

COVID-19

Essential Care Partner and Visitor Guidelines

Acute Care

Note: Latest updates will appear in blue.

Background

Efforts to prevent, quickly identify and contain transmission of COVID-19 are vital to protecting staff and populations that are most vulnerable to serious outcomes from this virus. Active management of facility access for staff, patients and others have been in place throughout the pandemic. Consideration of how best to balance necessary preventative measures with maintaining the vital connections that patients have with family members and support systems continues to evolve.

Definitions

Essential Care Partner

An essential care partner is defined as those providing physical, psychological and emotional support, as deemed important by the patient.

General Visitor (Visitor)

A visitor is defined as someone whose time with the patient is discretionary and short-term/temporary.

This can include:

- visits that occur for purposes that are social in nature;
- individuals who are not involved in the care of the patient.

Fully Vaccinated Manitoban/Individual

Fully vaccinated individuals - those who have received both doses (any combination) of an approved two dose COVID-19 vaccine (AstraZeneca, Pfizer, Moderna), OR a single dose of an approved single dose COVID-19 vaccine (Janssen/Johnson & Johnson) with more than 14 days having passed since the second dose (or approved sole dose) was received.

Where vaccination status is a factor in acute facility access, proof of immunization will be required.

Guideline during Provincial Response Level YELLOW

Expanded visitation for fully immunized general visitors will begin the week of Feb 22, 2022. Date of implementation may vary by site.

Essential Care Partners

All essential care partners are required to show proof of full vaccination status upon every entry to an acute care facility. Sites will determine the location and process to manage this requirement alongside existing site screen protocols.

In situations where an inpatient's identified essential care partner is not fully vaccinated, AND an alternate fully vaccinated essential care partner is not available, case-by-case consideration related to permitted access of the essential care partner may occur. In these situations, the clinical judgement of the care team should indicate that an essential care partner's in-person presence is necessary and that an alternate, fully-vaccinated, essential care partner is not available.

For each acute care inpatient, two essential care partners may be identified by the patient or substitute decision maker - one may attend as an essential care partner at a time. Identification of additional support beyond the two designated essential care partners is at the discretion of the facility/site in collaboration with the patient or substitute decision maker.

Orange and Red Zone Inpatients

Essential care partner access to **ORANGE** and **RED** zone patients should continue to occur virtually wherever possible. In-person visitation will be considered and facilitated if it is the only option to meet the patient's needs.

Visitor access to orange and red zone patients is not permitted, regardless of the vaccination status of the visitor.

Essential care partners and visitors accessing acute facilities must take the most direct route from screening to and from the unit when accessing and departing. The time spent within a facility is restricted to the patient's care area/room.

Pediatrics

Parents/guardians are the substitute decision-makers for their children and frequently provide essential support, two designated parent/guardian may visit every day. One parent/guardian may remain overnight with the child.

Emergency Department and Urgent Care

One essential care partner per patient will be permitted in emergency departments and urgent care centres, subject to assessment of space and the ability of the essential care partner to remain physically distant from other emergency department/urgent care patients and their essential care partners.

Outpatient

One essential care partner will be permitted to accompany patients in outpatient services areas (including diagnostic services and CancerCare Manitoba) subject to assessment of space and the ability of the essential care partner to remain physically distant from other patients and their essential care partners.

End of Life Care

When a loved one is dying, the ability to be present is often an important time both for the dying individual and for their visitor. The significance of this access needs to be balanced with the risk

of infection for the visitor, the staff and other patients.

In determining status of allowed visitors, consideration will be given to the stage of illness, projection regarding timing of death (e.g., those whose condition may be stable but who are at high risk of deterioration) and trajectory of expected decline, which can often be monitored by observing the rate of decline in performance status. The Palliative Performance Score may be helpful in monitoring decline; it is not so much the patient's performance status as their momentum of decline that indicates the approaching end of life. The decision related to when an individual is approaching their end of life will be informed by the care team and is unique to the circumstances of each individual.

During the estimated last month of life, a maximum of **four essential care partners** may be identified to visit. [The number of essential care partners and general visitors attending the patient room at any given time will be at the discretion of the facility, taking space and ability to physical distance into consideration.](#)

Respecting every situation is unique, additional essential care partners (beyond the maximum of four) is to be managed on a case-by-case basis in collaboration with site leadership and IP&C.

When considering exceptions to these guidelines and consideration of visitors beyond the maximum of four essential care partners, vaccination status of visitors should be considered. Of note, **fully immunized** individuals (those who have received both doses of the COVID-19 vaccine, and whose second dose was more than 14 days ago) who are asymptomatic have the lowest risk of acquiring and passing on a COVID illness.

Medical Escorts

Medical escorts for Inuit, First Nations, and Metis patients are considered essential care partners within the circumstances listed above.

[Unvaccinated Essential Care Partner or Visitor](#)

[In situations where either the essential care partner or visitor are not fully vaccinated, access continues to be restricted, with the exceptions approved by the facility in consultation with IP&C.](#)

[Fully Vaccinated Visitors](#)

[In circumstances where **the general** visitors are fully vaccinated \(have received both doses of the COVID-19 vaccine, with second dose received more than 14 days ago\), expanded visitor access is permitted in **Green Zones**.](#)

[All visitors must show proof of vaccination status each time they enter a facility and must continue to follow all screening and IP&C requirements: use of medical masks \(visitors and patients\), hand hygiene, physical distancing, and enhanced cleaning/disinfection. External hair dressers would be captured as visitors, and must meet all outlined requirements.](#)

Visitation in End of life situations in emergency departments should continue to be assessed on a case by case basis.

Documentation and Proof of Immunization:

- Visitors and essential care partners must provide documentation or proof of vaccination status.
- Facility will confirm visitors/essential care partners meet the criteria (received both doses of COVID-19 vaccine, second dose received at least 14 days prior). Facilities will not record or retain record of vaccination status.
- Documentation may vary according to the facility and by essential care partner, and may include:
 - Confirmation via QR code (Manitoba immunization card);
 - Manitoba immunization card;
 - Canadian COVID-19 Proof of Vaccination

Scheduling and Information Management

- Essential care partner information must be retained for 30 days for the purpose of contact tracing. Information related to an individual's vaccination status must not be retained.

In-Room Visits

- In-room visits may occur between patients and fully vaccinated general visitors if the physical space will allow for physical distancing to be maintained between the visitor(s) and the patient.
- Up to one visitor will be permitted at one time. Facility operators may approve an additional visitor where space permits them to remain physically distanced from the patient.
 - If visitors are from the same household, they are not required to maintain physical distancing from one another but must maintain physical distancing from the patient.
- Appropriate PPE including medical masks must be worn at all times.
- Hand hygiene must be performed regularly.
- Facilities may determine the level of supervision required for visits in order to ensure physical distancing and other requirements are following. This may include requiring patient doors to remain open during visits. This is at the discretion of the facility.

Visits in Other Locations

- Facilities that have access to a large space for visitation, will determine the maximum number of visitors that may be present at one time.

Requirements

Screening must occur prior to entry being permitted to any health care facility. This is required every time an essential care partner, escort, parent or guardian accesses a facility.

Individuals with symptoms or exposure history will not be permitted to enter. This includes individuals who have travelled outside Canada within the past 14 days. Once screened, essential care partners should be asked to sign in at the time of accessing a facility. They should proceed directly to the unit nursing station to check in with the care team. The check in should include identifying the needed care the essential care partner is providing and the expected length of time they will be in the facility. This information will be retained solely for the purpose of Public Health contact tracing should a COVID-19 case investigation be required within a unit.

Unvaccinated essential care partners in Manitoba from out of province, including those who have been granted exemption from federal quarantine, may be permitted to access acute care for the

purpose of providing essential care to inpatients during their required 14-day isolation upon arrival in the province. Consideration and approval will be made on a case-by-case basis and is at the discretion of site leadership and IP&C.

Essential Care Partners will follow all precautions including:

- hand hygiene upon entry to facility and before/after contact with healthcare workers or healthcare environment;
- wear a medical mask and eye protection at all times;
 - In Green Zones and common areas, the essential care partner will be provided with a medical mask and eye protection to wear for the duration of their visit.
 - In Orange and Red Zones, the essential care partner will be required to follow the directions of facility/unit staff, including related to wearing and appropriate use of additional personal protective equipment. Staff must be satisfied the essential care partner is able to safely remove PPE without contaminating themselves.
- maintain physical distance of two meters from the patient and staff when possible.

Change Tracker

Feb 16, 2021

- Provincial response level changed to YELLOW
- Expanded access to allow two vaccinated essential care partners to be identified per patient (increased from one, to align with long term care facilities). One may attend to provide care at a time.
- Expanded access for fully vaccinated general visitors
- Expanded access for fully vaccinated essential care partner in Emergency/Urgent Care and Outpatient circumstances subject to space and physical distancing being able to be maintained from other patients and ECPs
- Removed section related to travelers. All those entering facilities will be asked if they have been told or required to self-isolate and this will capture those who have travelled to countries that require isolation upon return (not all travel outside of Canada has an isolation requirement).

December 31, 2021

- Provincial response status changed to RED
- Discontinuation of vaccinated visitor guideline
- Addition of eye protection to PPE essential care partners must wear.

November 29, 2021

- Updated to require proof of full vaccination by essential care partners, upon each entry to a facility.

June 25, 2021

- Work is underway to develop Essential Care Partner and Visitor Guidelines for Provincial Response Level ORANGE.

- At present, visitation for acute care will continue to occur as per the recently updated guidelines below.

June 17, 2021

- Updated to define Fully Vaccinated Individuals and to support expanded visitation to acute care facilities in some settings/situations. Specific guidance added for screening, information records, and confirmation of vaccination documentation.
- Updated end of life language to increase the consideration of end of life timeframe from 2 weeks to 4 weeks.

May 24, 2021

- Updated screening requirements – required EVERY time an essential care partner, escort, patient or guardian accesses a facility.
- Essential care partners in Manitoba from out of province, including those who have been granted exemption from federal quarantine, may be permitted to access acute care for the purpose of providing essential care to inpatients during their required 14-day isolation upon arrival in the province. Consideration and approval will be made on a case-by-case basis and is at the discretion of site leadership and IPC.
- Patients and families/guardians/escorts traveling out of province, within Canada, for medical procedures or care, may follow the same quarantine and acute care access as identified for essential travelers as part of public health orders. Travel for care out of country requires consideration based on country of travel, in coordination with the medical officer of health, site leadership and IP&C.

March 15, 2021

- Updated to include that essential care partners will be provided a medical mask for their visit

February 16, 2021

- Updated with additional information related to essential care partner guidance.

December 17, 2020

- Added change tracker
- Updated to include definition of essential care partner and provide guidance for visitation by essential care partners during Pandemic Response Level RED.
- With updated definition, facility access for visitors is restricted.