

Use of water coolers in clinical areas

The provision of a water chiller in clinical areas should always be discussed with the Infection Prevention Control Team (IPCT) and installed with its agreement. Prior to the purchase of a water cooler, alternatives should be considered, and advice sought from the IPCT and the Estates department.

There are two types of water chillers: Point of Use (POU) or bottled water (BW).

POU chillers are connected directly to the buildings water supply and provide mains filtered water. POU chillers are unlikely to present a risk as long as they are properly maintained; the water is chilled as soon as it enters the storage tank and it remains chilled until it is used. Plumbed in water chillers are the preferred option.

BW chillers use containers of water which need to be changed when emptied.

General Guidelines

- Manual handling risks must be assessed.
- A protocol for the cleaning, maintenance and use of water coolers and water dispensers must be in place.
- All bottled water should be supplied from an approved source, for example a member of the Bottled Water Coolers Association (BWCA) or European Point of use Drinking Water Association (EPDWA).
- Water from bottled coolers should not be given to patients who are moderately or severely immuno-compromised.

Location and use of water coolers

Coolers should be located:

- Away from heat sources and direct sunlight.
- Where they will not cause an obstruction.
- Away from young children or elderly patients if they also supply hot water.

High risk areas

High risk areas should not have bottled water coolers. Under no circumstances should a water cooler be situated in:

- Intensive care units
- Neonatal units
- Oncology units
- Transplant units
- Surgical wards
- Operating theatres

Medium risk areas

Subject to consultation with the IPCT, coolers may be placed in:

- General wards and day rooms
- Hospices
- Medicine of the Elderly wards

Low risk areas

Coolers may be placed in the following areas without special precautions:

- Offices and administration areas
- Outpatient areas
- Public areas and waiting rooms

Operation of water coolers

- Water coolers should never be switched off.
- If the water cooler is left unused for a period (for example, over the weekend), the tap should be run for 20-30 seconds prior to being used for drinking.
- Bottle coolers should never be left with an empty bottle attached.
- Bottles should never be left on a cooler for longer than 2 weeks, so they must be dated when attached.
- Cap label should be removed prior to attaching the bottle onto the cooler.
- Disposable drinking cups should be kept wrapped and stored in a clean dry place until placed in the cup dispenser.
- Bottles must not be refilled using tap water.
- Bottles should be stored in a cool dark location and used on a first in, first out basis.

Cleaning of water coolers

- The exterior of the cooler, including the dispensing taps, must be cleaned **at least daily** by a designated person using a disposable cloth with general purpose detergent or preparations recommended or provided by the company.
- If the cooler is fitted with a drip tray, this should be **emptied** and **cleaned daily** using a disposable cloth with general purpose detergent or preparations recommended or provided by the company.
- Records of cleaning should be kept.
- Bottled water coolers should be cleaned and sanitised internally every three months by the company or by trained personnel.

Maintenance of water coolers

- Point of use water coolers should have their filters changed every 6 months.
- Point of use water coolers should be attached to the mains water supply rather than supplied from a tank.