

Responding to Patient and Family Questions Regarding the Temporary Change in Our Visitor Policy Updated: 10/19/09

Clarian Health is now restricting visitors to its downtown hospitals – Methodist Hospital, Indiana University Hospital (including IU Simon Cancer Center) and Riley Hospital for Children. This means that only two essential adult visitors per patient are allowed in the hospital.

This temporary restriction is in response to increasing cases of 2009 H1N1 in our community and is in cooperation with the county-wide hospital visitor restriction recently announced by the Marion County Health Department (MCHD). Clarian is taking this step alongside other Indianapolis-area hospitals.

Q. How do I explain this policy to patients and families who come to the unit to see a loved one?

A. Please tell them that this measure is being taken to help protect patients – including their loved one. Visitors who are actually ill but believe they are healthy could inadvertently expose and infect their hospitalized loved one.

This is a temporary measure taken in response to a rapidly evolving situation. The decision was made with the best interests of our patients in mind. Here are some specific talking points:

- Only two essential adult visitors per patient are allowed.
- This measure is being taken in the interest of patient safety and is in cooperation with the county health department's recent announcement of visitor limits.
- Clarian wants to protect patients and staff from any unnecessary exposures to the virus.
- This is a temporary restriction taken in response to a rapidly evolving situation.

Q. Who are “essential” visitors?

A. The definition of “essential” visitors will vary from patient to patient. Most commonly, essential visitors are parents, guardians, spouses/domestic partners, adult children and spiritual counselors. Our goal at this time is to limit **the number of visitors** in the hospital to prevent unnecessary exposures. To that end, we're focusing on the number of visitors allowed per patient.

Q. When can we make an exception to the visitor restriction policy?

A. Certain circumstances, such as a patient's expected death, suggest an exception to this temporary policy. Seek your supervisor's input when facing such situations. We

anticipate that staff will exercise compassionate and experienced judgment in such circumstances.

Q: Are we asking patients to designate their essential adult visitors in accordance with this policy?

A: Again, our goal at this time is to limit the number of visitors inside the hospitals to prevent our patients and staff from unnecessary exposure to the virus. With that in mind, although we are not asking patients to specifically designate their essential adult visitors, we are asking families to help us by limiting the number of adults coming to the hospital to visit patient family members during their stay. As always, there will be exceptions to this rule, and staff should use their discretion and best judgment accordingly.

Q: Does that mean that when two visitors leave, another two may visit the patient?

A. We are not encouraging this practice, because our goal is to limit the number of visitors in the hospital. Some patients may ask to “switch out” visitors in this way and again, staff should use their judgment in responding to these requests.

Q: How do we define “adult?”

A: For the current visitor restriction policy, we consider people 18 and older to be adults. Some circumstances may warrant an exception to the age restriction, such as a patient’s expected death or a visiting parent who is under the age of 18. Staff members are encouraged to ask a supervisor if they think a younger visitor should be allowed.

Q: Is there a procedure to follow if an exception to the visitor restriction policy has been made for a particular patient?

A: There is no written procedure, per se, but whenever possible staff should communicate with other colleagues (supervisors, oncoming shift employees) about visitation policy exceptions that have been made. Any subsequent changes to that exception should also be communicated to other staff, as appropriate.

Here’s an example of such a case: Critically ill patient is allowed more than two adult visitors overnight because her condition warrants the exception. In the morning, the patient’s condition improves dramatically. In this case, night shift staff should communicate the visitation exception to both the family and the day shift staff; and the day shift staff should work directly with the family to return to the two-adult policy, noting the need to minimize exposure in the hospital.

Q: Are all Clarian hospitals following the same visitor policies at this time?

A. This temporary visitor restriction pertains to Clarian’s downtown hospitals – Methodist, IU (including IU Simon Cancer Center) and Riley. In addition, Riley is staffing a visitor screening station inside the ED entrance where patients are screened and

directed to the appropriate waiting area upon arrival. The screening station will be operational during hours designated by Riley administration. Other Clarian hospitals are establishing or considering restrictions appropriate to their communities.

Q. Why can't family members or close friends who are healthy visit a patient?

A. Someone who appears to be healthy may be infected but not yet showing symptoms of the flu. Because so many children, cancer patients, transplant patients and other patients with weak or compromised immune systems are treated at our hospitals, we have chosen to take this measure in the interests of protecting our staff and patients.

Q. Since no more than two visitors are allowed to come back to the patient's room, can the patient come out and visit in the lobby or another common area?

A. No. This defeats the purpose of the temporary restriction, the intent of which is to protect patients and staff from unnecessary exposure to the virus. A visitor who appears to be healthy may be incubating the virus and expose patients and staff to 2009 H1N1 in such a situation.

Q. Can ambulatory patients see their visitors outdoors?

A. Again, this defeats the purpose of the temporary policy. A patient could be exposed to the virus if a visitor who appears to be healthy is infected and is still in the incubation stage.

Q. How are we notifying patients and visitors about this temporary policy change?

A. Signs are posted at hospital entrances, at information and unit desks and other prominent locations. We anticipate that staff will exercise thoughtful and experienced judgment to manage requests and questions related to the temporary change in visitor policy.

Q. What if a visitor refuses to leave?

A. Ensure that administrative staff – unit secretaries, administrative assistants, etc. – are fully informed about the policy and are able to explain it to visitors.

Suggest that visitors call their loved ones and visit by phone, leave notes, cards, gifts, etc., so their hospitalized loved one knows they were there and that they are thinking about them.

If a visitor becomes violent or creates a disturbance that cannot be contained, call Safety & Security. **This should be a last resort.**

Methodist	962.8000
IU/Riley	274.7270

Q. How long will this policy remain in effect?

A. We will lift the temporary measure at the earliest appropriate time.