



Department of Health

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DATE: May 20, 2020

TO: Hospitals

FROM: New York State Department of Health (Department)

Informational Message: COVID-19 Pilot 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 visitors within hospitals and described requirements for the allowance of patient support persons. On May 20th the Department made updates to this Advisory that further clarified authorized support persons. (Hereinafter “Revised Visitation Guidance”). Accompanied by strong infection prevention and control requirements, this policy aims to safeguard and maintain the health and wellbeing of patients and staff, while containing and preventing the spread of COVID-19 during the State’s initial growth 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.

Pilot 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, a hospital visitation program will be piloted in across New York State. This pilot aims to continue to ensure a safe environment of care while permitting expanded, but still limited, visitation.

The pilot hospital visitation program will be instituted in selected health systems by May 26th, 2020 and will be in place for a period of two weeks. After evaluation of the pilot by the Department in collaboration with participating health systems, it may be modified or instituted State-wide to all general hospitals. During the time of this pilot, the Revised Visitation Guidance is still in effect for non-participating hospitals, as well as for those patients specifically described in the advisory.

Participating health systems will ensure that:

- Visits are limited to four hours per day per patient, unless otherwise authorized by the Department of Health, depending on the patient’s status and condition;
- 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;
- Total time for all visitors cannot exceed the four-hour maximum, unless otherwise authorized by the Department of Health;



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- 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 Revised Visitation Guidance.
- Visitors are provided with and must wear appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) 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 over 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 thoroughly discuss the potential risks and benefits of the visitor's presence with visitor and, depending upon the patient's condition, the patient;
- The facility determines appropriate visiting hours;
- All visitors are greater than 18 years of age except in rare exceptions as determined by the hospital; and
- Details about the facility's visitation policy, including participation in the pilot hospital visitation program, is posted on the facility's webpage.

Any facility participating in this pilot hospital visitation program reserves the right to cease participation and end increased visitation access at any time.