

Catholic Health to limit hospital visitation due to surge in COVID-19 patients, hospital capacity

As a result of the surge in COVID-19 cases that has placed significant pressure on hospital capacity across the region, non-coronavirus patients in Catholic Health hospitals are limited to one visitor at a time during reduced hours as of Wednesday, Dec. 1.

Hospital visiting hours will be from noon to 6 p.m. daily at Kenmore Mercy Hospital; Mercy Hospital of Buffalo; Mount St. Mary's Hospital; and Sisters of Charity Hospital, Main Street and St. Joseph Campuses. In-person visitation is not permitted in restricted COVID-19 units, except for patients receiving end-of-life care.

In addition, emergency department patients may be accompa-

nied by one visitor for a period of time based on patient census and other factors determined by the clinical team. If a patient is being tested for possible COVID-19 or is confirmed positive while in the emergency department, the accompanying visitor will be asked to leave the hospital and will receive further information by telephone.

Maternity patients will continue to be allowed two support persons for the duration of their hospital stay, but additional visitors will not be permitted at this time. In certain outpatient settings, where space permits, patients may be accompanied by a support person for their appointments.

Hospital visitors, limited to those age 18 or older, are required to undergo a health screening, complete an online registration process, and follow all safety guidelines, including wearing a mask at all times and washing or sanitizing their hands before and after each visit. Individuals who report significant COVID-19 exposure or symptoms in the past 10 days, or have a temperature of 100.0° F or higher, will not be permitted to visit.

A complete list of the most updated visitor guidelines and the online visitor form are available at chsbuffalo.org/visitors.

1,050 NEW COVID CASES IN NIAGARA COUNTY

On Wednesday, the Niagara County Department of Health issued the following weekly update on positive COVID-19 cases in Niagara County from Nov. 25 through Dec. 1.

"We regretfully report the deaths of 13 Niagara County residents from COVID-19. We extend our deepest sympathies to the family and friends of these individuals."

The rest of the update is as follows:

- √ 1,050 new positive cases
- √ A total of 28,811 positives to date (isolations + recoveries + deaths)
- √ 1,181 active cases (1,136 isolating at home, 45 in hospital)
- √ 27,211 recovered

√ 419 deaths

√ 137,014 residents with at least one vaccine dose (<https://covid19vaccine.health.ny.gov/covid-19-vaccine-tracker>)

√ 10% positivity rate, 7-day average (<https://coronavirus.health.ny.gov/positive-tests-over-time-region-and-county>)

√ The Niagara County heat map that breaks the positive cases down by municipality since the beginning of the pandemic can be found here: <https://tinyurl.com/ybgz-musw>.

√ The Niagara County heat map that breaks down active cases by municipality can be found here: <https://tinyurl.com/y5b4hldh>.

Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center revises patient visitation

Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center has revised its visitation policy in order to better protect and maintain the health and safety of hospital patients, visitors and staff.

The updated policy will be reviewed regularly and will remain in effect until further notice.

Changes include:

√ Visiting hours in the acute care areas, including ICU, medical/surgical units, labor and delivery, and telemetry, will now be from noon to 4 p.m. daily.

√ Operating room/surgery, the hours of noon to 4 p.m. do not apply, and one visitor is permitted to stay with the patient – but proof of vaccination will be required.

√ Visitation on the behavioral

health unit will be from 1-2 p.m.

√ One designated inpatient visitor is permitted at a time. The patient or their legal representative will determine the designated essential support person who can visit the hospital.

√ Visitors must be 12 years of age or older.

√ All visitors who are accompanying a patient for a service or visiting an inpatient will be required to provide proof of vaccination (New York Excelsior Pass app or COVID-19 vaccination card). Exceptions to this rule may be made for end-of-life situations.

√ Exceptions for after-hours visitation may be permitted in the instance of labor and delivery, pediatric patients, ER visitation, pa-

tients with special needs, patients for whom a support person has been determined to be medically essential to their care, or end-of-life visitation.

All visitors are required to wear an approved face covering at all times, and will not be permitted to see a patient with an active diagnosis of COVID-19. In addition, any visitors exhibiting signs and symptoms of an illness or who have an illness that could be transferred to patients, will not be permitted to visit.

A press release noted, "The purpose of these revisions is to maintain Memorial's commitment to quality care in a safe environment."

Hochul announces 'urgent action' to boost hospital capacity and address staffing shortages

Department of Health will be permitted to limit nonessential, nonurgent scheduled hospital procedures if necessary to ensure capacity

Gov. Kathy Hochul on Friday announced "urgent action" to boost hospital capacity and address staffing shortages ahead of potential spikes in COVID-19 cases this upcoming winter. Through an executive order signed by Hochul, the Department of Health will be allowed to limit nonessential, nonurgent procedures for in-hospitals or systems with limited capacity to protect access to critical health care services. Limited capacity is defined as below 10% staffed bed capacity, or as determined by the Department of Health based on regional and health care utilization factors.

The new protocols will begin Friday, Dec. 3, and will be reassessed, based on the latest COVID-19 data, on Jan. 15, 2022. The executive order will also enable New York state to acquire more quickly any critical supplies to combat the pandemic.

"We've taken extraordinary action to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and combat this pandemic. However, we continue to see warning signs of spikes this upcoming winter, and while the new omicron variant has yet to be detected in New York state, it's coming," Ho-

chul said. "In preparation, I am announcing urgent steps today to expand hospital capacity and help ensure our hospital systems can tackle any challenges posed by the pandemic as we head into the winter months. The vaccine remains one of our greatest weapons in fighting the pandemic, and I encourage every New Yorker to get vaccinated, and get the booster if you're fully vaccinated."

Hochul's team said her administration "continues to take comprehensive steps to prevent the spread of COVID-19, including mask protocols in health care and P-12 school settings; correctional facilities and detentions centers; public transportation and at transportation hubs; and implementation of the HERO Act, which requires all employers to implement workplace safety plans in response to COVID-19."

"The administration continues to focus on boosting vaccination rates among New Yorkers, including bolstering the state's network of vaccine access points, and working to expand testing supplies. That also includes acting on our comprehensive plan to vaccinate school-aged children 5-17, provide incentive programs, combat vaccine misinformation campaigns, increase vaccine awareness, de-

ploy pop-up vaccines in targeted low-vaccination areas, and implement vaccine requirements for health care workers."

Earlier in the day, Hochul said, "We are closely monitoring the emergence of the SARS-CoV-2 variant B.1.1.529, also known as the omicron variant. The Department of Health's Wadsworth Center Laboratory will continue to actively monitor COVID-19 virus samples selected from throughout New York state to compare sequences and identify circulating and new variants. While we have not yet identified any omicron cases, we are not surprised that new variants are emerging and may likely end up in New York. We will continue to monitor WHO actions and work with our partners at the CDC to keep a close eye on developments."

"I want to remind New Yorkers to continue taking the precautionary steps we know reduce the spread of this deadly virus: wear a mask in indoor public places, use proper hand hygiene, get tested, and stay home when sick. The vaccine also remains one of our greatest weapons in fighting the pandemic, and this news further emphasizes the need for each of us to get vaccinated and get the booster if you're fully vaccinated."

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