



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
Department of Public Health
Bureau of Health Care Safety and Quality
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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: March 16, 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 novel Coronavirus 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 10, 2020.

Pursuant to an Order issued by the Commissioner of Public Health, all hospitals are directed to implement the following visitation policies, effective March 16, 2020, to protect the health and safety of patients and staff during the 2019 novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.

Hospitals must urge potential visitors to defer visitation until further notice. Hospitals must require all visitors to perform hand hygiene before visiting a patient.

To protect the safety of patients, a patient is allowed one visitor at a time. Visitors must remain 6 feet from the patient at all times. Hospitals should place limits on the time of each visit to no more than fifteen minutes. No visitors under the age of 18 years old are allowed in the hospital, unless the visitor is a child of a patient. In compassionate care situations, such as end-of-life-situations, decisions about visitation should be made on a case-by-case basis.

Hospitals must screen all visitors for symptoms of a respiratory infection (fever, cough, shortness of breath, or sore throat) and those individuals with any symptoms should not be permitted to visit.

Hospitals are expected to notify potential visitors to defer visitation until further notice. Such notification can be achieved through signage, calls, letters or other identified, appropriate forms of communication. Hospitals should support alternative electronic methods for communication between patients and visitors, such as Skype, FaceTime, WhatsApp or Google Duo.

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

Hospitals are directed to suspend any communal food services in their cafeteria, such as salad bars and offer foods in packaging only. 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>.