

TriHealth expands visitor access, cites patient health, family stress during pandemic

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Do you wish you could visit someone who's been admitted to the hospital? Or have you experienced being tucked away in a hospital longing to see a friend or your young child?

There's more of a chance to do so now than when the coronavirus pandemic was a new threat. And now, TriHealth hospitals have a two-visitors-per-patient allowance.

TriHealth launched its updated visitor policy Sept. 14. It allows two visitors per day per admitted patients if they're fever-free and follow mask-wearing and other rules, as long as other conditions such as the rate of COVID-19 spread in the region are stable.

One visitor can be someone other than a family member. Children age 5 and older may count as a visitor now, too. And a visitor may stay overnight, said John Ward, senior vice president of the Bethesda North region, who led the review of the policy.

"We've learned a lot about the virus" since the pandemic's start," said Dr. Bryan Strader, president of TriHealth Physician Practices. "I don't feel, if the facilities are using safety recommendations, the risk of transmission of the virus is increased" by adding a visitor.

Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center has allowed two healthy primary support visitors, parents or guardians, for each patient since March 16.

"There is no difference between how we treat patients with COVID-19 and those without," said Dawn Nebrig, director of Cincinnati Children's Family Relations. That's different from many hospitals, which don't allow visitors to those suspected of or diagnosed with COVID-19.

"We recognize that having a sick child is unbelievably stressful, and facing that stress without all of your support present compounds the pain," Nebrig said. But she added, "We will always make decisions that put the safety of all our patients first."

Other hospital systems in the Cincinnati region continue to limit visitors to one-per-patient, as a general rule. But all allow exceptions. But they are reviewing, and sometimes tweaking, visitor policies routinely, hospital officials said.

Strader said that, as he learned about people avoiding hospitals fearing they'd be whisked away from visitors, he thought, "We might be doing more harm than good." He added that emotional well-being is an important part of healing.

Ward said allowing just one visitor per day was taking a toll on visitors. The new approach – labeled the "compassionate visitor policy" – attempts to prevent that, he said. "It addresses some of the anxiety or stress on the family members themselves."

Several TriHealth hospital areas remain restricted to one visitor, and none are permitted to visit COVID-19 patients in isolation.

Hospital officials throughout the Cincinnati region encourage patients, families and friends to check visitor rules regularly and call with any questions.

Here are links to visitor policies listed by area hospitals as of Thursday:

- The Christ Hospital [visitor policy](#).
- Mercy Health [visitor policy](#).
- TriHealth visitor policy.
- UC Health [visitor policy](#).
- St. Elizabeth Healthcare [visitor policy](#).
- Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center [visitor policy](#).