

## Humidifier Use in Long Term Care and Assisted Living Facilities

Portable humidifiers provide comfort by adding moisture to dry, heated indoor air. Cool wick-type humidifiers are recommended for care and safety of use. A cool wick-type humidifier is also known as an evaporative humidifier. Evaporative humidifiers have 3 parts, the wick, the water reservoir and the fan. The wick is a filter that soaks up water from the reservoir; it traps minerals and impurities in the water. The fan is next to the wick and blows air onto it to help with water evaporation. As the humidity of the room increase, the water vapor decreases.

Providers should develop policies and procedures and educate their staff prior to deciding to allow or use humidifiers.

When the decision has been reached to use a humidifier:

- Place humidifier on dry, firm, flat, level surface.
- Keep cord away from heated surfaces and out of way, where it cannot be stepped on or tripped over. Do not use an extension cord.
- Keep wick filter inside humidifier clean and free from build-up.
- Consult the product manufacturer's specific care recommendations and for information about:
  - Type of water to be used. **Sterile water to be used if individual has a tracheostomy.**
  - Type of wick required – whether washable and how often to be changed.
  - Humidifier cleaning and maintenance – unless indicated otherwise, humidifier should be cleaned at least weekly.
- Instructions will also include what solution should be used to clean the base and the reservoir. In the absence of specific instructions, hand washing is recommended and follow this guide:
  - Turn unit off, and unplug it before dismantling.
  - Remove the water reservoir, and fill 2/3 full of water and a tablespoon of chlorine bleach.
  - Let it sit for 20 minutes, and move the solution around to clean into corners. Empty and rinse several times to remove all chlorine from the tank.
  - Remove the wick, and if washable, immerse in a sink of cool water, or rinse under running water.

- Empty any water residue from the base of the humidifier, and add undiluted clear vinegar.
- Let it stand for 20 minutes and drain. Add a little water to rinse, drain, and wipe clean.
- Replace wick.
- Wipe the outside of the unit with a warm water/vinegar cloth.
- Water should never be added (topped off) to a humidifier reservoir. The reservoir should be emptied and rinsed before adding fresh water each time a refill is needed.
- Facility policies and procedures may reflect the manufacturer's recommendations for care and cleaning of the humidifier, but should clearly indicate staff responsibility for care and cleaning.

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