

Isolation Barriers

Published: 2/9/2021

Nursing home providers are encouraged to utilize existing physical barriers for communicable disease isolation and avoid dividing a smoke compartment.

Nursing homes are designed around the required air flows and air movement for both heating and cooling. The smoke compartments are designed with the Heating Ventilation Air Conditioning (HVAC) systems ducted into each smoke compartment and resident rooms. The smoke compartment provides the resident protection and isolation in the rooms, provides for fire safety with the sprinkler system, smoke detector coverage, room designed to support sheltering in place in the event of fire or other hazardous conditions, and has the appropriate exiting widths and pathways.

Using the existing smoke compartments in a building may be the most efficient and effective means to achieve the intended isolation for residents.

The CMS 1135 blanket waivers allow facilities to waive requirements that would otherwise not permit temporary walls and barriers between patients. Refer to 2012 LSC, sections 18/19.3.3.2. This referenced LSC section is for interior wall and ceiling finishes being required to be Class A or Class B. It is important to note that this is the only LSC section referenced for this temporary construction blanket waiver.

The use of the temporary barriers/walls (plastic with zippers installed) potentially creates several areas of concern:

1. Material used to construct the barrier is required to be Class C Rated as an interior finish.
2. Location of the temporary barrier may impact the following:
 - a. Obstruct the path of egress.
 - b. Reduce the clear width of the corridor.
 - c. Create trip hazards with the extra barrier material bunching at the floor level.
 - d. Compromise the sprinkler system coverage and operating features.
 - e. Compromise smoke detector coverage (required on both sides of the barrier).
 - f. Obstruct the fire alarm system notification devices.
 - g. Obstruct the access to fire alarm manual alarm devices (pull stations).
 - h. Obstruct the doors from closing (resident room doors, cross corridor doors, service area hazard doors, etc).
 - i. May obstruct or alter the HVAC air flows in the facility.
 - j. May alter the facility's emergency plan and evacuations plans.
3. Obstructs the exits, may require the use of other exits.
4. Creates dead-end corridors.
5. May impede/delay the closing of all resident room doors in the event of an emergency.
6. Complicates the movement within the smoke compartment.

If the nursing home uses a temporary barrier wall, the provider needs to address the above concerns and complete training of staff operating within facility on the changes and how they plan to conduct required fire safety plans of the facility.