perform hand hygiene before and after handling decorations.
- Before handling items, consider how to lift safely:
 - [Lifting Items Safely](#)
 - When returning items to storage, consider the space and optimal or safe zones for storage: [Ergonomic Considerations – Shelving and Rack Design](#)

Costumes, Character Visits, and Gifts

- Costumes worn by health care providers in patient care areas must be compliant with [AU800- Dress Code / Personal Appearance](#) and allow for routine practices, hand hygiene compliance, effective donning and doffing of personal protective equipment, and must not interfere with performing aseptic procedures (e.g., catheter insertion, medication administration).
- Costumes and footwear must be clean.
- Volunteers or special character visitors must adhere to the following measures while on site:
 - Ensure strict adherence to the [Hand Hygiene Policy](#). If the costume includes gloves, those gloves should not be part of the costume.
 - Do not enter rooms with signage that indicates patient is on Additional Precautions.
 - If unit experiencing alert or outbreak, adhere to preventative measures. See IPAC Outbreak Resources at www.interiorhealth.ca
 - All BC Provincial Health Officer Orders and Notices regarding gatherings and celebrations must be followed in all IH facilities.
 - Stay at home if you are feeling unwell, and do not return until your symptoms are resolved.
- Gifts must comply with [IPAC Toy Management](#) resource.

Other related resources: Food safety for the holidays and events

- Refer to, [Food brought in from families & resident participation in Food Preparation](#), for guidelines and consideration around safe food practices, in order to minimize potential for foodborne illnesses.
- Public Health Act. Food Premises Regulation, BC Regulation 210/99.
https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/11_210_99#division_d2e1469

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