



Health Facility Compliance Guidance Letter

Number: GL 20-2007
Title: Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Infection Control and Emergency Preparedness - Prohibition of Nonessential Visitors
Provider Types: General Hospitals, Special Hospitals, Private Psychiatric Hospitals
Date Issued: March 16, 2020

1.0 Subject and Purpose

Texas hospitals (general, special, and private psychiatric) *should allow only essential visitors* to access the hospital because of the significant health and safety risk to patients posed by COVID-19.

Based on state law, federal guidance, and Governor Greg Abbott's March 13 disaster declaration, the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) will be updating requirements for Texas hospitals to assist them in protecting the public from COVID-19.

HHSC urges all hospitals to immediately implement the following measures.

2.0 Policy Details & Provider Responsibilities

Essential visitors include government personnel; one designated caregiver acting on the patient's behalf, such as a parent of a minor or a legally authorized representative; patient family members no more than one at a time; clergy members authorized by the hospital; and additional family members of patients at the end of life or presenting at the emergency department, subject to hospital policy.

This recommendation does not address restrictions on hospital workforce, e.g., medical and professional staff, administrative or other employees, or contract services staff.

Hospitals should prohibit nonessential visitors from entering the facility. This prohibition does not need to extend to an outpatient clinic operated by the hospital.

Hospitals should also prohibit from entering the facility any essential visitors who have:

- Fever or signs or symptoms of a respiratory infection, such as cough, shortness of breath, or sore throat;
- Contact in the last 14 days with someone who has a confirmed diagnosis of COVID-19, is under investigation for COVID-19, or is ill with respiratory illness; or
- Traveled within the previous 14 days to a country with sustained community transmission. For updated information on affected countries visit: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/index.html>

A hospital may enact more stringent restrictions on visitors to reduce the health and safety risk to patients and staff. A hospital must have written policies and procedures regarding the visitation rights of patients, including those setting forth any clinically necessary or reasonable restriction or limitation that the hospital may need to place on such rights and the reasons for the clinical restriction or limitation.

3.0 Background/History

Hospitals have the responsibility to protect the health and safety of patients. State and federal guidance indicates that COVID-19 presents a significant health and safety risk to hospital patients. Accordingly, HHSC issues this guidance letter to support the governor's March 13, 2020, proclamation certifying that the COVID-19 virus poses an imminent threat of disaster in the state, declaring a state of disaster for all counties in Texas, and authorizing the use of all available resources of state government and of political subdivisions that are reasonably necessary to cope with this disaster.

4.0 Resources

Governor Greg Abbott's Disaster Proclamation is provided at https://gov.texas.gov/uploads/files/press/DISASTER_covid19_disaster_proclamation_IMAGE_03-13-2020.pdf.

CMS Guidance for Infection Control and Prevention Concerning Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19): FAQs and Considerations for Patient Triage, Placement

and Hospital Discharge (Ref: QSO-20-13-Hospitals):

<https://www.cms.gov/files/document/qso-20-13-hospitalspdf.pdf-2>

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5.0 Contact Information

If you have any questions about this letter, please contact the Policy, Rules, and Training section by email at: HCQ_PRT@hsc.state.tx.us.