
Visitors in hospital

Summary

- You are in hospital for treatment and recovery. If you do not want visitors, it is okay to say so.
 - As a visitor, it is important to keep to a hospital's visiting hours, so patients can get plenty of rest.
 - You might be able to arrange to visit someone after visiting hours. Check with the hospital.
 - Never visit someone in hospital if you are sick.
 - Most hospitals have hand wash stations on every ward. Wash your hands before and after your visit.
 - Use family rooms if you need privacy or so that you do not disturb other patients.
 - Respect the wishes of the person you are visiting – sometimes they may not feel well enough to have visitors.
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Visitors are an important part of the recovery process and are welcome in hospitals. Visitors can help people recover faster, and also help reduce their anxiety and stress. However, it is up to the person in hospital to decide if they want visitors, and visitors must also respect hospital policies and visiting hours.

Managing your visitors in hospital

When it comes to managing your visitors, it is important to put your needs – and the advice of your doctor – first. You are in hospital for treatment and recovery. If you do not want visitors, it is okay to say so.

Unwanted visitors

It is your right to refuse to see anyone from outside the hospital, especially visitors who may cause you distress. If this is the case, let the nurse unit manager of your ward know. Your wishes can then be communicated to the other nurses, who will let your visitors know.

If you do not want any visitors at all, let family and close friends know so they do not make the trip to the hospital only to be refused entry.

If you have a visitor who is refusing to leave, security staff can intervene and remove that person if necessary.

At times when you want some temporary privacy, such as when a doctor or nurse needs to examine you or to administer treatment, do not hesitate to ask your visitors to step out of the room or to come back another time.

Visiting a patient in hospital

For patients, hospital is a place for treatment and recovery. Keep this in mind when planning your hospital visit. Before you leave home, check with the hospital to make sure the patient is well enough to see you.

Patients may also be away from their room during the day for tests and other treatment or therapies. Knowing this in advance means you will not make the trip to the hospital only to be refused entry or to have a long wait to see the patient.

Some hospitals and wards restrict how many patients can visit at one time to make sure the patient does not become too tired and that the ward is not too busy. You may have to wait until other visitors leave before you can see the patient. Where possible, coordinate visits with others, such as family members.

When you arrive at the hospital, go to the main administration area and ask the receptionist to direct you to the patient's room. The administration area is usually near the main entrance. If you know which ward or floor the patient is on, you can go directly there. Check at the nursing station or ward reception if it is okay to visit the patient and find out which room they are in.

Health and hygiene

Some hospitals ask that all visitors clean their hands when they first arrive. This is to avoid bringing infections such as bacteria and viruses into the hospital environment where sick patients are highly susceptible to infection.

Victorian hospitals have waterless hand-wash pumps for this reason, but even with these measures in place, it is in everyone's best interest to stay away from the hospital if you are unwell.

Wash your hands when you leave the hospital to avoid taking infection with you.

Hospital visiting hours

Hospital visiting hours and policies vary across Victoria, and many hospitals have different hours for particular wards. Check the policies of the hospital and the ward you wish to visit.

For example, intensive and special care units, and special care nurseries in maternity hospitals often limit visitors to immediate family and only for short periods of time. In children's hospitals, the hours are often more flexible for parents or carers. You can either call the hospital or visit their website to find out what the visiting hours are.

Many hospitals have generous visiting hours such as 10 am to 8 pm, but they may have a rest period in the middle of the day to give patients quiet time. It is important to respect the visiting hours and rest times, because patients need time to recover.

Some wards also have mealtimes set aside where visitors may be asked to leave for a while so that patients can relax and have their meal without distraction.

Visiting after hours

Most hospitals lock their doors after visiting hours to protect patients and their belongings overnight. In children's hospitals, only parents and carers can be on the ward after hours.

Hospitals may allow designated visitors who have arranged with the nurse-in-charge or nurse unit manager to visit outside of general visiting hours. Check with staff at the nursing station in the patient's ward in advance to find out if it is possible for you to visit after hours.

Parking and transport

Decide how you will get to the hospital. If you are catching public transport, work out the best route and how long the journey will take. Give yourself plenty of time to allow for delays.

If you are driving, work out your route, journey time, parking options and costs ahead of time. For example, many major hospitals have car parks, but these often charge a fee to use them.

Taking gifts

Before you buy a gift, consider the hospital's policy on what you can and cannot bring into the ward. For example, at many hospitals, pot plants are not permitted in surgical or high-dependency wards. Flowers are usually allowed in all areas except the intensive care unit (ICU), and hospitals may also have restrictions on food. Alcohol is not allowed in hospital.

If you decide to bring flowers, think about also bringing a vase or a container, to make sure that there is one available. It is not the role of nursing staff to look after a patient's flowers.

Call the hospital or visit its website to see if there are any restrictions on what you can bring into the ward.

Consider others in hospital

There are a number of things you can do to consider the patient you are visiting, hospital staff and other patients, which include:

- Check that the patient is happy for you to visit before you make the journey to the hospital.
- The person you are visiting may be sharing a room, so it is important to consider the needs of other patients during your visit. Limit your noise when you are in the ward and the patient's room. Some hospitals have a family area where you can go for privacy and where you will not disturb other patients.

- It is important to remember that nursing staff are there to attend to patients' medical needs, not the needs of visitors.
- There may be times during your hospital visit when the patient needs some temporary privacy, such as when a doctor or nurse needs to administer treatment. You may need to step out of the room or come back at another time.
- If you bring children, make sure you properly supervise them and that they do not disturb other patients and hospital staff.
- Smoking is not permitted in any hospitals in Victoria.
- Some people find it a shock to see a loved one recovering from surgery or a procedure. They may look pale and unwell, and be hooked up to machines. Be prepared for this when you visit and try to focus on their treatment and recovery.
- Respect the rules and policies of the hospital, be courteous to hospital staff and other patients, and respect the wishes of the patient.
- Remember that the patient may be feeling low and your visit is likely to be an important and happy distraction.

Where to get help

- Hospital staff

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