Holiday FAQs on Family Presence during COVID-19 in Acute Care

Will the designated support and visitation guidance be relaxed for the holiday season?

Given the current transmission rates in Alberta, and the need to ensure the safety of patients, families and staff, Alberta Health Services (AHS) is not able to accommodate additional designated support persons and/or visitors beyond what is outlined in the current guidance. Please see ahs.ca/visitation for more information.

How can I prepare for a safe holiday visit?

It is crucial right now for everyone to assess their risk of exposure and transmission of COVID-19 before entering an AHS facility. If you are a designated support person, or planning to visit a patient receiving end-of-life care or who is critically ill, please ensure you review and follow the direction in these pamphlets to reduce your risk:

Know Your Risk
Know Your Role

You must follow all noted requirements, including but not limited to health screening, continuous masking, and hand hygiene when coming to AHS facilities.

When is it best to be present at a facility?

Please discuss with the care team the schedule for the day to determine when it is the ideal time to support, and plan times that best meet the patient’s needs. If you require entrance during evenings or weekends, speak with the care team. Consider moving as much as possible to virtual connections.

Can other family members come for a special holiday visit?

Unfortunately, at this time, this is not possible. We encourage you to consider having a virtual visit instead. When a designated support is present with a patient, they may want to help set up a family call to allow other family members to participate.

Can we rotate the designated support person over the holidays?

While in some cases changes in the designated support person are supported, it must be done through discussion with the care team. Reasons for change may include a change in the designated support person’s health status, fatigue, or otherwise being unable to continue. The intention of a limited number of designated supports is to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19, and rotating different people into this role increases the risk to everyone.

Can my loved one receive a pass to leave the facility over the holidays?

With the high levels of community transmission of COVID-19 at this time, there are no off-site passes for the holiday season. This includes day passes and overnight passes from any AHS acute care and rehabilitation facilities.

If a pass is necessary to support care, the care team needs to weigh the risks with the patient before the decision is made.

Regrettably, passes will not be considered strictly for the purposes of social visitation over the holidays.

For more please visit: ahs.ca/visitation
Can I bring in food for a patient and/or staff?

Please check with the healthcare team to make sure you are able to do so for your loved one. The care team will confirm dietary requirements and explain the process to get food to patients. Whenever possible, have the designated support person bring the food to the patient directly.

Due to the requirement for continuous masking, designated support persons and visitors cannot eat together with patients. At this time, food cannot be heated or refrigerated at sites.

Gifts of food for staff cannot currently be accepted. Please consider a different way of saying thank you, like sending a message on thanksforcaring.ca or ahs.ca/sharingthelove.

Can I bring gifts to a patient?

A thoughtful gift can help a patient feel connected. One small gift for a patient is recommended. Consider sending a gift in with the designated support person, or discuss with the care team to see if the site has a process in place to drop off gifts. Some items such as plants, flowers and food might not be appropriate for all patients. You can check with the care team if you have any questions. For information on Infection Prevention and Control related to personal items, please see the Tip Sheet for Patients and Designated Family/Supports.

If I can’t come in person, what are my options? How can the site support connecting virtually?

If you cannot come to a healthcare site in person, or wish to limit time spent at AHS facilities to minimize risk of exposure and transmission of COVID-19, please consider the use of technology to connect with patients. Telephone, text messaging, email, and virtual video apps are all great ways to spend time with your loved one.

If the patient does not have access to their own device, ask the care team about patient use of AHS tablets (available in some locations). Review options to connect virtually.

Can we visit outside?

Outdoor gatherings are not permitted under the current province-wide Government of Alberta restrictions.