
Visitor Policies for Individuals with Disabilities in Hospitals Updated by Department of Health

On May 23, 2020, the Department of Health updated [their guidance](#) on hospital's responses to COVID-19 in regard to the visitor policies. Hospitals should follow their Emergency Preparedness Plan and the Department encourages hospitals to take **any** other appropriate measures to protect patient and staff safety. This includes limiting visitor access to vulnerable populations such as hospice, neonatal, SNF units, and other specialty units. The new language is as follows:

While hospitals are entitled to discretion in the implementation of visitor policies, the terms of those policies must adhere to Federal and State law. Specifically, a hospital, through its visitor policy, cannot deny access to an attendant, caregiver or family member of a patient who has an intellectual, developmental or cognitive disability, communication barrier, or behavioral concerns.

The Department also strongly encourages that a hospital's visitor policy allows for a patient support person at the patient's bedside for patients in labor and delivery and pediatric patients. Hospitals do not need the Department's approval to implement a new visitor policy in response to COVID-19.

These changes will assure that individuals who will benefit from the support of a family or caregiver will be permitted to have the assistance that they need. Many advocates have expressed the concern that these supports be available, and as a result, this guidance was issued.