



Visiting Your Loved One in Hospital

Introduction

Family support is a fundamental part of the care of a person in hospital, bringing comfort to both the person in hospital and the people whom they consider to be their family or carers.

At various stages throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, visiting has been reduced to “essential visits”, permitting visits only where not seeing a family member would cause particular distress or suffering to the patient. Given that progress has been made, the time is now right to take steps to carefully reintroduce family support in hospitals more broadly.

Every patient in hospital in Scotland is now able to benefit from support and contact with at least one person, regardless of which level the hospital is in.

Visits will still need to be managed carefully. Our approach will be person-centred to ensure:

- The risk of infection is minimised
- A compassionate approach is taken to each person's circumstances
- The wellbeing and safety of patients, their visitors, and our staff
- Areas of the hospital with active COVID-19 may still need to remain restricted to essential visits only (examples of essential visits are given in the box below)
- A flexible approach, in the event of an outbreak in the hospital and/or rapidly increasing community transmission or outbreaks.

An **essential visit** describes situations when it is very important for a relative or friend to be allowed to see their loved one. Examples of this include:

- a parent accompanying a child or a mother being accompanied by her partner for appointments or other care related to childbirth.
- When someone has reached the end of their life, has a life-threatening illness, when someone is receiving difficult news, or similar situations.
- When people have a mental health issue or dementia, autism or learning disability.

Every person's experience is unique, but we hope this leaflet might help address some of your concerns. If you want more advice, please contact the ward team providing care for your loved one and they will be able to help you.

What do I need to do before I visit?

All people in hospital will be able to have support from at least one named person during their hospital stay.

The person providing support can be changed if required. Visits will be arranged with you *via* the care team looking after your loved one. **Visits will be made by pre-arranged appointments** to ensure the number of people in the clinical area at any one time is limited to maintain a safe physical distance. Some patients may require a number of visits each day to support them whilst in hospital, whereas others might be able to get by with less frequent visits, perhaps daily or less often. For example, someone who has a learning disability, dementia or is in intensive care might need more frequent visits. Someone who is on the road to recovery might be able to cope with fewer visits. It is important to think about these things when

planning your visits. Please do not bring in food parcels, flowers, helium balloons or similar items.

“What do we mean by “family support”? The term recognises that the person an individual might want to support them in hospital could be a friend, carer or neighbour, and may not always be a relative.

It also recognises that family and friends are not “visitors” in a person’s life, even in hospital.

It is recommended that this person is the main link for communication.

Testing

Alongside face coverings, distancing and hand hygiene, voluntary lateral flow testing can be an important addition to protecting patients, staff and visitors.

Information on how to order tests is on the Scottish Government’s website. However, testing is not mandatory and not wishing or not being able to test will not be an obstacle to a visit. If you choose to take a test or have received a vaccination then you will still be required to wear a face covering, maintain distance and adhere to hand-hygiene requirements.

What do I need to do when I visit?

It is very important for the health and wellbeing of your loved one that you **do not visit** if you have been feeling unwell in any way. There is a checklist below to help you be sure about this.

Symptom checklist before visiting a hospital:

X Are you feeling unwell?

X Do you have a new/continuous cough?

X Have you had any sickness or diarrhoea within the last 48 hours?

X Have you noticed a change in your temperature?

X Have you noticed a change to your normal sense of taste or smell?

X Are you self-isolating because you have been in contact with anyone suspected as having, or has tested positive for Coronavirus, in the past 14 days?

In addition, you may be asked a series of questions by the staff – this is normal in the current situation and is intended to try and make sure that everyone stays safe.

For all visits it is essential that you:

- wear a suitable face covering whilst inside the hospital, or one can be provided for you.
- wash your hands or gel provided **on arrival at the hospital**
- wash or gel your hands again on **arrival at the ward** or department
- wash or gel your hands **frequently** during the time you are in the department, especially if you touch anything or anyone
- maintain the recommended physical distance wherever possible even if the person has previously been in your household or social bubble.
- if you cough or sneeze, make sure you follow good hygiene practice o cough or sneeze into the crook of your elbow or a disposable tissue o dispose of the tissue o wash your hands
- do not use patient or staff toilets unless there is no other option available

- wash your hands as you **leave the ward** or department, as you **leave the hospital** and when you **arrive home**.
- Eating and drinking out with bay/clinical areas.

Part of the process of being the family support for someone in hospital includes being asked to provide your contact details; this is normal in the current circumstances and is to assist Public Health, Test and Protect colleagues should there be a need to contact you.

What next?

At each stage, when guided by the Scottish Government, these restrictions will be revised and amended dependent on the outbreak status of the virus and any outbreak within the hospital and local community.



Frequently asked questions

What if my relative wants to cuddle or touch me?

Family members will be able to have close contact, such as holding hands with the person they are supporting. However, COVID-19 is still with us and can be transmitted easily. To reduce risks careful attention to infection, prevention and control measures will still need to be maintained. Key among these will continue to be frequent

hand washing and the use of alcohol-based hand rub, wearing face coverings, and adherence to physical distancing in communal areas. If you are not sure then please speak to a member of staff.

Strategic Framework Level	Level Zero	Level One	Level Two	Level Three	Level Four
Visiting	Full person-centred visiting subject to local health protection advice	<p>Support from at least two people from the same household at the same time</p> <p><i>If not from the same household and physical distancing cannot be maintained, visits can take place separately</i></p> <p>Preparations put in place for return to full person-centred visiting</p>	Support from at least one person	Support from at least one person	Support from at least one person

Required	<p>People providing support must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • maintain physical distancing in the communal areas of the hospital wherever possible • wear face coverings • have access to hand hygiene facilities • not move around other areas of the hospital unless as part of care for the patient- i.e., birth partner attending scan, parent accompanying child or other situation • must not gather in communal areas of the hospital with other people
Settings	<p>Hospitals/ wards with no COVID-19 outbreak.</p> <p>Family support can still take place in COVID-19 areas (now known as red pathways) if deemed necessary and essential, in accordance with NHS Borders standard outbreak policies</p>

What if my relative wants to walk around with me or go to the hospital cafe?

At the current time we would ask that you do not move around different areas of the ward/hospital or try to visit other people in the ward/hospital. Consider going outside if appropriate.

What if I don't feel able to visit my relative?

Feeling anxious or nervous about coming into a hospital is a normal response to recent events. Speak to the care team if you are worried and they will be able to advise you.

Staged approach to reinstating person-centred visiting

(each level is dependent on the Scottish Government advice appropriate at the time)

Over the past year NHS Borders have established robust processes to manage the practicalities of family and carer presence in our hospitals. These include measures such as one-way systems, physical distancing signs, extra hand-hygiene stations for example. These will remain in place or be enhanced if required in keeping with local risk assessments.

Thank-you for your understanding and patience.