



Factsheet for visitors to hospital

Coronavirus (COVID-19) update 1 July 2020

What is this factsheet about?

This factsheet provides directions to hospitals and visitors which restrict visitor entry into hospitals to limit the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19). This factsheet applies to visitation of all admitted patients, including those being treated for coronavirus (COVID-19).

This applies to all Victorian hospitals.

In addition to following the directions of the Chief Health Officer, hospitals may put additional restrictions in place in order to reduce the risk of coronavirus (COVID-19) in their facility and protect vulnerable patients, which may include additional restrictions on visitors. Visitors should contact the hospital before visiting to check the hospital's policies, as all visitors will remain subject to the hospital's local operating procedures.

Who should read this?

This factsheet is for health services and people who wish to visit patients in hospital.

Changes to hospital visiting

Special rules now apply for people visiting hospitals during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

For information relating to the current restrictions and State of Emergency please visit [Victoria's restriction levels](https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/victorias-restriction-levels-covid-19) <<https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/victorias-restriction-levels-covid-19>> on the Department of Health and Human Services website.

The Department of Health and Human Services (the department) is closely monitoring developments regarding coronavirus (COVID-19). Advice from the department is being continuously updated and may change.

The health of our community, patients, visitors and staff is our biggest priority during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. We have put in place measures to keep our community safe while supporting the provision of the highest level of care.

IMPORTANT

Individuals **must not visit anyone in hospital, even if they are on the allowed to visit list**, if:

- They have tested positive for coronavirus (COVID-19) or are awaiting test results, and have not met the criteria for discharge from isolation;
- They have returned to Australia from overseas in the last 14 days;
- They have had known contact with someone who has coronavirus (COVID-19) in the 14 days before attending the hospital
- They have a temperature higher than 37.5 degrees or symptoms of acute respiratory infection such as:
 - breathing difficulties such as breathlessness
 - cough

- sore throat
- runny nose

There are limited circumstances where a person who would be excluded from entering a hospital (e.g. for one of the reasons above) may be authorised by the hospital and/or the Chief Health Officer or Deputy Chief Health Officer to enter the hospital. Further information about these limited exceptions is below.

What are the rules on care and support visits?

Up to two care and support visits are allowed each day, for under two hours with no more than two visitors allowed at one time (two visitors may arrive to the hospital together).

There are some visitors who are exempt from the two-hour restriction – see the exemption list below.

At any one time, no more than two visitors can be present with a patient. For example, if a parent or guardian of a child (exempted person) is already in the room, only one care and support visitor can be let in. This includes patients who are receiving palliative care.

Who is allowed to visit without the two-hour time limit restrictions?

People in the following categories will not be bound by the two-hour time limit, however, the limit of two visitors at a time must still be adhered to:

- A parent or guardian or temporary carer of a patient in the hospital who is under 18 years
- A carer of a patient with a disability
- A partner or support person of a pregnant patient
- A support person for a patient coming into the emergency department of a hospital
- A support person for someone attending an outpatient appointment
- A person who is providing support to a patient receiving palliative care in hospital (see appendix 1 for additional supporting information).

For those allowed to visit a patient, what must they do when at the hospital?

- Visitors should have their temperature checked on arrival to the hospital and prior to entering the ward area
- Visitors must wash their hands with soap or use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser after using the lifts, holding railings and every time they enter or exit a patient's room.
- If the patient can have more than one type of visitor (for example, a parent and a care and support person), there must not be more than **two** people with the patient at the one time (with the exception of a hospital worker).
- For people providing care and support, (who are not in the category of visitors who are exempt from the two hour limit) the visit must be limited to a maximum of two hours.
- Visitors must stay in the patient's room at all times and limit movement around the building. Quick trips to the bathroom or to purchase food can be made.
- Visitors should limit the number of personal items brought into the hospital. This will reduce the number of unwanted germs and taken back home.
- When the visit is over, visitors should leave the hospital. Do not wander through hallways or spend time in public areas, including lobbies, waiting areas, cafeterias and vending areas.

- If the patient is suspect or confirmed coronavirus (COVID-19), appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) must be used by visitors (refer to the department's website for [guidance on the use of PPE for health workers](https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/personal-protective-equipment-ppe-covid-19) <<https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/personal-protective-equipment-ppe-covid-19>>). Health service staff must ensure visitors put on ('don') and take off ('doff') PPE properly.
- After visiting a suspected or confirmed coronavirus (COVID-19) patient, visitors should:
 - wash their hands with soap and water
 - wash clothing in hot water (60–90 degrees Celsius) and laundry detergent. If machine washing is not possible, soak the clothing in hot water and detergent in a large bucket or trough. Avoid splashing by wearing rubber gloves and using a stick to stir
 - dry the clothes in a clothes dryer or hang them out to dry in full sunlight.
- Each hospital may have different local operating procedures; visitors must also adhere to these directions.

How can other family and friends stay in touch with their loved one?

During the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic it is recommended, wherever possible, to encourage connecting with loved ones through audio and video talking and texting. The patient may use their personal phones, computers and tablets to stay connected with their family and friends.

Does this apply to outpatients?

As listed in the special rules above, if a patient is coming to the hospital for an outpatient appointment, they can bring a support person if needed. One care and support person can be present during the appointment.

Do these restrictions apply to hospital workers?

Hospital workers are permitted to remain in hospitals for the purposes of their work.

Hospital workers include:

- An employee or contractor of the hospital.
- A student of the hospital under the supervision of a worker of the hospital.
- A volunteer with specific health service approval to provide goods or services to a patient in hospital.
- A person who provides health, medical or pharmaceutical goods or services to a patient of the hospital, whether on a paid or voluntary basis.
- A disability worker who is present at the hospital to provide a disability service to a patient
- A person who provides good or services to keep the hospital in operation, whether on a paid or voluntary basis. This includes union and employer representatives.
- A person required for emergency management or law enforcement in the hospital.

Are there any exemptions to the special rules?

A hospital can permit an excluded person to enter a hospital in very limited circumstances:

- Allowing a person who, within the last 14 days, had known contact within a diagnosed coronavirus (COVID-19) patient, or returned to Australia from overseas, to enter a hospital to:
 - visit their child
 - attend the birth of a child where they are the partner or support person of the patient
 - visit a patient for end of life purposes

- visit an immediate family member whose medical condition is life threatening.
- Allowing a diagnosed coronavirus (COVID-19) patient to attend hospital to visit a patient for end of life purposes, or to visit an immediate family member whose medical condition is life threatening. This must also be authorised by the Chief Health Officer or Deputy Chief Health Officer.

Conditions may be imposed on these visits.

Where can I find out more information?

For Victorian updates on coronavirus (COVID-19): <https://www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus>

For national updates: <https://www.health.gov.au/news/latest-information-about-novel-coronavirus>

For international updates: <https://www.who.int/westernpacific/emergencies/covid-19>

World Health Organisation (WHO) resources: <https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus>

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Appendix 1

Setting up visits for patients receiving palliative care in hospital

Where resources permit (including staffing and PPE), health services should support compassionate visiting arrangements for patients receiving palliative care in hospital.

For individuals who are in the at-risk group of coronavirus (COVID-19), they may wish to consider whether it is safe to visit someone being palliated in hospital. This includes:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people 50 years and older with one or more chronic medical conditions
- people 65 years and older with chronic medical conditions
- people 70 years and older
- people with chronic conditions or compromised immune systems
- people in aged care facilities
- people with a disability

There is currently limited evidence of the risk of coronavirus (COVID-19) for pregnant women who are greater than 28 weeks' gestation, therefore, it is the discretion of the pregnant woman if she wishes to visit someone in hospital.

The document in the following link was created to support Australian intensive care units, however its recommendations on facilitating visits for patients receiving palliative care is relevant across contexts and can be used as a guide: <https://www.acccn.com.au/documents/item/938>.

The table below aims to minimise the risk of infection to family and loved ones when visiting someone in hospital receiving palliative care.

COVID-19 status of patient receiving palliative care	Infection control guidance for visitors	Visiting restrictions
COVID-19 positive	<p>For PPE requirements, refer to Table 1 in Guidelines on the conventional use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for health workers</p> <p>In addition to standard precautions, all visitors should apply droplet and contact precautions (Tier 2). This includes use of the following PPE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• single-use surgical mask• eye protection (for example, safety glasses/goggles or face shield. Note that prescription glasses are not sufficient protection.)• long-sleeved gown• gloves (non-sterile). <p>Health services need to ensure information is provided to visitors on correct donning / doffing as well as what to do when they leave the hospital</p>	<p>As mentioned above, where resources permit:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the duration of the visit should be agreed between healthcare staff and the visitors prior to the visit• individual health services must follow the directions and limit the number of visitors allowed with a patient at any one time (two visitors). There is no time limit placed on visits for end of life purposes under the directions. Hospitals can also place additional restrictions if required - for example, restricting the total number of visitors over a 24 hour period• where children are visiting a COVID-19 positive patient, if PPE cannot be effectively worn, consider limiting to video or online visits
COVID-19 suspected (awaiting test results), symptomatic	As above	
COVID-19 negative, asymptomatic	Standard precautions (Tier 0) Hand hygiene	

Guidance documents are available to support healthcare professionals in their understanding of coronavirus (COVID-19) context palliative care in the following link

<http://www.anzspm.org.au/c/anzspm?a=da&did=1005077&pid=1587788101>