

Acute care visitor policy overview

The [Ministry of Health's Overview of Visitors in Acute Care](#) was updated in November 2021 to require visitors be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 unless they are under the age of eligibility, have an approved medical exemption, or are in certain care settings outlined in the policy.

Policy summary

- Visitor policy remains up to two visitors at a time per patient in most situations. Visitors will continue to undergo the health screening at the entrance, follow IPC requirements and wear a medical mask (and additional PPE as required). Visits will continue to be documented at the site.
 - The limit of two visitors may be removed in consultation with a patient's clinical care team.
 - In the emergency department and intensive care unit, patients are limited to one visitor per patient. As in other areas of acute care facilities, the limit can be removed in critical cases, with the consultation of a patient's clinical care team.
 - Additional special considerations can be made for additional visitors on a case-by-case basis (e.g., a child requiring care or supervision may need to accompany their parents or guardians).
- Exemptions from the vaccination and other visitor requirements (e.g., variation in number of visitors permitted) are in place for support persons (as defined under the previous "Essential Visitor" policy). These will be determined on a case-by-case basis:
 - Compassionate care (e.g., critical illness, palliative care, end-of-life)
 - Pediatric care, labour, and delivery
 - Emergency department
 - ICU
 - Visits paramount to the patient's physical care and mental well-being
 - Visits for supported decision making
- The vaccine requirement does not apply to:
 - Children under the age of 12 years
 - Individuals with an approved medical exemption
- Medical exemptions: Only physicians licensed and registered with the College of Physicians and Surgeons of BC and nurse practitioners licensed and registered with the BC College of Nurses and Midwives can issue vaccine exemptions and deferrals in BC. According to the provincial health officer, the reasons outlined in the deferrals to COVID-19 vaccination table are the only valid reasons for a COVID-19 exemption or deferral.
 - Evidence of medical exemption must include:
 - One of the [valid reasons for exemption or deferral](#).



- The person's full name.
 - The issuing physician or nurse practitioner's name and signature (digital signatures are not valid).
- To ensure timely, fair, and consistent decision-making, health authorities are expected to ensure public access to clear information about the complaints process regarding visitor access. Visitors or patients can request a review of any decisions made related to visitor status through the health authority Patient Care Quality Office. At each site, an administrator or administrator-on-call with sufficient knowledge of the visitor guidance and authority to make decisions regarding visitation of current in-patients must be available.

Further clarifications

- **Diagnostic and treatment centres** are considered Hospitals under the Hospital Act; therefore, visitors are required to provide proof of vaccination at the entrance to the facilities.
- **Community Health Services:** Currently there is no vaccination requirement for people accompanying patients to community health services outside of an acute care facility (for example, primary care centres, clinics, or GP offices).
- **Sites with both long-term care and acute services** in the same building: All visitors are required to be fully vaccinated and provide proof of vaccination at the time of entry into an acute care facility, licenced long-term care facility or registered seniors' assisted living setting. In cases where a site may have multiple care services (acute care and LTC services in one building), visitors should follow the guidance that most applies to the site. For example, if an acute care facility has a LTC unit, visitors are to follow the Acute Care Guidance document.
- A person accompanying an **outpatient** is considered a visitor and is required to provide proof of vaccination at the time of entry into the facility.