COVID-19 Limited Visitation Policy

POLICY

In response to a sharp increase in COVID-19 cases in St. Lawrence County, on Tuesday, November 10th, 2020, St. Lawrence Health System (SLHS) suspended general visitation at all facilities and issued a Limited Visitation Policy.

This policy is designed to cover the aspects of limited visitation. Please refer to the related policies for further guidance and procedures related COVID-19 matters; such as visitor screening, PPE requirements, waiting room utilization, and other components of managing limited visitation.

SCOPE

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

DEFINITIONS

TWO IMPORTANT DEFINITIONS: There are two types of persons who may be permitted into areas of the SLHS facilities where direct patient care is occurring. They are Support Persons and Visitors. Access to patient care areas for Visitors, except in the very limited circumstances and areas described below, is not permitted. Support Persons comprise the vast majority of those people who may be accorded some access to patient care areas, and, as described below, they will be significantly limited in number and use. It is important to note that this policy is designed to address visitation in patient care areas only. It is not intended to cover non-patient care areas such as waiting rooms. The term visitation is used to apply to the presence of either a Support Person or a Visitor in a patient care area.

SUPPORT PERSON: An individual whose primary role is to make, or assist in making, healthcare decisions for a patient, provide medical history information, or otherwise serve as a resource. Most frequently Support Persons will be family members, significant others, or close personal friends. Some may be legal guardians, parents of minor children, spouses, next of kin, or carry health care proxies, but in all cases should be persons who are close to and trusted by the patient and can best assist in enabling care. In the majority of patient care areas there will be very few Support Persons needed, the primary exceptions being seen in the Emergency Department, with Pediatric Patients, and in maternity situations.

VISITORS: An individual who is a guest of the patient, most often, but not exclusively, family members.
PROCEDURE

CATEGORY 1 - INPATIENT AND OBSERVATION UNITS

NO VISITATION AT ALL – There will be no visitation permitted at the CPH AIRBORNE PRECAUTIONS UNIT, CPH INPATIENT SUBSTANCE USE REHABILITATION UNIT, and GH INPATIENT DETOX.

CPH OB UNIT - Labor and delivery patients may have one Support Person as designated by the patient throughout labor, delivery, and the immediate postpartum period, including recovery. Following delivery there may be one visitor permitted, the visitor to be designated by the patient. Visitors will be permitted for such periods of time as determined by the CNO or OB nurse manager. Visitation will not be permitted when the Support Person is in the hospital, except in limited circumstances as determined by the OB nurse manager, and in accordance with the most current NYS guidance.

- How many Support Persons can be designated per patient - One (1)
- How many Visitors can be designated per patient - One (1)
- How many Support Persons or Visitors may be on the unit at a time - One (1)

CPH MED/SURG UNITS, CPH ICU, CPH OBSERVATION UNIT, MH MED/SURG UNITS, GH MED/SURG UNITS EXCEPTING GH DETOX PATIENTS - There will be no visitation permitted on these units except in circumstances set forth in the EXCEPTIONS below:

IP EXCEPTION 1: PATIENTS WITH COGNITIVE IMPAIRMENTS. Patients for whom a Support Person has been determined by the attending provider or nursing unit manager to be essential to the care of the patient during all or a portion of the hospitalization, including patients with disabilities or cognitive impairments at the time.

- How many Support Persons are allowed at any one time – One (1)
- How many different people may serve as a Support Person during the course of a hospitalization – No more than Two (2)
- How many Visitors are allowed - Zero (0)

IP EXCEPTION 2: PEDIATRIC PATIENTS. Hospitalized Pediatric Patients require a Support Person. They are essential and most often are the parents of the Pediatric Patient.

- How many Support Persons can there be per patient - Up to Two (2)
- How many Support Persons can be with a patient at a given time - One (1)
- How many Visitors are allowed – Zero (0)

IP EXCEPTION 3: END OF LIFE. Patients whom are deemed by the attending provider to be nearing life’s end, where death is anticipated within 24 hours may have a Support Person. If capable, the patient will make the designation of whom shall serve as Support Persons. If not so capable, the spouse, next of kin, or legal representative will make that determination. Support Persons most often will be family, clergy, or legal representatives.

- How many Support Persons may be designated – Up to Two (2)
- How many Support Persons can be with a patient at a time – One (1)
- How many Visitors are allowed – Zero (0)

CATEGORY 2 – EMERGENCY DEPARTMENTS

Emergency Departments present one of the most challenging of all environments in which to manage care and mitigate COVID risk. For that reason discretion must be used within the Emergency Department in the day by
day coordination of activity. Generally, there should be very limited presence of Support Persons in the Emergency Departments and no Visitors.

As soon as is reasonable after presentation of a patient to an Emergency Department, the Emergency Department lead provider and charge nurse will determine if there is any need for a Support Person to be designated for a given patient. The same criteria referred to above in Category 1 relating to inpatients will be used in determining the need for and the method of designating a Support Person. A designated Support Person's presence may be needed for all, or a portion of, the duration of the Emergency Department episode of care. A Support Person's presence in an Emergency Department may not be needed at all, and necessary information may be communicated by telephone or other means.

**ED EXCEPTION 1: PEDIATRIC PATIENTS.** Pediatric Patients require that at least one Support Person be designated and most often physically present during the course of Emergency Department visit. In cases where both of the Pediatric Patient's parents are present, both would customarily be designated as Support Persons. The lead provider or the nurse manager may at their discretion permit up to two Support Persons to be physically present during all or a portion of the stay.

**ED EXCEPTION 2: PATIENTS WITH COGNITIVE IMPAIRMENT.** One Support Person, as deemed to be essential to the care of the patient during all or a portion of the Emergency Department care, will be allowed to remain with the patient for the duration of their Emergency Department visit.

**ED EXCEPTION 3: CRITICALLY ILL PATIENTS OR END OF LIFE.** Patients deemed critically ill requiring transfer to another facility or where end of life is imminent, may have up to two Support Persons. If capable, the patient will make the designation of whom shall serve as Support Persons. If the patient is not able to make this decision the spouse, next of kin, or legal representative will make that determination. Support Persons most often will be family, clergy, or legal representatives. The lead provider in each Emergency Department, in conjunction with the charge nurse, may make exceptions to these allowances in unique circumstances.

**CATEGORY 3 – OUTPATIENT DIAGNOSTIC AND TREATMENT SERVICES**

These services are provided in a variety of settings across the System including the three main hospital facilities where both inpatient and outpatient testing and treatment occurs. There are other ancillary services which are provided in off campus facilities, where they occur in distinctly segregated areas, such as PT, OT, and speech therapy at the Lawrence Avenue facility in Potsdam. Some ancillary diagnostic and treatment occurs within a provider clinic, such as the infusion service in the rheumatology practice in Canton or radiology at the Urgent Care Center. Irrespective of location, the following procedures are to be used.

There will be no Visitors permitted in patient care areas. Support Persons may be permitted in only very limited circumstances. Patients With Cognitive Impairments and Pediatric Patients shall have a Support Person designated. The degree to which a Support Person's presence will be permitted will depend mainly on the type of care being provided. In hospital based settings and in off campus distinctly separated ancillary service areas, the manager will make the determination relative to Patients With Cognitive Impairments and Pediatric Patient Support Persons. In clinic based settings, those determinations will be made by the practice manager in conjunction with the treating provider. The determination of whether a Support Person is required and the method of determining who shall serve in that capacity, shall be in accordance with the procedures set forth in Category 1 relating to inpatients.

**OP EXCEPTION 1: ULTRASOUNDS FOR MATERNITY PATIENTS.** If the patient requests, the husband or significant other of a maternity patient may be designated as a Support Person. The Support Person may be permitted to be physically present during all or a portion of the ultrasound testing
process. The determination of the degree to which a Support Person may be present shall be made by the imaging directors at the three hospitals and shall be consistent.

- Maximum number of Support Persons Cognitive Patients – One (1)
- Maximum number of Support Persons that may be designated for a Pediatric Patient – Two (2)
- Maximum number of Support Persons for Pediatric Patient that may be physically present – One (1)
- Number of Visitors that maybe present – Zero (0)

**CATEGORY 4 – CLINICS**

No visitors may be present in any patient care area of a clinic. Support Persons shall be designated for all Patients with Cognitive Impairments and Pediatric Patients in the manner set forth in Category 1 relating to inpatient care. The degree to which the Support Person may be physically present in a patient care area will be made by the practice manager in coordination with the patient's treating provider.

**CLINIC EXCEPTION 1: SUPPORT PERSON.** Due to the high volume of patients presenting for clinic visits and their unique circumstances, there may be a need to designate a Support Person for a patient whom does squarely meet the definition of a Patient with Cognitive Impairments. In these cases the degree to which certain patients may depend upon others, usually family members, to communicate and sometimes fully understand provider instructions, may require on occasions that a Support Person should be designated in the best interest of care. While these circumstances may be rare, it is important to be mindful that exceptions may sometimes need to be made for this particular category of patient. These determinations are best made by the patient's treating provider in conjunction with the practice manager.

**CLINIC EXCEPTION 2: PEDIATRIC PATIENTS.** Support Persons for pediatric patient clinic visits should be no more than one (1) present in most cases, however, in unusual circumstances determined by of the treating provider, in conjunction with the practice manager, two Support Persons may sometimes be permitted.

- Number of Support Persons designated for Cognitive Patients – One (1)
- Maximum number of Support Persons designated for Pediatric Patients – Two (2)
- Number of support persons present per Pediatric visit – One (1) Subject to Exception CL 2, above

**CATEGORY 5 – OUTPATIENT SURGERY**

Generally one Support Person may be designated for all surgical outpatients. Patients With Cognitive Impairment and Pediatric Patients shall have one Support Person designated. In view of the high risk that exists in these areas, Support Person presence in the pre and postoperative areas will be extremely limited. The SLHS CNO in conjunction with the respective hospital CNOs shall develop standardized procedures for Support Person presence. These procedures will be developed in conjunction with the CMOs at the three hospitals and shall be uniform as to all outpatient surgical settings.

A hospital may suspend or further restrict visitation at any time when warranted.

While we will continue to evaluate this limited visitation policy, please assume that it will likely remain in effect at least throughout the end of 2020.

**Related Policies, Documents, & Forms**

- [COVID-19 Employee Toolkit](http://stlawrencehealthsystem.policystat.com/policy/8882784/). Copyright © 2020 St. Lawrence Health System
• COVID-19 Visitor Screening Policy
• Universal Mask Wearing Policy
• Infection Prevention - Standard Precautions - Transmission-Based Isolation
• Infection Prevention - Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Attachments

No Attachments

Approval Signatures

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<td>Jeremy Slaga: Chief Administrative Officer</td>
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Applicability

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