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**Guidelines for the Development of Hospital Protocols for Use of Hydrotherapy
for Low Risk Patients in Labor**

Purpose of the Guidelines

The following guidelines are intended to assist hospitals in developing protocols for use of hydrotherapy for low risk patients in labor. It is recommended that checklists be developed and implemented as appropriate for certain activities related to hydrotherapy such as patient education, pre-hydrotherapy patient preparation, and equipment cleaning.

Regulation

According to Hospital Licensure Regulation 105 CMR 130.621(E), 'Each labor-delivery-recovery room shall contain or have access to private toilet and shower or tub. If tub facilities are provided, there shall be at least a three foot clearance on two sides and at the end of the tub.'

The hospital must comply with the regulation referenced above, or a waiver of the requirement must be requested by the hospital and granted by the Department for one of more of the requirements of the regulation, in accordance with 105 CMR 130.050 of the Hospital Licensure Regulations.

At a minimum, policies and procedures for hydrotherapy should include provisions for the following:

Administrative

- Evidence of review and approval of policies and procedures by clinical, engineering and infection prevention staff, as applicable.
- Staffing criteria that ensures safe patient monitoring
- Informed patient consent that addresses risks/benefits and clinical situations that require the patient to discontinue use of hydrotherapy
- Authorization/order from health care provider

Patient Eligibility Criteria for Use of Labor Tub

- Inclusion (e.g., active labor, singleton pregnancy, gestational age, presentation criteria)
- Exclusion (e.g., elevated maternal temperature, non-reassuring fetal heart rate, BMI, malpresentation)

Facilities and Equipment

- Protocols that address the:
 - risks associated with electrical and plumbing connections (e.g., hoses and wires extending from sink to tub)
 - routine tub preventive maintenance (e.g., frequency and type of regular inspections in accordance with manufacturer's guidelines)
 - water temperature control guidelines
- Nurse call system
- Non-slip surfaces
- Special provisions for portable tubs (e.g., emergency evacuation, tub drain time)
- Special provisions for whirlpool tubs
- Patient lift if used

Patient Monitoring and Associated Documentation

- Patient supervision and monitoring by staff, including documentation required to address the type and frequency of ongoing maternal and fetal assessments (e.g., vital signs, progression of labor, hydration)
- Role and responsibilities of staff and patient support person(s) including provisions to ensure that the patient is not left unattended while in the tub
- Time limitations for tub use (e.g., primiparas, multiparas)
- Water temperature monitoring (e.g., temperature range, frequency of monitoring)
- Depth of water level, including provisions to prevent overflow during tub filling
- Use of medication and restrictions (e.g., use of analgesics, sedatives)

Emergency Preparedness

- Emergency measures, including indications for immediate patient exit from the tub and assistance required for exit from tub
- Availability of emergency and transport equipment
- Assessment and management of emergencies, (e.g., unplanned births that occur in the tub, including post-delivery care of mother and infant)

Education

- Patient and support person(s) education
 - use of the tub for labor (e.g., risks and benefits, safe use of hydrotherapy)
- Hospital staff education
 - Nursing
 - All hospital policies and procedures developed for use of hydrotherapy, such as:
 - Patient and infant safety
 - Use of portable tubs, if applicable

- Obstetrical risks and contraindications (e.g., non-reassuring fetal heart rate, malpresentation, multiple fetuses)
 - Indications for immediate patient exit from tub
 - Assessment and management of emergencies (e.g., unplanned births that occur in the tub, post-delivery care of mother and infant)
 - Simulated emergency training at least annually
 - Infection prevention (e.g., cleaning of tubs, protocols for patients with infectious diseases, open wounds)
- Environmental Services
 - Appropriate use of disinfectants in accordance with manufacturer's guidelines and cleaning protocols in accordance with CDC recommendations

Infection Control

- Cleaning protocols approved by the Infection Control Committee/representative, including the type of disinfectant, exposure time, methods used to clean tubs and related equipment (e.g., Doppler, tub liners thermometer, pumps and hoses) between patients and during single patient use (e.g., drain, clean and refill, as applicable), if water becomes contaminated. Disinfection of hydrotherapy tubs is consistent with the most recent edition of the *CDC Guidelines for Disinfection and Sterilization in Healthcare Facilities*
www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/pdf/guidelines/Disinfection_Nov_2008.pdf
- System to ensure periodic review and evaluation of infection control practices
- Staff use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), consistent with CDC Guidelines (e.g., shoulder length gloves, face and eye protection)

Quality Assurance

- QA Program includes a review and evaluation of maternal and newborn practices and outcomes in relation to hydrotherapy for patients in labor

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