



Department of Health

ANDREW M. CUOMO
Governor

HOWARD A. ZUCKER, M.D., J.D.
Commissioner

SALLY DRESLIN, M.S., R.N.
Executive Deputy Commissioner

DATE: June 17, 2020
TO: Hospitals
FROM: New York State Department of Health

Informational Message: COVID-19 Hospital Visitation Program

Background

On April 10, 2020, the Department issued a Health Advisory: COVID-19 Updated Guidance for Hospital Operators Regarding Visitation, which suspended visitation within hospitals and described requirements for the allowance of patient support persons. On May 20th, the Department made updates to that Advisory that further clarified guidance for authorized support persons (Hereinafter “Revised Visitation Guidance”). Accompanied by strong infection prevention and control requirements, these policies were put in place to safeguard and maintain the health and wellbeing of patients and staff, while containing and preventing the spread of COVID-19 during the initial phase of the pandemic. After the successful efforts of New Yorkers to flatten the curve and reduce virus transmission, the Department recognizes the need for sustainable hospital visitation policies for the next phase of the pandemic.

Hospital Visitation Program

Separation of patients and their loved ones during a hospitalization can cause significant stress and anxiety, and the opportunity to visit hospitalized patients must be done in a manner that continues to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and ensure the health and wellbeing of patients, staff, and visitors. In recognition of this need, and to ensure a safe environment of care while permitting expanded, but still limited visitation, a pilot hospital visitation program was initiated in twenty-one hospitals across the State on May 26, 2020. After evaluation of the pilot by the Department in collaboration with participating hospitals, statewide visitation to all general hospitals will be permitted beginning June 19, 2020. Hospitals may decide when to initiate expanded visitation based on their current volume of COVID patients, staffing to screen visitors, personal protective equipment (PPE), and other resources.

If a hospital decides to initiate expanded visitation, such hospital must notify the Department no later than 48 hours prior to the start of the expanded visitation policy and must include in the notification a plan to communicate parameters of the new policy to patients. Notifications should be emailed to hospinfo@health.ny.gov.

Hospitals are still required to comply with the policies on allowing support persons for pediatrics, childbirth and patients with an intellectual, developmental, or other cognitive disability as listed in the Department of Health May 20th Revised Visitation Guidance.

Participating hospitals will ensure that:

- Visits are limited to no more than four hours per day per patient, unless otherwise authorized by the hospital, depending on the patient's status and condition;
- Total time for all visitors cannot exceed the four-hour maximum, unless otherwise authorized by the hospital. However, the facility can determine the appropriate visiting hours within this requirement;
- Visitors are limited to one person at a time unless at hospital's discretion a limited number of additional persons is determined to be appropriate to allow at the bedside;
- Patients undergoing same day procedures may be accompanied to the facility by a companion and that companion may remain with the patient through the initial intake process; and may rejoin the patient for the discharge process;
- Visitors may not be present during procedures and recovery room except for pediatrics, childbirth, and patients with an intellectual, developmental, or other cognitive disability as listed in the Department's May 20th Revised Visitation Guidance;
- Visitors are provided with and must wear appropriate personal protective equipment
- as recommended by the Department and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention;
- Visitors must be advised how to perform meticulous hand hygiene and how to wear the PPE, and must adhere to such procedures;
- Visitors who fail to wear a face mask and other PPE will be asked to leave the facility;
- Visitors must undergo symptom and temperature checks upon entering the facility, and shall be denied entry if they report significant COVID-19 exposure or symptoms during the prior 14 days or have a temperature equal to or greater than 100.0 degrees Fahrenheit;
- Once in the facility, visitors must remain in the patient's room throughout the visit except when directed by hospital staff to leave during aerosol-generating procedures or other procedures during which visitors are usually asked to leave;
- Health care providers should provide written information to visitors and/or discuss the potential risks and benefits of the visitor's presence with the visitor and, depending upon the patient's condition, the patient;
- All visitors are greater than 18 years of age except in rare exceptions as determined by the hospital;
- Name and contact information for visitors, the date(s) of their visits, and the name of the patient(s) visited are maintained in an electronic format by facility; and
- Details about the facility's current visitation policy, including participation in the hospital visitation program, is posted on the facility's webpage.

The Department may adjust visitation policies based on the prevalence of COVID-19 in a region or county.