

# COVID-19 Hospital & Clinic Patient Visiting Policy

**Type:** National Guidance

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## **Purpose**

The purpose of this guidance is to provide advice on access by members of the family/whānau, carers and support person/people who are visiting patients, or providing support to patients, on all DHB hospital campuses during the COVID-19 pandemic response.

The purpose of whānau as partners in care is to ensure that whānau journeys through Te Toka Tumai are well guided, safe, respectful and mana enhancing.

We recognise whānau are essential to patient's lives and an important part of a patient's care, treatment and recovery. They provide support, care and help in decision-making.

We also recognise that our staff have the right to a safe workplace and all practicable steps must be undertaken to eliminate risks, and where not practicable to do so, minimise these.

As we manage COVID-19 in our community we are committed to enabling access to whānau for patients in our care and to support outpatients, whilst balancing risk of COVID-19 to our people and the risk of harm of not having whānau visit.

This kaupapa will help us to provide an enduring strategy to promote whānau as partners in care that can respond to the changing risk levels of COVID-19 that meets the needs of our patients whilst balancing the safety and wellbeing risks of us all.

## **Scope**

It is important to note that the Government's COVID-19 Protection Framework serves a different purpose which enables as much care as possible to be delivered safely under all traffic light colours.

This guidance applies to all DHB facilities.

This guidance is active for as long as an Epidemic Notice under the Epidemic Preparedness Act 2006 remains in force.

This guidance does not extend to visitors to DHB hospital campuses who are on site to provide essential services e.g. interpreters for patients with no or limited English, or Partners in care. Please refer to separate advice on essential services.

This guidance references the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015 by providing guidance to support the mitigation of any risk to staff while visitors who meet the criteria visit all work place facilities.

This guidance references the COVID-19 Infection Prevention and Control - Interim Guidance for DHB Acute Care Hospitals.

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## **Includes:**

- Public visiting patients within inpatient units
- Public accompanying people to community clinics
- Public accompanying people to any outpatient or ambulatory area/clinic
- Public accompanying people presenting at the Emergency Department
- Public accompanying people requiring maternity services
- Non-essential visitors.

## **Excludes:**

Charge Nurse/Midwife Managers (or a senior clinician/manager as designated) can assess requests on a case by case basis. For example, exceptions will be considered on compassionate grounds for end of life or therapeutic care.

- This guidance does not apply to patients
- This guidance does not apply to on duty staff, volunteers and contracted workers performing or providing essential services
- This guidance does not apply to whānau with essential support role as a Partner in care.

## **Definitions**

- Visitor – Member of the public not receiving assessment, diagnostics or treatment
- Patient – Member of the public receiving / seeking treatment, this includes mental health service users
- Non-essential visitors – e.g. company representatives, external people attending meetings, people not visiting family / whānau, off-duty staff.
- Whānau spokesperson – the single point of contact for the whānau.
- High risk area – May include but not limited to Emergency Departments (ED), Intensive Care Units/High Dependency Units (ICU/HDU), Aged Care wards, Mental Health In-patient units, Maternity wards, Delivery Suite and Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU), Special Care Baby Unit (SCBU), Coronary Care Unit (CCU) Oncology (including chemotherapy areas), Renal Outpatient and Inpatient areas, Immunology, or other Outpatient areas redesignated or identified by the DHB for the purpose of providing care to patients who have high vulnerability from potential exposure to COVID-19.
- Partner in care – Anyone who provides essential care needs to a patient as part of their health experience.

## **Guidelines**

There is an expectation that Staff will adhere to the vision and values of their respective organizations. This will include:

- Consideration of respect, partnership, cultural sensitivity and equity, and effective communication.
- All staff will maintain respectful communication with family/whānau, carers and support person/people, treating each person with dignity and respect
- That staff will be treated with respect and that abuse and aggression toward staff will not be tolerated
- All staff will partner with family/whānau, carers and support person/people regarding this guidance
- All staff will work with Māori and Pacific health teams/leaders to ensure cultural supports and aspects of care are considered and actioned
- Whānau liaison increases as the response level increases

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- Alternative means of communication between patients and whānau/ families are encouraged and enabled.
- DHBs will ensure visibility of the expectations on visitors within the facility including:
  - visibility of screening questions and processes
  - limitations such as medical mask wearing at all times
  - restricting movement within the hospital to the place the patient resides with access to and from that place.
- DHBs will ensure the visitor guidance is not taken in isolation - it is part of a much wider risk assessment associated with the risk of COVID-19 transmission in the organisation and community.
- This guidance provides advice for visitor policies to be implemented at DHBs in accordance with their established and agreed incident management team framework and union or health and safety representative engagement forums.
- Changes to this guidance will occur as the environment and science identifies change needed. Any substantial change in direction will follow the usual national engagement process with sign off.

## Guideline content

The COVID-19 Protection Framework is determined by the Government and introduces a new flexible 3 level approach to managing COVID-19 in the community. The framework specifies the public health and social measures to break the transmission of COVID-19 across New Zealand. These measures are informed by scientific knowledge about COVID-19 and information about the effectiveness of control measures.

It is appropriate that DHBs continue to operate services as per national guidance e.g. planned care, community framework etc. This enables DHBs to continue to deliver as much clinical care and surgery as possible whilst responding quickly and appropriately to COVID 19.

DHBs will ensure the visitor guidance is not taken in isolation - it is part of a much wider risk assessment e.g. Vaccination/ testing/ staffing MIQFs/workforce levels.

DHBs will set visiting hours and these may differ from DHB to DHB to reflect the community and hospital needs and ensure appropriate security and support for staff is available.

DHBs will work towards separate entrances for visitors and those attending clinic, outpatients or treatment, where it is practicable to do so with existing facility design.

## Risk assessment

DHBs cannot eliminate the risk of introduction and spread of COVID-19 in hospital without removing and restricting all people from the hospital. This is not practical nor is it in the public or patient interest. DHBs have introduced several controls e.g. security measures, restricted access to areas, which enable decisions of risk-based trade-offs to maintain patient, worker and visitor safety to mitigate the risk of COVID-19 spread by visitors to hospital facilities. The COVID-19 Hospital & Clinic Patient Visiting Guidance is one of the ways that DHBs are minimising the risk of COVID-19 to patients, staff and the wider community.

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## Visitors with symptoms

Visitors with acute respiratory symptoms (e.g. cough, sore throat, flu like symptoms) or abdominal pain and diarrhoea, or those who have been at a local area of interest or with a household contact to current COVID-19 case must not attend unless prior arrangements are made.

Public information including signage should be in place at all entrances to reflect this. A process should be in place to manage unwell visitors

While visiting any DHB facility, visitors will:

- Maintain the appropriate and effective wearing of masks in all public and patient areas
- Maintain physical distancing

## Patients admitted with COVID-19

Visiting patients who have been admitted with COVID-19 during the active (infective) period of their infection will be more restrictive and managed on a case by case basis. The reason for this is to ensure Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) processes are adhered to, and to minimise any risk of avoidable transmission. Other methods of communicating with a patient with COVID-19 should be facilitated as appropriate, such as video conference, facetime Zoom, Skype etc.

It is recommended that family/whānau, carers and support person/people must designate a whānau spokesperson who will be the point of contact for the whānau regarding the visiting guidance and any changes to it. Before any visitor can enter an area where there are COVID-19 positive patients, they must be met by an appropriate staff member who will ensure personal hygiene requirements are met, and Personal Protection Equipment is appropriately worn and explanation of the guidance.

## Visitors in self-isolation

Anyone that is under self-isolation (due to close contact with a confirmed case or due to recent overseas travel) will not be able to visit.

## Visitors register

All visitors need to scan in or sign in on arrival and provide their contact details and confirm if they have visited any areas of interest or reside with any recently diagnosed COVID-19 whānau. If they are using the government's COVID-19 Tracer App, please encourage that Bluetooth tracing is turned on.

## Vaccination status

Visitors to DHB facilities will not have to demonstrate vaccination status nor provide evidence of a negative swab or undertake a swab to enter. DHBs will take all practicable steps to ensure visitors register through their COVID-19 Tracer App when visiting and prominently display information for visitors while visiting.

## High – Risk Areas

If existing visiting policies within high-risk areas are more rigorous than stated in these guidelines, they should be followed.