



Influenza Q&A for Patients and Visitors

Carolinan HealthCare System Flu Visitation Policy

What is the current flu visitation policy at Carolinas HealthCare System?

For your safety and the safety of our patients, effective Jan. 2, 2015, Carolinas HealthCare System is *restricting visitors under the age of 18* at all of its Greater Charlotte area in-patient hospitals.

Carolinan HealthCare System also is asking individuals of all ages who are experiencing flu-like symptoms to refrain from visiting patients. If extraordinary circumstances require an individual with flu-like symptoms to visit a hospital patient, the nurse or physician should complete the child health screen. If the visitor has two or more symptoms of influenza, they will not be allowed to visit. If the visitor does not have signs of influenza, he/she will be asked to wear a surgical mask to protect themselves and others.

Hospitals currently affected by the tighter visitation policy are:

Carolinan Medical Center
Levine Children's Hospital
Carolinan Medical Center-NorthEast
Carolinan Medical Center-Mercy
Carolinan Medical Center-Pineville
Carolinan Medical Center-Union
Carolinan Medical Center-University
Carolinan HealthCare System Lincoln
Carolinan HealthCare System Behavioral Health-Randolph

Carolinan HealthCare System Cleveland
Carolinan HealthCare System Kings Mountain
Stanly Regional Medical Center
Carolinan HealthCare System Anson
Carolinan HealthCare System Behavioral Health
Carolinan Rehabilitation-Charlotte
Carolinan Rehabilitation-NorthEast
Carolinan Rehabilitation-Mt. Holly
Carolinan HealthCare System Behavioral Health-Davidson

Why is there a visitation restriction in place?

At Carolinas HealthCare System, we want to provide you and your loved ones with the best healthcare experience possible. To help ensure your safety and to protect the health and quality care of our patients, we have temporarily tightened our visitation policies due to the growing prevalence of influenza cases in the region. This policy is necessary to help us maintain a safe environment for our patients, employees and visitors.

When will the Carolinas HealthCare System flu visitation policy be lifted?

Carolinan HealthCare System will continue monitoring flu activity in the region and in our hospitals. We realize this policy may be a temporary inconvenience to your family, but we will do everything we can to lift the restriction as soon as it is safe for everyone. In the meantime, we appreciate your patience and support.

Flu Information

What is influenza?

Influenza (or “the flu”) is a respiratory disease caused by influenza viruses. Flu outbreaks are most common during the late fall, winter and early spring.

What are the signs and symptoms of the flu?

Common symptoms of flu include:

- Fever
- Headaches and/or body aches/pain
- Cough or sore throat
- Stuffy or runny nose
- Chills
- Fatigue
- Nausea, vomiting and/or diarrhea

Severe flu-related complications, such as pneumonia and respiratory failure, or even death, may occur in certain cases, and the flu may cause a worsening of underlying chronic medical conditions. Discuss any medical conditions with your healthcare provider that might put you at higher risk for flu complications.

How does the flu virus spread?

Flu viruses are spread mainly from person to person through coughing or sneezing by people with influenza. Sometimes people may become infected by touching something with flu viruses on it and then touching their mouth or nose.

Infected people may be able to infect others beginning one day before symptoms develop and up to seven or more days after becoming sick. That means that you may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick.

What should I do to keep from getting the flu?

First, and most importantly: get a flu vaccination as soon as it is available, especially if you are considered high risk.

In addition to being vaccinated, you should also take everyday actions that can help prevent the spread of germs that cause illnesses like influenza. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends following these steps to protect your health:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.
- Wash your hands often with warm water and soap for 15-20 seconds, especially after you cough, sneeze, eat, or use the restroom. If soap and water are not available, use alcohol-based hand sanitizers.
- Disinfect frequently-touched objects and surfaces – such as doorknobs, desks, keyboards and phones – to help remove germs.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you are sick with flu-like illness, CDC recommends that you stay home for at least 24 hours after your fever is gone except to get medical care or for other necessities. (Your fever should be gone without the use of a fever-reducing medicine.)
- While sick, limit contact with others as much as possible to keep from infecting them.
- Try to stay in good general health: get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids and eat nutritious food.

Source: www.cdc.gov/flu

What should I do if I get sick?

If you become ill with flu-like symptoms, you should stay home and avoid contact with other people as much as possible to keep from spreading your illness to others. If you are concerned about the severity of your symptoms, contact your healthcare provider. Your provider will determine whether influenza testing or treatment is needed.

If you experience any of the following warning signs, seek emergency medical care immediately.

In children, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Bluish skin color
- Not drinking enough fluids
- Not waking up or not interacting
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough
- Fever with a rash

In adults, emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen
- Sudden dizziness
- Confusion
- Severe or persistent vomiting

Are there medicines to treat flu?

Yes. Oseltamavir or zanamavir are available for treatment of influenza. However, most people with mild cases of the flu do not require antiviral therapy. Antivirals should only be considered for those sick enough to be hospitalized or for those with conditions that put them at risk for more serious complications of influenza (pneumonia, lung disease, weakened immune system, etc.). Your healthcare provider will decide whether or not your illness requires antivirals.

How long can an infected person spread the flu virus to others?

People with influenza should be considered potentially contagious as long as they are symptomatic and possibly for up to seven days following illness onset. Children, especially younger children, may be contagious for longer periods.

How long can viruses live outside the body?

We know that some viruses and bacteria can live for two hours or longer on surfaces like cafeteria tables, doorknobs, light switches and desks. Keeping these commonly-touched surfaces clean and frequent hand washing will help you reduce the chance of getting contamination from these common surfaces.