

**Access and Visitation Policy for Department of Mental Health Hospitals and the  
Department of Public Health Public Health Hospital System  
Effective: June 10, 2020**

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidelines to allow patients at DMH Facilities and the DPH Public Health Public Health Hospital System (PHHS) the opportunity to have visitors on a limited basis during the COVID-19 pandemic while adhering to recommended CDC and DPH guidelines. (For purposes of this policy, DMH Facilities and PHHS Hospitals are collectively referred to as Hospitals). Public health experts have now determined that visitation is safe when certain precautions, such as physical distancing, facemasks, and increased frequency of cleaning of commons space especial visiting areas are strictly followed. DMH and PHHS may begin to allow visitation, following the rules below, starting June 10, 2020.

**Hospital Access, Including Visitation:**

Except as provided herein, access to Hospitals shall continue to be restricted to Hospital personnel (including DPH or DMH personnel), including provider and contracted staff, providing essential direct care, clinical treatment, administrative, legal, educational, and core services. Included in this category are medically necessary providers such as outside laboratory personnel, medical consults and forensic evaluators; provided, however, that telephonic or video conferencing technology should be used for any medical consultations and forensic evaluations that can be conducted through such means. Entry to Hospitals shall continue to be through a designated Single Point of Entry (SPE)

All consultations and evaluations should be conducted via telemedicine technology if possible. Consultations and evaluations that cannot be conducted via telemedicine technology should be postponed, provided that postponement will not unreasonably delay treatment and discharge.

**General Conditions and Limitations for All Visitors (Including Special Exceptions):**

To protect the safety of patients, a patient is allowed one visitor at a time. No visitors under the age of 18 years old are allowed in the hospital, unless the visitor is a child of a patient. Exceptions to the one-visitor limit may be made when a visitor is a patient's minor child accompanied by any adult.

Visits must be scheduled in advance, and are limited to 30 minutes, with adequate interval in-between scheduled visits to allow for cleaning of the visiting space. The staff monitoring the SPE will have a daily schedule of approved visitors by time, patient name and unit name. In the event a visitor arrives without having scheduled the visit in advance, the visit may be denied or deferred until there is an available unscheduled time.

In order to facilitate contact tracing, should it be necessary, all visitors must provide an ID and contact information, which will be documented in a signed log at the SPE

People waiting to visit a patient must wait outside the Hospital rather than in Hospital lobbies, entrances or waiting rooms, until the time of their visit.

Each Hospital shall establish visiting hours in such a way as to minimize interference with scheduled treatment. Visit appointments shall be available in accordance with each Hospital's policies.

Hospitals must screen all visitors, including special exceptions, for symptoms of possible COVID-19 infection (fever, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, chills, myalgia (muscle pain), or new onset of loss of taste or smell). Individuals with any symptom shall not be permitted into the hospital. All visitors shall be required to provide their name and contact information to allow for contact tracing should that be necessary.

All visitors, including special exceptions, are required to perform hand hygiene at both the SPE and the unit or visiting location prior to visiting a patient and to wear a facemask at all times while in the Hospital. Each Hospital shall make hand washing or hand sanitizer available for visitors and shall provide facemasks to all visitors. Patients will also be strongly encouraged to wear masks, if they can tolerate them, during the visit.

All visitors shall be required to comply with requirements for physical distancing, and may be asked to leave the Hospital if they fail to do so after prompting by staff.

Each Hospital shall have designated lavatories for visitors' use, which shall be cleaned between each use.

Visitors may not bring items, including food, to leave with the patient until such time as infection control guidelines do not require disinfecting of items brought into the Hospital.

Except as provided herein, all provisions of a Hospital's search, contraband and visitation protocols shall remain in effect.

In-person visits will not be permitted for patients who are isolated as a result of confirmed or presumed positive (i.e. person under investigation or PUI) COVID-19, or if access to the unit or Hospital has been further restricted as a result of infection control or quarantine directives.

In compassionate care situations, including but not limited to end-of-life-situations, decisions about visitation should be made collaboratively with the provider, patient and loved ones, as appropriate, on a case-by-case basis.

**Designated Indoor Area:** All visits will take place in designated spaces that have a table and chairs limited to the patient and number of visitors to support physical distancing. All visits to PHHS units will take place in the patient's room or other designated visiting location.

**Designated Outdoor Area:** Where Hospital space permits, visits may take place in outdoor space, so long as utilization of such space does not interfere with other patients' access to fresh air. Hospitals may limit the number of visitors at any given time to accommodate available space.

**Physical Distancing:** Visitors and patients must follow physical distancing guidelines and remain 6 feet apart. Hugging, kissing and handholding are not permitted.

**Disinfecting the Visitation Area:** Furnishings in the designated indoor or outdoor visiting area including chairs, tables, or a picnic bench, should be disinfected after each visit, using an EPA-approved disinfectant for use against SARS-CoV-2.

### **Special Exceptions:**

For purposes of this guidance the following categories of individuals are not considered visitors and who may be permitted increased access in accordance with Hospital specific protocols:

- Parents or guardians of patients who are under the age of 18 years old (at Pappas Rehabilitation Hospital for Children, all patients), companions for patients with intellectual and/or physical disabilities, and children of patients.
- Clergy
- Judges, attorneys, independent medical examiners (IMEs) and other court personnel involved in pending commitment related or criminal litigation. Attorneys and IMEs shall be provided with space to permit confidential communication and shall be permitted to visit with their clients for extended periods, not to exceed 90 minutes (additional time may be permitted if there is not another attorney visit scheduled). Access for such individuals shall also be in compliance with all guidance for courts as written and available at <https://www.mass.gov/guides/court-system-response-to-covid-19>. Attorney visits shall be scheduled in advance and should take place during regular business hours or scheduled visiting hours only.

Each Hospital shall continue to facilitate patient access to technology, and to provide confidential space for communications with attorneys and IMEs for remote visits and consultations; however, patients and their attorneys (and IME's) are encouraged to utilize their own technology to the extent they can (such as FaceTime, Skype, Zoom, etc.). Hospitals will allow patients to use their own devices for communicating with counsel and IMEs in a space that allows for private and confidential communication.

All individuals in this special exceptions' category must be screened in accordance with this memorandum.

**Use of Technology:** Notwithstanding the provisions of this Policy to the contrary, Hospitals shall continue to encourage and facilitate the use of telephonic or video conferencing technology for all visits. While each Hospital shall use its best efforts to facilitate patient access to such technology, patients and other individuals are encouraged to utilize their own technology to the extent they can (such as FaceTime, Skype, Zoom, etc.).

**Visitation Policies Subject to Change:** The DMH and PHHS may have to change these guidelines with little notice, as required by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. Hospitals may prohibit visitation on a case-by-case basis, if a patient or staff tests positive or shows symptoms of illness, or it is determined visitation cannot safely be accommodated for residents, visitors, or staff.