



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
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Bureau of Health Care Safety and Quality  
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**Memorandum**

**TO:** Massachusetts Hospital Chief Executive Officers and Administrators

**FROM:** Elizabeth Kelley, MPH, MBA, Director  
Bureau of Health Care Safety and Quality

**DATE:** March 10, 2020

**RE:** Policies and Procedures for Patient Visitors in Hospitals during the COVID-19  
Outbreak

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) continues to work with state, federal and local partners on the outbreak of novel Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19), caused by the virus SARS-CoV-2, and we continue to appreciate the essential role you have in responding to this evolving situation.

At this time, DPH strongly recommends the following individuals defer visiting a hospital, unless the visit is essential:

- Individuals who have returned from travel to any of the countries currently identified as having widespread local transmission of COVID-19; and
- Individuals with upper respiratory tract symptoms including, fever and/or cough.

DPH strongly encourages all hospitals to consider the health and safety of their health care workers and patients when considering visitation policies and procedures. While federal and state statutes enumerate patients' rights in hospitals, patients' rights are not without limitations. Pursuant to federal regulations, hospitals are required to have written policies and procedures regarding the visitation rights of patients. These policies and procedures must include any provisions setting forth any clinically necessary or reasonable restriction or limitation that the hospital may need to place on visitation rights and the reason(s) for such restrictions or limitations.

DPH reminds hospitals that through the hospital's existing written policies and procedures on visitation rights, the hospital may restrict or limit visitations to patients for any clinically necessary reason, including for infection control concerns. If a hospital's existing policies and procedures include restrictions or limitations on patients' visitation rights when clinically necessary, patients must be informed of these restrictions or limitations on visitation.

When a hospital limits or restricts visitors in certain circumstances consistent with its written policies and procedures, hospitals should consider alternative electronic methods for communication between patients and visitors, such as Skype, FaceTime, WhatsApp or Google Duo.

DPH strongly encourages all hospitals in Massachusetts to monitor the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) website and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website for up-to-date information and resources:

- CMS website: <https://www.cms.gov/About-CMS/Agency-Information/Emergency/EPRO/Current-Emergencies/Current-Emergencies-page>
- CDC website: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/healthcare-facilities/index.html>

Additionally, please visit DPH's new website that provides up-to-date information on COVID-19 in Massachusetts: <https://www.mass.gov/2019coronavirus>.