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# COVID-19 Hospital Visitor Guidance

**March 30, 2021**

Family members and loved ones play a key role in supporting and comforting those who are ill or are receiving care. As we seek to prevent the further spread of COVID-19, AHS is issuing Visitor/Welcoming policies to protect the health of both employees and patients, while recognizing increasing rates of fully vaccinated Vermonters.

This guidance provides minimum standards affected institutions must meet. Such institutions may adopt more stringent standards and guidance so long as they otherwise comply with applicable laws and regulations.

**To protect the health of both the workforce and patients, AHS is establishing the following requirements for all hospitals throughout Vermont:**

# For Inpatient/Acute Care:

* Each hospital will implement entry control points in their hospitals to enable the screening of all individuals entering their facilities.
* Fully vaccinated visitors are permitted with evidence of vaccination, including the Covid 19 Vaccination Card provided to every vaccinated person.
* Visitors who are not fully vaccinated are not permitted,with the following limited exceptions (these limits do not count any fully vaccinated visitors):
  + One support person on Labor and Delivery;
  + One parent or support person for pediatric patients – one consistent support is strongly recommended, but when necessary a second support can be identified as an alternate;
  + One visitor/support person escorting an individual undergoing same-day surgery or an ambulatory procedure;
  + One support person for patients with communication needs (i.e., persons who are deaf or who do not understand/speak English), or patients with a cognitive impairment or disability who require assistance to access care; and
  + For patients in end-of-life care, the care team will manage decisions around visitation.
* The unit will determine whether an individual attempting to visit meets one of the established exceptions and will screen the individual before permitting entry.

# Emergency Department and Express/Urgent Care:

* Each Emergency Department and Express/Urgent Care will implement entry control points to enable the screening of all individuals entering their facilities.
* Fully vaccinated visitors are permitted with evidence of vaccination, including the Covid 19 Vaccination Card provided to every vaccinated person.
* Visitors who are not fully vaccinated are not permitted,with the following limited exceptions (these limits do not count any fully vaccinated visitors):
  + One parent or support person should accompany pediatric patients;
  + One support person for patients with communication needs (i.e., persons who are deaf or who do not understand/speak English), or patients with a cognitive impairment or disability who require assistance to access care; and
  + Visitation for patients in end-of-life care will be managed by the care team (in the ED only).

# Outpatient Clinics:

* Each Outpatient Clinic will implement entry control points to enable the screening of all individuals entering their facilities.
* Fully vaccinated visitors are permitted with evidence of vaccination, including the Covid 19 Vaccination Card provided to every vaccinated person.
* Visitors who are not fully vaccinated are not permitted,with the following limited exceptions (these limits do not count any fully vaccinated visitors):
  + The patient has no fully vaccinated support person and the patient requires support and assistance to access their appointment, such as a patient with communication needs (i.e., persons who are deaf or who do not understand/speak English), or a patient with a cognitive impairment or disability who requires assistance to access care.
  + One parent or support person may accompany pediatric patients.

**For all permitted visitors entering a hospital, hospitals shall:**

* Ensure that everyone who enters any facility meets the criteria for entry outlined above.
* Keep and implement a written process to screen all visitors intending to enter the facility for vaccinations status and symptoms of COVID-19. Permitted visitors who are not fully vaccinated and are symptomatic or who have recently engaged in social gatherings contrary to Health Department guidance[[1]](#footnote-1) shall be prevented from entry.
* Implement a process for tracking the permitted visitors associated with each patient and implement access control for visitation to the patient.
* Require all permitted visitors to be masked and maintain a face and nose covering for the entirety of the visit. Visitors are permitted to wear a mask of their own but the hospital shall provide a mask if one is needed.
* Keep and implement guidelines for the conduct of permitted visitors including:
  + Direction to remain in the patient’s room for the duration of the visit;
  + Limiting traffic in hallways; and
  + Prohibiting congregating in waiting rooms, cafeterias and lobbies before, after or between visits.
* Prevent visitors from in-person visiting with patients suspected of having COVID-19 or infected with COVID-19. Hospitals should make every effort to support patient and family interaction by deploying the use of technology.
* Encourage permitted visitors to clean their hands upon entry/exit from the building, entry/exit from the unit or clinic and entry/exit from patient rooms.
* Permit only Americans with Disabilities Act service animals to accompany family members/support people.
* Exceptions to this policy may be made in extenuating circumstances, including but not limited to visiting patients and residents receiving end-of-life care.

# Other:

* Visitors to pharmacies who are not fully vaccinated and present with any COVID-19 symptoms must access a pharmacy within a hospital through remote means, such as delivery outside the facility, that do not require entering the facility.
* Fully vaccinated employees may visit patients either on- or off-duty. If unvaccinated, employees must be an approved permitted visitor.
* All volunteers to be fully vaccinated with the following limited exceptions: certified birth doulas, sexual assault support volunteers, and substance abuse peer mentors. Volunteers should be provided with information on how to become fully vaccinated in order to participate in hospital volunteer programs.

1. <https://apps.health.vermont.gov/COVID/faq/#4761> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)