

# Visiting a Loved One with COVID-19 in the ICU

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, current visitor guidelines limit the number of people who can visit ICU patients and the amount of time they can spend in the room. The changes help keep our patients, staff, and visitors safe and prevent the spread of COVID-19. These guidelines may change from day-to-day as needed. Please confirm the most current visitor guidelines with your nurse.



## Preparing for your visit to the ICU

The intensive care unit or ICU is a place for critically-ill or -injured patients who need the highest level of medical care. All patients have the right to make decisions about their treatment. Patients in the ICU often can't make or communicate these decisions on their own. You or a trusted family member or friend will be asked to work with the healthcare team to make those decisions for your loved one.

There are some important things to keep in mind when choosing a representative:

- **Is the person healthy?** Visitors must be in good health. Visitors cannot have signs of illness or have COVID-19 or a pending COVID-19 test result.
- **Is the person able to wear personal protective equipment (PPE)?** PPE is special clothing designed to prevent infection. When visiting the ICU, masks, gowns, gloves, and other protective equipment must be worn. The equipment will be provided, and staff can help make sure it's worn correctly. (See [page 2](#) for more details.)

As you consider who will be the representative, remember that this person will be the representative for as long as your loved one remains in the ICU.

- **Is the person able to communicate clearly in the ICU?** The ICU setting can be loud and hectic. In addition to the various devices making noises, medical staff will be wearing protective equipment that may cover their mouths or muffle their speech. This makes it difficult to communicate. It's recommended that the representative be able to hear and speak well in this setting.
- **Is the person able to communicate effectively outside the ICU?** The representative will be responsible for taking accurate information back to other family members and may need to assist with making decisions.
- **Is the person emotionally prepared to see their loved one?** Visiting the ICU is not like a typical hospital visit. Your loved one will be connected to different tubes, monitors, and devices. They will most likely be sedated and unable to speak. Their physical appearance may seem different than normal — they may look swollen or frail, or their skin color may appear different. Some people will find this experience frightening or painful.

## During the visit

You will meet with your loved one's medical team. They will tell you about your loved one's condition. Use this opportunity to ask questions and take notes. You will also have a chance to see your loved one, but the visit will be brief.

As you discuss treatment options with the care team, it may also be necessary to talk about the possibility that your loved one may not survive. This conversation may include ways to keep your loved one comfortable as they die naturally. The care team understands this can be a painful process and is prepared to support you in this difficult experience.

### Wearing personal protective equipment (PPE)

When visiting a loved one with COVID-19 in the ICU, you must follow these steps to protect your health and the health of others:

#### 1 Answer questions

Before you go into your loved one's room, you will be asked questions by the care team about your health, including if you have any symptoms of COVID-19.

If you have special concerns about your personal health, talk with the nurse or doctor caring for your loved one. There are risks associated with visiting a loved one with COVID-19.

#### 2 Wash your hands

The care team will show you where to wash your hands. Follow these steps:

- **Wet your hands** under clean running water (warm or cold), and apply soap.
- **Lather your hands** by rubbing them together with the soap.
- **Scrub your hands** for at least 20 seconds. Be sure to clean the back of your hands and wrists, between the fingers, and under your nails.
- **Rinse your hands** well under clean running water.
- **Dry your hands** with a clean towel or air dry them. Use a towel to turn off the tap.

Once you have entered the room, you must stay there until you plan on leaving. You will not be allowed to go in and out.



#### 3 Put on PPE

You must wear PPE during the entire visit with your loved one, including:

- **Gloves.** Always keep your gloves on while in the room. Avoid touching your face or skin while wearing the gloves. Wash your hands immediately once you remove the gloves.
- **Gown.** A gown prevents droplets in the air from landing on your skin and clothing.
- **Mask.** Wearing a mask correctly is the best way to lower the spread of COVID-19. **Do not touch or pull the mask down away from your nose or mouth while you are wearing it.** You must wear the mask even after you have stepped out of the room.
- **Eye protection.** Goggles or a face shield must be worn at all times while in the room. COVID-19 can be transmitted by touching your eyes or if virus particles get into them.

#### 4 Remove PPE

When you are finished with your visit, call the nurse. A member of the care team will help you safely remove the PPE. **You must wash your hands after removing PPE and before leaving the area.**

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