



# NORTHUMBERLAND HILLS HOSPITAL

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) NHH COVID-19 Visitor Policy Update – Effective Monday, March 21, 2022

### **Q. 1 How many visitors are admitted patients (“inpatients”) allowed to have at NHH today?**

Effective Monday, March 21, NHH will relax COVID-19 visitor restrictions on both inpatient units and within the Emergency Department/Short Stay Unit. A daily maximum of two visitors or essential caregivers will now be permitted for each patient per day, between the hours of 8AM and 8PM. To minimize the number of individuals in the patient room at any one time, these two visitors will not be permitted simultaneously. Exceptions to the two person per day and 8AM to 8PM rule continue as follows:

- For inpatients at imminent end of life additional visitors will be considered at the discretion of the care team
- For obstetrical patients, the birth partner AND labour coach will be permitted
- For outpatients, the following exceptions are permitted:
  - a. Essential caregivers for children coming to the hospital for care (children = 18 and under)
  - b. Essential caregivers for those with communication challenges and/or cognitive impairments – outpatient clinic settings only (Dialysis, Diagnostic Imaging, etc.)

Visiting continues to be on hold for inpatients whose room is located in a COVID-19 hot zone (i.e. a unit designated in a COVID-19 ‘outbreak’ status by Public Health) OR confirmed or presumed positive for COVID-19. There are currently (March 18, 2022) no active COVID-19 outbreaks at NHH. Family members should expect to be advised directly in the event of new COVID-19 cases.

### **Q. 2 What are the visiting hours?**

Visiting hours continue to be restricted to 12 hours/day, 8AM to 8PM. There are no visiting hour restrictions for patients in the Emergency Department or Short Stay Unit, or for those considered ‘exceptions’ to the two person and 8AM – 8PM rule (eg., visitor to a patient at imminent end of life, essential caregiver for children 18 and under or those with communication/cognitive impairments, or a birth partner to an obstetrical patient).

### **Q. 3 Will Rapid Antigen Testing be required before I can enter to visit a loved one?**

No, in light of the steadily declining COVID-19 cases in the community, NHH will conclude the pilot exercise involving Rapid Antigen Testing for visitors on Monday, March 21. Introduced in February 2022 as an additional protection, it was never intended as a long-term precaution and it is not felt to be necessary at this time. NHH reserves the right to resume Rapid Antigen Testing without notice, should circumstances warrant.

### **Q. 4 Are visits permitted to patients receiving care within the Emergency Department?**

Yes, consistent with our inpatient visiting guidelines, effective March 21, 2022, two visitors or essential caregivers per day will now be permitted for Emergency Department and Short Stay Unit patients, within the restrictions set out in the COVID-19 Visitor Policy. There are no set visiting ‘hours’ within the Emergency Department/Short Stay Unit as there are on inpatient units but to minimize the number of individuals in the patient room at any one time, these two visitors will not be permitted simultaneously.

### **Q. 5 So visiting restrictions have been relaxed, but not removed completely?**

Yes, with limited exceptions, two visitors/essential caregivers per admitted inpatient and Emergency Department/Short Stay Unit patient will be permitted each day. Exceptions to the number of visitors (i.e. more than two visitors/day) may be made for patients who are at imminent end-of-life, at the discretion of

the care team and for obstetrical patients who may have a primary partner AND labour coach if desired. It is the responsibility of each patient (or their substitute decision maker) to select who they wish their in-person visitor/essential caregiver to be, and communicate that wish to the rest of their family/social circle in advance of visitors' arrival to avoid people having to be turned away at the entrance. If a patient wishes to have two different individuals visit them or support them during the course of a particular day, then they should plan in advance when each will come in.

**Q. 6 Do I still need to wear a mask if I visit a patient at NHH?**

Yes. While Ontario is lifting mandatory mask mandates in many public settings beginning March 21, 2022, Universal masking continues throughout NHH for the time being, and it will be required. Those coming into the hospital will be provided with a mask to use during their time on-site and it is recommended that this mask be discarded on exit. Anyone found not compliant with the universal mask policy—or other personal protective equipment requirements specific to the patient they are visiting—will be required to leave.

**Q. 7 If I have been vaccinated, do I still need to be screened/wear a mask?**

Yes. Visitors who have been vaccinated for COVID-19 must pass the screening process and will be expected to follow all required infection prevention and control practices within the hospital, including the wearing of any recommended personal protective equipment.

**Q. 8 I have a loved one in hospital, and I am worried about what they may be exposed to as a result of this relaxing of visitor restrictions. What infection control measures have you put in place to reduce the risk of visitors entering the hospital?**

NHH's universal mask policy remains in effective. Visitors will be expected to wear a hospital-issued mask for the duration of their visit and wash their hands on entry and exit (and repeatedly through their visit, as required). Visitors will also be expected to restrict their movement when inside the hospital as much as possible, i.e. to the patient room and—with the exception of the cafeteria-- refrain from eating and drinking while on-site, given the need to remove the mask to do so. Active screening is also in place prior to entry. This involves the successful completion of a series of questions regarding symptoms and potential exposure to COVID-19 positive cases.

**Q. 9 I have a loved one receiving chemotherapy treatments. Can I join them now for their treatment?**

NHH continues to restrict outpatient visitors to 'essential only'. Unless your loved one has specific needs to support them during their appointment (for example, requires support getting in/out of the hospital for their appointment) general visiting to patients within our outpatient clinics, including chemotherapy and dialysis, is not permitted at this time.

**Q. 10 What if the patient is unable to identify that they wish to have a visitor?**

In situations where the patient is not able to communicate, their substitute decision maker is expected to determine who will visit each day and communicate this to the care team.

**Q. 11 What door should I come in/go out if I'm visiting?**

Visitors to those admitted to an inpatient bed continue to be encouraged to enter/exit at the main front entrance, between the hours of 8AM and 8PM, to minimize traffic into the Emergency Department and through the hospital. Visitors to patients within the Emergency Department and adjacent Short Stay Unit should enter via the Emergency Department. All those arriving outside of the 8AM to 8PM visiting hours must enter via the Emergency Department entrance. All visitors will be asked to sign in on arrival, and to provide their name and contact information to support management of the two-person-per-patient limit and any necessary contact tracing.

**Q. 12 Is the cafeteria open to the public?**

Yes, the Main Street Bistro is open weekdays, 8AM to 2PM, and public service is available. For hours of operation please see the hospital website.

**Q. 13 Can I bring food, such as a coffee or tea, in to my loved one?**

No. To minimize the risk of infection introduced when consuming food/drink in patient care areas, visitors are not permitted to bring food and drink into the hospital at this time.

**Q. 14 I live in another province and cannot visit in person at all. Will the Virtual Visiting service continue to be available?**

Yes, the Virtual Visiting program introduced in April 2020 continues to be available. Virtual visits may be scheduled weekdays by contacting the hospital's Virtual Visiting Team at 905-372-6811 ext. 3146 or by email to [virtualconnections@nhh.ca](mailto:virtualconnections@nhh.ca). Note: to protect patient privacy, the patient's full name should not be included in the email. For full details, please refer to our website at: <https://nhh.ca/Patients/VisitingGuidelines>

**Q. 15 I have a question or concern regarding your Visitor Policy. Who should this be directed to?**

Any individual patient and/or visitor with questions or concerns regarding the COVID-19 Visitor Policy is encouraged to contact the manager of the patient care unit during business hours. In the event a visitor-related concern arises outside of business hours, when unit managers are not typically on site, the Clinical Operations Manager has been designated as the point person responsible for addressing questions regarding visiting, in consultation with NHH's Patient Relations Manager or manager/senior manager on call.

**Q. 16 Is this COVID-19 Visitor Policy subject to change?**

Yes. Our team is constantly monitoring the total volume of traffic into and out of the hospital to ensure physical distancing requirements can be maintained, as well as any sign of hospital-acquired infection connected to visiting. In the event it is found necessary for safety purposes, the hospital will limit visiting once again. It remains our goal to maintain a safe balance between limited visiting/essential caregiver presence and infection control and ultimately return to the open visitor policy in place prior to the pandemic.

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