



NORTHUMBERLAND HILLS HOSPITAL

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) Visiting Guidelines at NHH – Updated August 19, 2022

Q. 1 Is visiting permitted to admitted patients (“inpatients”) at NHH today?

With the exception of areas identified on outbreak, most COVID-19 visiting restrictions have been lifted and NHH has returned to our previous open visiting policy. There is no daily maximum of visitors or essential caregivers and no set visiting hours. Visits should not be planned during therapy or treatment times, and the privacy and healing environment of all patients and their families must be respected at all times. Please note: 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. Effective August 19, 2022, there is one active COVID-19 outbreak at NHH: on 2A Med/Surg. Visiting is not permitted to 2A as a result of this outbreak. Families of patients in this unit will receive direct communication from the care team as circumstances change. Exceptions to the visiting restriction will be made in select patient circumstances to permit visiting to COVID-19 positive patients. See Q 2 below.

Q. 2 My loved one is dying but they have COVID-19. Can I visit?

Yes. Each patient situation is unique and exceptions to the visiting restrictions for COVID-19-positive patients are made in patient circumstances where death is imminent, on consultation with the care team and NHH infection prevention and control leads. Speak with the care team to know what is appropriate for you and your loved one at this time. Have a concern? See Q 16 below.

Q. 3 Are there set visiting hours?

There are currently no hospital-wide visiting hours at NHH. Effective July 11, 2022, visiting hours returned to our pre-COVID-19 open visiting policy which is flexible to accommodate individual patient circumstances. Please note: all those visiting before 8AM or after 8PM will be required to enter via the Emergency Department entrance. See Q3 below. NHH continues to monitor visitor volumes and will adjust the open visiting policy as required should circumstances change in the community or the hospital.

Q. 4 Do I still need to wear a mask if I visit a patient at NHH?

Yes. While Ontario has lifted mandatory mask mandates in most public settings, hospitals are high-risk settings and, as such, universal masking continues throughout NHH for the time being for all visitors, staff, physicians, students, volunteers and contractors. Those coming into the hospital without a mask will be provided with one to wear during their time on-site. Visitors wearing a personal cloth mask will be expected to either cover it or replace it with a supplied mask and discarded that supplied mask on exit.

Q. 5 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 appropriate personal protective equipment.

Q. 6 What door should I enter in if I’m visiting? Are there special requirements for late night visiting?

The hospital’s main entrance is locked nightly after 8PM and opened again at 8AM. Visitors to patients admitted to a hospital inpatient bed should note that NHH has special access requirements in place for evening and night hour visits. 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. Visitors to patients within the Emergency Department should enter via the Emergency Department entrance. All those visiting after 8PM and before 8AM must enter via the Emergency Department entrance as other entrances will be locked.

Q. 7 Are visits permitted to patients receiving care within the Emergency Department?

Yes, consistent with our inpatient visiting guidelines, visitors or essential caregivers are permitted for Emergency Department and Short Stay Unit patients, with the exception of those confirmed or presumed positive for COVID-19. While there are no set visiting 'hours' the team expects that families minimize the number of individuals in the patient room at any one time.

Q. 8 Will visitors be screened before entering the hospital or required to show proof of vaccination?

Visitors to NHH are expected to self-screen for symptoms of COVID-19 or other illness and visitors are accountable for deciding for themselves if they have any symptoms consistent with COVID-19. IF YOU ARE EXPERIENCING POTENTIALLY CONTAGIOUS SYMPTOMS OF ANY KIND IT IS EXPECTED, FOR THE SAFETY OF YOUR LOVED ONES AND OTHERS, THAT YOU WILL POSTPONE YOUR VISIT TO PATIENTS IN THE HOSPITAL. Proof of vaccination is not presently required but staying up to date with COVID-19 vaccinations is strongly recommended by all who enter.

Q. 9 I have a loved one in hospital, and I am worried about what they may be exposed to from other visitors, patients or even staff. What infection control measures have you put in place to reduce the risk??

The following is a summary of the infection prevention and control measures in place at NHH:

- **Temporary closure of unit-specific outbreaks to all new admission** - as appropriate, and on direction of Public Health
- **Daily self-screening by staff for COVID-19 symptoms** – All individuals entering the hospital for work must pre-screen for symptoms and refrain from entering the building or community mental health offices in the event symptoms develop.
- **Mandatory use of appropriate PPE** – All staff, physicians, midwives and essential caregivers/visitors are expected to pay strict attention to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) requirements throughout the hospital and NHH's universal masking policy remains in effect. Visitors continue to have access to free masks on entry to the hospital and NHH's Community Mental Health offices and will be expected to keep their medical-grade mask on at all times (or over top of their personal cloth mask) while inside, unless eating or drinking in designated areas. No eating or drinking is permitted by visitors in patient rooms. This is due to the fact that masks would need to be removed.
- **Cohorting of patients considered "high risk contacts"** – Any patients identified as having a high risk of exposure have been co-located into the same area, tested and cared for with appropriate precautions.
- **Mandatory vaccination of staff** – All staff and physicians are required to be up to date with their vaccines (two doses); booster vaccines continue to be distributed to further reduce the risk of infection and spread.
- **Strict adherence to thorough hand hygiene practices** – Strict adherence to thorough hand hygiene will continue to be reinforced.
- **Enhanced environmental cleaning** – enhanced cleaning, with a focus on equipment shared between patient rooms
- **Proactive communication** – Public notices are continually updated across NHH's communication channels, including doorways within/leading to the hospital, to promote awareness of the presence of COVID-19 and the importance of vigilance with PPE.

Q. 10 I have a loved one receiving chemotherapy treatments. Can I join them now for their treatment?

While visiting restrictions have been lifted, NHH continues to recommend outpatient visitors within our outpatient clinics, including chemotherapy and dialysis, be limited to what the patient deems as 'essential,' in consultation with their health care teams.

Q. 11 What about the Obstetrical area? Are there restrictions on the number of visitors to a new/birthing mom?

A. Again, as in the case of our outpatient visitor recommendations, we have lifted visiting restrictions but continue to strongly recommend visitors to our Maternal/Child Care unit be limited to ‘essential only’, meaning birth partner and labour coach. Obstetrical patients are encouraged to discuss visiting with their care team if they wish to have more.

Q. 12 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. 13 Is the cafeteria open to the public?

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

Q. 14 Can I bring food, such as a coffee or tea, in to my loved one?

No, not at this time. To minimize the risk of infection introduced when communally consuming food/drink in patient care areas, no eating or drinking is permitted by visitors in patient rooms at this time.

Q. 15 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 in limited form. Virtual visits may be scheduled weekdays, as internal capacity permits, by contacting the hospital’s Virtual Visiting Team at 905-372-6811 ext. 3146 or by email to 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. 16 I have a question or concern regarding your Visiting Guidelines. Who should this be directed to?

Any individual patient and/or visitor with questions or concerns regarding NHH’s evolving Visiting Guidelines is encouraged to contact the manager of the patient care unit during business hours. Call the main Switchboard at 905-372-6811 to be directed. 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 the manager/senior manager on call.

Q. 17 Are these latest Visiting Guideline changes subject to change?

Yes. Our team is constantly monitoring the total volume of traffic into and out of the hospital to ensure safety 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 revise Visiting Guidelines once again, on consultation with Public Health, our internal Infection Prevention and Control leads and our Patient and Family Advisory Council. It has always been 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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Updated August 19, 2022 – subject to change