



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
Department of Public Health
Bureau of Health Care Safety and Quality
67 Forest Street, Marlborough, MA 01752

CHARLES D. BAKER
Governor

KARYN E. POLITO
Lieutenant Governor

MARYLOU SUDDERS
Secretary

MONICA BHAREL, MD, MPH
Commissioner

Tel: 617-624-6000
www.mass.gov/dph

Memorandum

TO: Massachusetts Hospital Chief Executive Officers and Administrators
Department of Mental Health Hospitals
Department of Public Health Hospitals

FROM: Elizabeth Kelley, MPH, MBA, Director
Bureau of Health Care Safety and Quality

DATE: June 6, 2020

RE: Patient Visitors in Hospitals during the COVID-19 Outbreak

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) continues to work with state, federal and local partners on the outbreak of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), caused by the virus SARS-CoV-2, and we continue to appreciate the essential role you have in responding to this evolving situation. This memorandum replaces the Policies and Procedures for Patient Visitors in Hospitals during the COVID-19 outbreak memorandum sent on March 16, 2020.

Pursuant to an Order issued by the Commissioner of Public Health on March 15, 2020, all hospitals are directed to implement procedures published by the Department of Public Health to screen visitors and to restrict visitation as necessary to protect the health of patients and staff. The following visitation policies shall be effective June, 10 2020, to protect the health and safety of patients and staff during the 2019 novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.

For purposes of this guidance, birth partners, parents of patients who are under the age of 18 years old, attorneys of patients and companions for patients with intellectual and/or physical disabilities are not considered visitors, but must be screened.

Hospitals must screen all visitors for symptoms of possible COVID-19 infection (fever, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, chills, myalgia, or new onset of loss of taste or smell). Individuals with any symptom should not be permitted into the hospital. Hospitals must require all visitors to perform hand hygiene before visiting a patient.

Visitors are required to wear a facemask at all times while in the hospital.

To protect the safety of patients, a patient is allowed one visitor at a time in the hospital. No visitors under the age of 18 years old are allowed in the hospital, unless the visitor is a child of a patient. People waiting to visit a patient should wait outside, rather than in hospital waiting rooms, until the time of their visit.

A hospital may allow for outdoor visitation in a designated space, provided the patient's health status permits and infection control protocols are maintained during the visit.

Hospitals may prohibit visitation on a case-by-case basis if a patient tests positive or shows symptoms of COVID-19 or if visitation poses a significant infection control risk to the patients, visitor, or staff.

In compassionate care situations, including but not limited to end-of-life-situations, decisions about visitation should be made collaboratively with the patient and loved ones, as appropriate, on a case-by-case basis.

Hospitals should continue to support alternative electronic methods for communication between patients and all other visitors, such as Skype, FaceTime, WhatsApp or Google Duo.

Hospitals are also directed to restrict any non-essential personnel, such as sales vendors, who do not provide direct care from entering the facility.

Hospitals may prepare food onsite but, in alignment with the restaurant guidance, we would require that self-serve, unattended buffets, topping bars, drink stations, and other communal serving areas remain closed. Hospitals should take appropriate measures to limit the number of individuals eating in their cafeteria so that social distancing measures can be observed.

DPH strongly encourages all hospitals in Massachusetts to monitor the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) website and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website for up-to-date information and resources:

- CMS website: <https://www.cms.gov/About-CMS/Agency-Information/Emergency/EPRO/Current-Emergencies/Current-Emergencies-page>
- CDC website: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/healthcare-facilities/index.html>

Additionally, please visit DPH's website that provides up-to-date information on COVID-19 in Massachusetts: <https://www.mass.gov/2019coronavirus>.