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TO: Hospitals
FROM: New York State Department of Health

Interim Health Advisory: COVID-19 Updated Guidance for Hospital Visitation

Background

On April 10, 2020, the Department of Health (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 20, 2020 and June 17, 2020, the Department made updates to this Advisory to further clarify guidance for visitation. This update supersedes previously issued guidance regarding hospital visitation.

Visits from friends and family can promote patients’ physical or emotional well-being and care but must be accompanied by adherence to strong infection prevention and control requirements. These rules safeguard and maintain the health and wellbeing of patients, visitors, and staff and prevent the continued spread of COVID-19 and other diseases.

Hospital Visitation Guidance

Beginning April 1, 2021, hospitals may allow each patient to have up to TWO visitors at a time for up to four hours per day, unless otherwise disallowed by the hospital according to the patient’s status, condition, circumstances, OR hospital policy. At times, additional visitors may also be allowed based on hospital discretion, or the hours may be increased, at the hospital’s discretion. Restrictions on the number of visitors, length of visits, and visiting hours may differ among various units of the hospital. These restrictions, which may predate COVID-19, exist to protect both the welfare of the patients in those units and facilitate healthcare providers’ ability to treat them. Visitors are expected to respect and comply with these additional restrictions. Details about hospital visitation policies must be posted on the facility’s website.

All visitors must adhere to the following policies and practices:

- Visitors must wear face coverings at all times.
- Visitors may be provided with and asked to wear additional appropriate personal protective equipment, depending on the disease the patient has, as recommended by the Department, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and hospital policy.
- Visitors must be advised regarding how to perform meticulous hand hygiene and how to wear the PPE and must adhere to such procedures.
- Visitors who fail to wear a 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 10 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.
- All visitors must be greater than 18 years of age except in rare exceptions as determined by the hospital.

Hospitals must

- 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.
- Collect name and contact information for visitors, the date(s) of their visits, and the name of the patient(s) visited and maintain this information in an electronic format.

In addition, hospitals will ensure that following allowances are made:

- **Labor and Delivery**
 - Two support persons, including a doula if requested, may accompany the patient throughout labor, delivery, and the postpartum period, including recovery, until discharge to home. The support persons can be the patient's spouse, partner, sibling, parent, or other persons of their choice.
- **Pediatrics**
 - Pediatric patients may have two designated support persons with them.
- **Patients with Intellectual and/or Developmental Disabilities (I/DD)**
 - Patients with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (I/DD) and patients with cognitive impairments including dementia, may designate one support person to remain with them through their hospitalization. An additional visitor may also be with the patient during hospital-designated visiting hours.
- **End of life situations**
 - Two support persons may be designated to remain with patients in imminent end-of-life situations
- **Procedures:**
 - Patients undergoing same day procedures may be accompanied to the facility by a companion and that companion may remain in a hospital designated waiting area until the patient is discharged, unless otherwise disallowed by the hospital according to the patient's status, condition, circumstances, or hospital policy.
 - Visitors may be present during pediatric and childbirth procedures and with patients with an intellectual, developmental, or other cognitive disabilities, or end of life situations and in other situations as authorized by the hospital, depending upon the patient's status and condition.

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

Questions about this guidance may be sent to hospinfo@health.ny.gov.