

GUIDELINES

Designated Support Persons During the Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has transformed health practices and policies, including the application of general visitation restrictions severely limiting the access of Designated Support Persons (DSPs) to facilities and the support offered to patients by these persons. Studies have indicated that these restrictions, when prolonged, have a negative impact on the mental and physical health of patients.

In order to address this impact, guidelines have been developed to provide a balanced approach for managing the presence and support of designated support persons in a safe manner. These guidelines respect the need and right for vulnerable patients to have support from their family, as defined by them, to be involved in their care while recognizing the existing risks.

These guidelines and the approach in relation to Designated Support Persons aligns with the guiding principles of the Canadian Foundation for Health Care Improvement (CFHI) and Canadian Patient Safety Institute's (CPSI) [Policy Guidance for the Reintegration of Caregivers as Essential Care Partners](#).

In both Health Authorities, family and friends who support patients will be defined as Designated Support Persons (DSPs). This term emphasizes that they are respected as an essential member of the healthcare team and are “more than a social visitor”. DSPs are active partners in care and can provide physical, psychological and emotional support. This care can include decision making support, care coordination and continuity of care. This term also aligns with the terminology and responsibilities of DSPs in New Brunswick's Nursing Homes.

DSPs will be provided with information related to infection prevention and control to keep the patient, members of the healthcare team and themselves safe. This will include hand hygiene, continuous mask use, and physical distancing when in contact with other patients/staff/visitors. As an active member of the healthcare team, the DSP is not required to maintain a two-meter distance from the patient.

DSPs will not be limited to visiting hours applicable for general/social visits. The hours, frequency and support the DSP will provide to the patient will be determined in collaboration with the patient, the DSP and members of the care team.

Guiding Principles

Patient – The patient in this document is defined as a person who is receiving services within hospital facilities and is not a suspect/confirmed COVID-19 patient.

Designated Support Person

- A DSP is an active partner in care and an essential member of the healthcare team who can provide physical, psychological and emotional support, as deemed important by the patient.
- The DSP contributes to a positive patient experience and outcome.
- DSPs are identified/designated by the patient or substitute decision maker (SDM) and can include family members, close friends or other caregivers.
- DSPs must be 18 years of age or older.

Social Visitors

- Social visitors have an important social role but do not participate as DSPs who are active partners in care.
- Social visitors are only permitted to visit during the Yellow Phase during specific visiting hours.
- They are required to wear a mask, practice hand hygiene, and maintain a two-meter distance from the patient and staff.

Emergency/Outpatient/Ambulatory Care Services

- A support person will be permitted for all patients.
- There may be situations or circumstances where physical distancing with other patients within clinical areas will not allow for the DSP to be present. In this case, staff will communicate this to the patient and their DSP, and discuss options based on patient need.

Number of Designated DSPs

- Eligible patients or their substitute decision maker will designate up to two DSPs. Exceptions to the number of DSPs are identified in the guide for DSP's
- Patients may change their DSP(s) if the individual is unable to meet the expectations of the patient / unit.
- Each patient care unit will have a process to identify and document each eligible patient's DSP.

Infection Prevention and Control (IP&C)

- All DSPs will be required to meet and adhere to all COVID-19 Infection Prevention and Control practices including active screening, hand hygiene, continuous mask use, physical distancing when in contact with other patients/staff/visitors, wearing personal protective equipment when required.
- DSPs should be provided with information on Infection Prevention and Control practices and be instructed on the proper use of personal protective equipment (PPE), hand hygiene practices, and unit restrictions / guidelines.

Visitation Details

- Visitation details will be defined by the healthcare team in collaboration with the patient and the DSP. This will include hours, frequency of visits and care that can be provided to the patient.

Restrictions

- DSP's must wash hands and change their mask before entering the establishment.
- RHAs may impose restrictions due to increased risk for patients and healthcare workers in the absence of a Provincial Alert Level change based on provincial, regional or local circumstances. Facilities wishing to restrict access to DSPs will need to make a request to the Emergency Operations Center.
- In these circumstances, arrangements for virtual partnerships in care with the DSPs will be supported so they can actively participate with the care team. This participation may occur through virtual means such as phone, video conference or email and should be considered a short term or interim measure.
- Children are not allowed to visit, except in the yellow phase. However, for patients at end of life or in critical condition, exception requests must be reviewed and approved on a case-by-case

basis. If visiting permission is granted, children 12 and under must be accompanied by the DSP and measures taken to ensure compliance with infection prevention and control requirements (hand hygiene, mask, etc.).

Conduct and Behaviour

- DSPs must follow hospital guidelines and be mindful and sensitive to the needs of others. This includes following IPC practices, the visitation plan, being respectful of all healthcare workers, and keeping noise and disruption to a minimum.
- Healthcare workers will address the non-compliance based on its severity and risk to others. This can include a discussion around the expectations up to and including removal from the facility, and removal of DSP designation.

PROCESS ON THE UNIT

- The nursing staff or the patient must communicate with each person to advise them that they have been designated as support person. They must be informed of their role as DSP and of the visitation plan. The visitation plan will be documented in the chart.
- The nursing staff must inform the patient and each designated support person of the restrictions in place due to COVID-19.
 - a. The designated support person must perform a self-assessment at home before each visit and will not be authorized to visit the patient in any of the following circumstances:
 - They have symptoms of COVID-19;
 - They have received confirmation of a positive COVID-19 test;
 - They have had contact with a confirmed case within the **past 7 days**;
 - They have been in close contact with a person with an acute respiratory illness;
 - They have stayed under the same roof as someone in self-isolation;
 - They are waiting for a COVID-19 test result.
- The nursing staff asks the designated support person to read the information found on the Network's website and provides them with a copy of the **information guide** on their first visit.
- Once on the unit, the person tells the staff that they are a designated support person and that they will visit the patient. They discuss the support to provide to the patient with the care team as needed.
- When the designated support person leaves the care unit, they let the staff know that they are leaving and provide them with any additional information about the patient's condition, their concerns, their questions, etc.
- The nursing staff provides the designated support person with directives on the proper use of personal protective equipment (PPE), hand hygiene practices and restrictions/guidelines (see below).

RESTRICTIONS / GUIDELINES FOR DESIGNATED SUPPORT PERSONS

DSPs should:

- Perform a self-assessment at home before each visit and not visit the patient if they have symptoms or risk factors (contact with a positive case, etc.);
- Wear a medical mask properly at all times;
- Wash their hands when entering and leaving the facility as well as when entering and leaving the patient's room;
- Maintain a physical distance of two meters (six feet) from other patients, staff and visitors. As an active member of the healthcare team, they are not required to maintain a two-meter distance from the patient.
- Go directly to the patient's room and remain there for the duration of the visit;
- Leave the room when staff need to perform a procedure and at any time deemed necessary by the care team;
- Check with the nursing staff about wearing PPE if the patient is in isolation;
- Advise the unit if they test positive for COVID 19 within **7 days** of their presence in the hospital.

DSPs are not allowed:

- to visit if they are confirmed to be COVID positive, or if they have tested positive for COVID in the **7 days** prior to the visit.
- enter the facility if they have symptoms of COVID-19 or any other acute infection, such as the flu, cold or other;
- use the patient's washroom (they must use washrooms designated for visitors);
- use shared spaces (TV lounges, kitchenettes, etc.). Certain exceptions can be made for DSPs that are present for long periods of time (e.g. pediatrics, palliative care).

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