COVID-19 Emergency Department and Hospitalization Visitation Policy

SCOPE

All St. Lawrence Health System (SLHS) affiliate entities.

DEFINITIONS

Support person: An individual who is in a support role for a patient or who is legally responsible for making health care decisions on behalf of a patient. This may include family members, friends or another individual who is there to support the patient. The role of a support person is not limited to a relationship that is legally recognized in New York. The designation of a support person is not intended to supplant New York law concerning the patient’s legal representative.

Visitor: An individual who is a guest of the patient. Family members are considered to be visitors as well, when not fulfilling the role of a support person.

POLICY

In alignment with the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH), SLHS has taken precautions to protect and maintain the health and safety of patients and staff during the COVID-19 outbreak to prevent the introduction of this infection into the hospitals. Visitation within hospitals has been modified, given the risk of COVID-19 in the healthcare setting. Staff should thoroughly discuss the potential risks and benefits of a support person’s and/or visitor’s presence with the patient and the support and/or visitor, if possible.

We encourage family, friends and support persons to remain closely connected to their loved ones through virtual means, including Skype and FaceTime. Devices such as iPads are available upon request:

- To request a device for patient use, contact the Nursing Supervisor.

PROCEDURE

For ensuring visitors and support persons minimize the risk of potential COVID-19 transmission, including when the patient is confirmed or suspected to have COVID-19:

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 surgical or procedure 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, use of the restroom, and obtaining to-go orders from the cafeteria, 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 surgical or procedure 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, use of the restroom, and obtaining to-go orders from the cafeteria, 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 and visitor should:

- Wear a surgical or procedure 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, use of the restroom and obtaining to-go orders from the cafeteria.

Hospital staff must record the name and contact information for support persons and visitors of hospitalized patients, the date(s) of their visits, and the name of the patient(s) visited.

Hospital staff must screen the support person and visitor for symptoms of COVID-19 (e.g., fever, sore throat, runny nose, and cough, shortness of breath, muscle aches, or diarrhea) and conduct a temperature check prior to entering the clinical area and every twelve hours thereafter for the remainder of their presence. When providing personal protective equipment to a support person and visitor, instructions on PPE conservation strategies should be provided to minimize unnecessary waste (i.e. prolonged wearing).

If a support person or visitor has confirmed or suspected COVID-19 or presents with or develops symptoms of COVID-19, they should be excluded from the hospital. In a situation in which a patient’s support person has confirmed or suspected COVID-19, through informed decision making the patient and family may choose to select a different support person.

During the admission process the patient care team discusses with the patient for their safety the current visitation policy and alternative methods for staying connected such as FaceTime and Skype. This should include considerations for assisting patient and family member communication through remote methods when possible, for example, via phone or video call.

1. For labor and delivery, SLHS considers one support person essential to patient care throughout labor, delivery, and the immediate postpartum period, including recovery.
   - This person can be the patient’s spouse, partner, sibling, doula, or another person they choose. This person can stay with the patient and will be the only support person allowed to be present during the
student’s care.

- Visitation on postpartum/antepartum units is now expanded with up to two visitors, but only one visitor may be present at a time. Limited hours for visitors as determined by hospital site. **(This expanded visitation is not permitted if the patient, visitor, or support person is positive for COVID-19).**
  - This restriction must be explained to the patient in plain terms, upon arrival or, ideally, prior to arriving at the hospital.
  - Hospital staff should ensure that patients fully understand this restriction, allowing them to decide who they wish to identify as their support person.

2. For **pediatric patients**, SLHS considers **one support person at a time** as essential to patient care during hospitalization.
   - For hospitalized pediatric patients, especially with prolonged hospitalizations, the patient or family/caregiver may designate two support people; but only one support person may be present at a time.
   - This restriction must be explained to the patient’s family/caregivers in plain terms, upon arrival or, ideally, prior to arriving at the hospital. Hospital staff should ensure that the family/caregiver fully understand this restriction.
   - Individuals age 70 years or older, are not encouraged to be support persons at this time due to increased risk of COVID-19 infection.

3. **Patients for whom a support person has been determined to be essential to the care of the patient (medically necessary) including patients with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (I/DD), and patients with cognitive impairments including dementia**, SLHS considers **one support person at a time** as essential to patient care in the emergency room or during hospitalization.
   - For these hospitalized patients, especially with prolonged hospitalizations, the patient or family/caregiver may designate two support people; but only one support person may be present at a time.
   - This support person can be the patient’s family, caregiver, or another person they choose. In these settings, the person will be the only support person allowed to be present during the patient’s care. This restriction must be explained to the patient and support person in plain terms, upon arrival or, ideally, prior to arriving at the hospital.
   - Hospital staff should ensure that patients fully understand this restriction, allowing them to decide who they wish to identify as their support person.
   - Individuals age 70 years or older, are not encouraged to be support persons at this time due to increased risk of COVID-19 infection.

4. **Patients in imminent end-of-life situations**, SLHS considers **one family member, clergy, and/or legal representative at a time** as a support person who should be permitted at the patient bedside.
   - SLHS defines imminent end-of-life situations as a patient who is actively dying, where death is anticipated within less than 24 hours.
   - The patient and/or family/caregiver may designate up to two support people; and two support people may be present at a time.
   - In the event the patient is a parent of a minor child, one adult family member and one child may be
permitted at the patient bedside.

- This restriction must be explained to the patient and/or support person in plain terms, upon arrival or, ideally, prior to arriving at the hospital.
- Hospital staff should ensure that patients and/or support person fully understand this restriction.
- Individuals age 70 years or older, are not encouraged to be support persons at this time due to increased risk of COVID-19 infection.

5. **Patients not on precautions for COVID-19**, up to two visitors can be designated, but only one visitor may be present at a time, and only during the designated hours for visitors as determined by hospital site. Only one visitor at a time for Critical Care patients (unless end of life exception applies) and only during the designated hours for critical care visitors as determined by hospital site.

- Visitors must be 18 years of age or older. Exceptions, including those listed above, may apply.

6. **Patients in the Emergency Department**, who have not been hospitalized, may have one support person at a time, per patient, for their entire Emergency stay. The patient or their legal representative will determine the identified essential support person. One support person will be able to accompany a patient in the Emergency Department, and the support person must remain within close proximity of the patient’s treatment room or the designated waiting area for the entire visit.

- If the patient being accompanied by the support person is admitted to the hospital from the Emergency Department, and none of the above scenarios apply, that support person may accompany the patient during the admission process to ensure that the patient is settled, thereafter, this individual is considered a “visitor” and must adhere to the current COVID-19 visitor restrictions. If a patient is admitted outside of permitted visiting hours, the visitor must return during visiting hours (as applicable).
- **Exceptions to the ‘one person at a time’ may apply.** Pediatric patients may have both parents as essential support persons within the Emergency Department. Any other extenuating circumstance will be presented to the lead Emergency Department physician for consideration.

7. **Outpatient Clinics and Service Areas** must limit people accompanying the patient to one essential support person when the patient needs assistance. Scheduling of patients must be done in a manner to limit time in waiting rooms due to the space constraints of a waiting room.

- Adult patients with appointments at any of our physician practice locations, can no longer be accompanied by a visitor.
  - Exceptions may be made if medically necessary. This may include patients who require mobility assistance or cognitive support, or are minors. Patients scheduled for outpatient procedures may be accompanied by one caretaker or assistant. Please contact your practice prior to arriving.
- Same Day Surgery and Procedures shall be limited to one visitor, starting at patient arrival through the intake process and may rejoin at the patient discharge process.
  - Exception: One consistent visitor may be called in for, and only for the duration of, an ultrasound event.
- Patients who are granted exceptions due to medical necessity will only be allowed one support person.

All patients and support persons are subject to screening and must wear appropriate personal protective equipment at all times.
- Any visitor who is coughing or shows any signs of illness will be kindly asked to leave.
- During the visit, patients are encouraged to keep in contact through virtual means, including Skype, FaceTime, and/or by phone. Staff will assist patients if needed.

**Visitation duration and number of visitors will be limited at the sites discretion based on circumstances. A hospital may suspend visitation at any time when warranted. Recommended hours of visitation will be determined by the hospital.**

SLHS has posted signage notifying the public of the suspension of visitation in all hospital entrances and in parking lots.

In addition, these policies are posted to the hospital’s website and social media pages.

**References/Citations**


**Attachments**

No Attachments

**Approval Signatures**

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**Applicability**

Canton-Potsdam Hospital, Gouverneur Hospital, Massena Hospital, St. Lawrence Health System