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Policy Area COVID-19
Applicability St. Lawrence Health system-wide content
Key Phrases COVID-19, Coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2

COVID-19 Visitor Screening and Restrictions

SCOPE

All St. Lawrence Health (SLH) affiliate entities.

DEFINITIONS

Visitor: an individual, 12 years of age or older that is able to visit with a patient within the SLH defined visitation hours. A Visitor may also be defined as a guest, one that makes formal visits of inspection and/or support of services.

Support Person: an individual, 18 years of age or older and are essential to patient care. They include:

- A parent or guardian of a pediatric patient
- A Support Person to a laboring patient
- Care Partner-care partner identified by the patient as the primary individual to be involved in providing care and care decisions.
- A person who is medically necessary for the care of a patient including patients with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (I/DD)
- Patients with cognitive impairments including dementia or in imminent end-of-life situations for a patient who is actively dying and death is anticipated within less than 24 hours.

POLICY

We may apply exceptions that restrict Support Persons and Visitors in limited circumstances due to medical necessity made by the treating clinician and/or based on the facilities' ability to maintain

appropriate infection control protocols.

St. Lawrence Health recognizes the need for patients to be able to see their loved ones face to face; at the same time, we must continue to put the safety of our patients, Visitors, and staff first. The New York State Department of Health has issued a directive allowing for restricted visitation for acute care inpatient settings. This policy addresses the management of both Visitors and Support Persons.

Outpatient departments will allow one (1) Support Person with a patient during an outpatient visit.

- Any Visitors or Support Persons permitted must be symptom-free; therefore, within the previous 10 days cannot have any respiratory symptoms, including fever of 100°F or higher or cough or shortness of breath and must not have knowingly been exposed to an individual with COVID-19, unless otherwise outlined below. This will be communicated through signage at building entrance points and the expectation is the visitor will self-report that they are ill and will not enter the facility. If a visitor is noted to be visibly COVID-19 symptomatic and/or ill, they may be asked to leave the facility.
- Visitors who fail to comply with the guidance outlined in this policy will be asked to leave the facility. Designated guardians and on-site Support Persons shall not be denied access to the facility for refusing to comply with the facility's COVID-19 testing and screening requirements
- Within areas of our facilities that do not allow us to accommodate social distancing, we reserve the right to refuse Visitors for their safety and the safety of our patients and staff.
- Certain outpatient clinics may have more stringent visitor restrictions, as approved by the appropriate Vice President.

PROCEDURE

Visitors

To help protect the safety of staff, patients and Visitors, the following COVID-19 guidelines will remain in place:

- Two (2) Visitors are allowed at a time at the bedside during visiting hours.
- Visitation is permitted for any patient, including those on Isolation Precautions. Visitors should be advised on requirement to use appropriate PPE per policy, and will be provided the PPE and educated on how to use by the patient's unit staff. Visitors will be made aware of potential risk of exposure.
- **At the request of the patient, Clergy may be permitted to visit the patient, and may do so in addition to any Visitor or Support Person without counting toward any Visitor or Support Person limitations defined by this policy.**
- Visiting hours for all SLH hospital inpatient units are*:
 - **Canton-Potsdam Hospital:** 9 a.m. - 8 p.m.
 - **Gouverneur Hospital:** 9 a.m. - 8 p.m.
 - **Massena Hospital:** 9 a.m. - 8 p.m.
- Emergency Departments will permit One (1) Visitor with a patient receiving care in the Emergency Department with no restrictions regarding visiting hours.

- Visitors must be 12 years of age or older.
- Virtual visitation is encouraged whenever possible. Virtual visitation includes whatever electronic device the patient prefers regardless of whether it is the patient's own device (e.g., a cell phone) or a device they receive for the purpose of improving communication (e.g., a tablet specifically designed for video telephony). The video camera may not be pointed at other patients or staff members without the staff member's permission. The healthcare team may request the device is turned off during patient care.
- The identified Care Partner will be allowed to visit 24/7 when deemed to be in the best interest of the patient. At any time should the visit be assessed by nursing as a barrier to creating a healing environment nursing leadership can ask the visitor to leave the bedside. In semi-private rooms, the room mate must agree to any overnight visitation and their decision for rest be respected.
- Birthing Center allows two support persons (same two from start to discharge) allowed to stay with mom. Allow four visitors per day with only two visiting at a time. Visiting is from 1pm-8pm. No visitors under age 12.

Support Persons

In the event a hospital's hours of visitation become restricted due to COVID-19, in addition to a designated Visitor, the following groups may designate a Support Person(s) who is not restricted by visitation hours.

- The following groups may designate a Support Person(s) who is not restricted by visitation hours.
 - **Pediatric patients: Two (2)** Support Person(s) or Visitors may be present on-site at a time in the emergency room or during hospitalization.
 - **Labor & Delivery:** Support persons will be permitted in accordance with New York State Law. In labor and delivery triage, prior to admission, **two (2)** Support Persons are allowed. Patients may have **two (2)** designated adult support people present upon admission, throughout labor, delivery, and postpartum.
 - **Patients with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (I/DD), and cognitive impairments including dementia: One (1)** Support Person may be present on-site at a time in the emergency room or during hospitalization. **An additional Visitor may also be with the patient and stay for up to four hours per visit during normal visiting hours once the patient is admitted to a room.**
 - **End-of-Life Situations:** the patient and/or family/care giver may designate **two (2) Visitors at a time at the bedside** as long as social distancing is maintained. Minor age Visitors must be accompanied by an adult. Clergy visiting at end of life are not counted as one of the two Visitors at the bedside. End-of-life determinations are made in coordination with patient, family/legal guardian and treatment team. Visitation for end-of-life situations is not restricted by COVID-19 status or hours. All infection control guidelines and instructions must be followed.

General Guidance

- Visitors will complete a sign in process when entering the hospital.
- Patients undergoing **same-day procedures** may be accompanied to the facility by a

companion for pre-procedure (surgery) and post-procedure (surgery). Pediatric patients undergoing procedures may have up to two (2) Support Persons.

- The Visitor must remain masked at all times and must maintain social distancing and hand hygiene as outlined in this policy.
- Support persons and visitors may not be present during procedures and in the recovery room except for pediatrics, childbirth, and patients with an intellectual, developmental, or other cognitive disability.
- Support Persons and Visitors will be instructed to 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.
- Within areas of our facilities that do not allow us to accommodate social distancing, we reserve the right to refuse Visitors for their safety and the safety of our patients and staff.
- Support Persons and Visitors must be wearing a **medical mask** upon arrival to the facility in the proper way - covering their nose and mouth completely. Cloth masks are not acceptable at this time. If the Support Persons and Visitors do not arrive with a mask or arrive with a cloth face covering, the hospital will provide the Support Persons and Visitors with a medical mask. The Support Persons and Visitors will be instructed to keep their mask on at all times. **Visitors with facemasks with exhalation valves must change the mask or cover it with a medical mask that covers the valve to be permitted to enter.**
- Support Persons and Visitors must comply with strict hand hygiene and personal protective equipment practices.
 - Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not readily available, use hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Cover all surfaces of hands and rub them together until they feel dry.
 - Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Support Persons and Visitors will be provided written information regarding the potential risks and benefits of visiting a patient within the hospital as well the expectations regarding their visitation which includes: the hours of visitation, remaining in the patient room during the entire visit unless otherwise instructed, wearing their medical mask during their entire visit and instructions regarding meticulous hand hygiene. Support persons and visitors who fail to comply with the outlined expectations will be asked to leave the facility.

Visitation of Patients in the Custody of Law Enforcement

Any patient that is in the custody of a law enforcement agency shall not have visitation unless the following conditions have been met:

- The Warden/Supervisor from the agency holding the prisoner/patient has approved the visitation.
- The Officer or Officers guarding the prisoner/patient approve of the visitation (in case the patient/prisoner has been disruptive and it may pose a safety risk).
- The Officer or Officers may also elect to search any packages/belongings that may be brought into proximity of the prisoner/patient.
- The prisoner/patient has been medically cleared to receive visitors.

- The visitation is in accordance with regular visiting hours and rules.
- No medical information regarding the prisoner/patient will be given out without prior authorization by the prisoner/patient.
- The security team and nursing leadership must approve the visit. If we have any concerns, we always have the right to limit visitation.

Visitation of a Deceased Patient

Visitation of a deceased patient may be a necessary step in the grieving process of the patient's loved ones. There may be up to two Visitors permitted at a time. This type of visitation is considered a compassionate visit; the hospital visitation hours do not apply to this type of visitation. Appropriate infection prevention precautions should be followed. Visitation of a COVID positive or Person-Under-Investigation deceased patient should be discouraged and should be handled on a case-by-case basis with hospital leadership. If this occurs, up to two Visitors are permitted and the Visitor(s) must:

- Fully understand the risks of acquiring COVID-19, so that the Visitor can make an informed decision of whether or not the visiting the deceased at the bedside is essential.
- Wear a medical mask throughout their time in the hospital,
- Practice scrupulous hand hygiene,
- Remain in the deceased patient's room except for entrance and exit from the hospital, and
- While in the deceased patient's room, a gown and gloves should be worn to prevent the person's hands or clothes from becoming contaminated. Eye protection should be worn while in the room if available. After the Visitor(s) has left the deceased patient's room, staff must observe that the Visitor(s) is properly doffing PPE and ensure the Visitor performs hand hygiene.
- Not directly touch or handle the body of the deceased without PPE. i.e. must not directly kiss, hug or hold the hand of the deceased without the protection of PPE.

The Support Person of a patient with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 who has been a close contact of the patient has potentially already been exposed to COVID-19. These Support Persons should:

- Wear a medical mask throughout their time in the hospital
- Practice scrupulous hand hygiene,
- Remain in the patient's room except for entrance and exit from the hospital; and
- While in the room, a gown and gloves should be worn to prevent the person's hands or clothes from becoming contaminated. Eye protection should be worn while in the room if available.

If the Support Person of a patient with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 has not been a close contact of the patient and does not have a history of confirmed COVID-19, the Support Person should:

- Wear a medical mask throughout their time in the hospital,
- Practice scrupulous hand hygiene,
- Remain in the patient's room except for entrance and exit from the hospital, and
- While in the patient's room, a gown and gloves should be worn to prevent the person's hands or clothes from becoming contaminated. Eye protection should be worn while in the room if

available.

- Again, in these circumstances the risks of acquiring COVID-19 should be fully explained, so that the patient and Support Person can make an informed decision of whether or not the Support Person's presence at the patient bedside is essential to the patient's health.

If the patient does not have confirmed or suspected COVID-19, the Support Person or Visitor should:

- Wear a medical mask throughout their time in the hospital,
- Practice scrupulous hand hygiene, and
- Remain in the patient's room except for entrance and exit from the hospital.

Outpatient Location Support Person Guidelines:

- **One (1) Support Person** is permitted to be with a patient during an outpatient visit
- The patient will be screened for symptoms of COVID-19 (e.g. respiratory symptoms, including fever of 100°F or higher or cough or shortness of breath) upon arrival to the outpatient office/ location
- If the patient screens positive, they are masked and the COVID triaging process continues.
- If the patient screens positive, a soft hand-off is called to the location where the patient will be receiving services.

Signage

Hospitals must post signage notifying the public of the visitation restrictions in all hospital entrances and in parking lots. In addition, Visitor restriction and screening communications should be posted to the [hospital's website](#) and social media pages.

Related Policies, Documents, and Forms

- [COVID-19 Employee Toolkit](#)
- [Universal Mask Wearing Policy](#)
- [Infection Prevention - Standard Precautions - Transmission-Based Isolation](#)
- [Infection Prevention - Personal Protective Equipment \(PPE\)](#)

References/Citations

- SLH Website: <https://stlawrencehealthsystem.org/patients-Visitors>
- OSHA ETS Website: <https://www.osha.gov/coronavirus/ets>
- NYS DOH Health Advisory: COVID-19 Updated Guidance for Hospital Visitation; dated November 18, 2022

Approval Signatures

Step Description	Approver	Date
Final Approval	Lisa Lougheed: Chief Nursing Officer	5/4/2023

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