


FAQ FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Updated December 10, 2020

These Frequently Asked Questions and Answers are updated on a regular basis.

	COVID-19 and Testing	2 - 4
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	Safety Measures	5 - 7
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	Visiting our sites	
	Planning your visit	8
	During your visit	10
	After your visit	11

	Coming in for an appointment	12-13
---	---	-------

	Providing support	14
---	--------------------------------	----



COVID-19 and Testing

What can I do to protect myself from getting COVID-19?

- Clean your hands often
- Practice physical distancing – avoid large gatherings and remain two-metres apart from others
- Wear a face covering in enclosed public spaces or where physical distancing is not possible
- Avoid shaking hands and close contact with people who are sick
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue or into your sleeve
- Stay home if you are sick

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

Symptoms of COVID-19, which is the disease caused by the 2019 novel coronavirus, range from mild — like the flu and other common respiratory infections — to severe.

The most common symptoms include:

- fever
- cough
- difficulty breathing
- muscle aches
- fatigue
- headache
- sore throat
- runny nose

(Source: [Ministry of Health](#))

I think I may have COVID-19. What should I do?

COVID-19 Assessment Centres are prioritizing those most at risk for the virus. Members of the public should only seek testing if they are:

- Showing COVID-19 symptoms;
- Have been exposed to a confirmed case of the virus, as informed by their public health unit or exposure notification through the COVID Alert app;
- A resident or work in a setting that has a COVID-19 outbreak, as identified and informed by their local public health unit; and
- Eligible for testing as part of a targeted testing initiative directed by the Ministry of Health or the Ministry of Long-Term Care. Learn more [here](#).

If you meet the criteria above, please book an appointment for testing:

- Complete the online booking form [here](#).
- Or you can 905-378-4647 ext. 42819 (4-CV19) and leave a message. Staff at the Assessment Centre will return calls as soon as possible to schedule a date and time for testing.

If you do not meet the criteria above, please visit the [Ontario Government's website](#) for a full list of pharmacy testing locations.



COVID-19 and Testing

Do I need an appointment to be tested? Where are the COVID-19 Assessment Centres located?

Testing at Niagara Health's COVID-19 Assessment Centres is available by appointment only. Assessment Centres are prioritizing testing for those most at risk for having COVID-19.

Yes. Our Assessment Centres are available by appointment only. To book an appointment:

- Complete the online booking form [here](#).
- Or you can call 905-378-4647 ext. 42819 (4-CV19) and leave a message. Staff at the Assessment Centre will return calls as soon as possible to schedule a date and time for testing.

For safety reasons, COVID-19 Assessment Centres have dedicated entrances. Please do not enter through the main entrance or Emergency Department when you arrive for testing.

St. Catharines Assessment Centre: Open Monday to Sunday 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Located behind the Walker Family Cancer Centre at the rear of the St. Catharines Site at 1200 Fourth Ave. The centre has a dedicated entrance off First St. Louth.

Niagara Falls Assessment Centre: Open Monday to Sunday 9 a.m. to noon and 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. The Assessment Centre is located at the main hospital building at 5546 Portage Rd. The centre has a dedicated entrance off North Street, just east of the Emergency Department.

Welland Assessment Centre: Open Monday, Wednesday and Friday 9 a.m. to noon and 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. Located in the auditorium of the Welland Site at 65 Third Street. The dedicated parking spots can be accessed from Nightingale Place.

How long will it take to get my test results? How will I access them? What should I do while I am waiting for the results?

While Niagara Health conducts COVID-19 swabs at its assessment centres, samples are sent to Ontario Public Health labs for testing. Niagara Region Public Health follows up with patients on their test results only if their results are positive for COVID-19.

Patients with a valid Ontario health card can access their test results online in three ways:

1. The Ministry of Health has launched a new user-friendly online portal for the public to easily access their [COVID-19 lab test results](#). It can take up to seven days to receive test results for COVID-19.

Please note: If results state “Unable to post positive/negative results on this website”, results may be available in another location. To find the other location, look for an arrow on the lower right hand side that says “Previous results”. Verify the results in this section and match the date you had your COVID-19 test.



COVID-19 and Testing

2. The Niagara Health Navigator allows users to access the Ministry of Health online portal through the app, under the “Self-Assessment and Lab Results” tile.
3. MyChart is a web-based portal that allows patients to track personal health records and information and access test results. Patients will need to [register](#) for a MyChart account to access COVID-19 test results.

Patients that do not have a current Ontario health card or would like the test results of their child (12 years old or under) may contact the Assessment Centre where they were tested or contact their health care provider (doctor’s office). To contact the Assessment Centre, call 905-378-4647, then:

- St. Catharines, ext. 44470
- Niagara Falls, ext. 52451
- Welland, ext. 33220

While waiting for test results, continue to self-isolate. Visit the Niagara Region Public Health website for more information about COVID-19 test results.

What happens if there is an outbreak of COVID-19 at the hospital?

The health, safety and well-being of everyone is our top priority.

In an outbreak, our Infection Prevention and Control experts take immediate action to protect our patients, staff and physicians. They work closely with Niagara Region Public Health and our Occupational Health and Safety team to closely monitor the situation and adjust our safety measures as needed.

How are you planning for an increase in patients?

We are closely monitoring the number of patients coming to the hospital and working diligently to manage patient flow. We are maintaining space within the hospital so there is capacity for a potential surge of COVID-19 positive patients.

We have also implemented important infection prevention and control procedures, including physical distancing for the continued safety of our patients, our community, and our teams. We’re appreciative of the community’s patience during this time and we ask for your continued understanding as we work as quickly and safely as we can to re-introduce services while maintaining vigilance for COVID-19 activity.

Information on any current outbreaks will be posted to our [case reporting page](#).



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Updated December 10, 2020



Safety Measures

A number of precautions are in place at Niagara Health to reduce the potential spread of COVID-19 and maintain the hospital as a safe place for all.

Masks required for Emergency Department/Urgent Care patients, outpatients and visitors

All Emergency Department/Urgent Care patients, as well as outpatients and approved visitors are required to wear a mask at all times while in the hospital, including common areas, elevators, waiting room areas and in patient rooms while visiting. Patients and visitors are asked to bring their own masks. Limited exceptions are made on a case-by-case basis for medical reasons.

We would also like to remind those coming to our sites to practice meticulous hand hygiene when putting a mask on and taking it off, and to practice physical distancing to keep everyone safe.

Find out how to safely wear a mask [here](#).

Reduced entrances

We are limiting the points of entry/exit at each of our sites. The main entrances to our Greater Niagara General, St. Catharines and Welland sites are open from 6:30 a.m. to 8 p.m. and Douglas Memorial Site from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Emergency Department and Urgent Care entrances are open 24/7.

Screening at the door

We are conducting screening of everyone at all entrances to our sites. Before entering the hospital, you will be asked if you have symptoms related to COVID-19, including fever or new cough or shortness of breath, as well as your travel history, contact information and the travel history of those who you've had contact with.

A screening form is available that can be completed in advance. You can fill out the [form on your mobile device](#) or [print a copy](#) of the screening form and bring it with you to help expedite the process. It is also available through the Niagara Health Navigator app under the Visitor Information & Screening tile. Download it for free from the [App Store](#) or [Google Play](#).

Filling out the form prior to arriving at Niagara Health sites is the quickest and easiest way for patients and visitors to enter the building. After completing the form, patients and visitors must have their results accessible to show a screener upon entry. There is signage to direct those coming to our sites and staff available to assist.

Visitor restrictions

We are pleased to welcome visitors back for inpatients (those admitted to the hospital) to all our sites, subject to certain conditions. This is being done in a gradual way to help ensure the safety of everyone at the hospital.

Inpatients (those admitted to the hospital) may have one visitor during each block:

- 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.
- 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.



FAQ FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Updated December 10, 2020



Safety Measures

To help maintain a safe environment, including reducing the number of people entering the hospital, visitors may not rotate throughout the allotted time.

Patients coming for clinic visits and other outpatient services:

Patients coming for clinic visits and other outpatient services are still asked to come alone. This includes Diagnostic Imaging (e.g. X-rays, CT scans, etc.), the Walker Family Cancer Centre and Dialysis Units. Patients with extenuating circumstances are encouraged to contact their care provider directly to discuss their needs. Anyone accompanying a patient to an appointment must be preapproved and meet all visitor criteria.

Patients visiting our Emergency Departments and Urgent Care Centres:

Effective Monday, Dec. 21, visitors/care providers can only accompany patients in the Emergency Department (ED) or Urgent Care Centre (UCC) if they are supporting patients:

- In life altering circumstances.
- Experiencing a mental health crisis.
- At end of life.
- Who are vulnerable. This includes those under 18 years of age, cognitive or developmentally delayed, and those with severe language impairment.

Patients and visitors/support people will be screened for COVID-19 per our existing guidelines. At triage, the nursing staff will assess whether the visitor/support person may accompany a patient in the ED/UCC based on the special circumstances outlined above.

To maintain a safe patient care environment, visitors must:

- Be 18 years of age or older.
- Provide their name and phone number to support contact tracing.
- Pass screening in order to gain entry. Please click [here](#) to access the online screening tool, and click or [here](#) to download a copy of the screening tool, which can be printed and filled out to expedite the screening process.
- Bring their own mask and wear it at all times while in the hospital.
- Follow infection prevention and control measures, including meticulous hand hygiene and physical distancing throughout their stay.
- Limit their movement while in the hospital, staying in the patient's room for the duration of the visit.
- Visitors may bring food to their loved ones while at the hospital; however, all food must be eaten in patient rooms only and visitors must take any leftover food with them when they leave.

Please visit the [Visitor Information web page](#) for more information.

FAQ FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Updated December 10, 2020



Safety Measures

Essential personal items for patients

Unfortunately, we are no longer accepting deliveries for patients. All essential items, including food, must be brought to patients by a visitor **during the designated visiting times** (see [visitor restrictions](#)).

Cleaning practices

Niagara Health's Environmental Services team plays a critical role in keeping everyone safe and we have a state-of-the-art cleaning program. During the pandemic, cleaning efforts have been increased and the team works around the clock to ensure bacteria and viruses don't spread throughout the hospital causing outbreaks.

Physical distancing

Niagara Health is using visual cues across our sites to encourage everyone to maintain a two metre (six feet) distance from others when possible.

We have posters displayed in high-traffic areas, floors stickers to encourage distancing in line-ups and have arranged seating in public areas to promote physical distancing. Please do not move the furniture.

Niagara Health team members are encouraged to conduct meetings virtually and in-person seminars, conferences and events have been cancelled or postponed.

Hand hygiene

Our staff, physicians and learners follow meticulous hand hygiene practices. There are sanitizer stations located throughout the building. Please clean your hands when you enter the building, throughout your stay, and when you leave.

Flower and gift deliveries

Any gifts for patients must be individually packaged. Our staff are unable to deliver gifts to patients. Please bring them with you during visiting hours.

We understand that families and friends may wish to bring flowers to their loved ones while they are in the hospital. In order to keep everyone safe we have implemented the following guidelines:

- Unfortunately, flower deliveries can not be supported at this time.
- We can only accept flowers in a vase with no soil. No plants are allowed.
- Please bring your gift or flowers with you during visiting hours only.



Visiting our sites

Planning your visit



What is the quickest way to be screened?

The quickest and most efficient way to enter our sites is by filling out the printable or online screening form before your visit.

- A link to the online screening form is available on our website or you can type www.niagarahealth.on.ca/Form into your web browser.
- The online form can also be accessed from the Niagara Health Navigator app, which is available on the App Store and Google Play.
- The printable online screening form is available to download on our website: www.niagarahealth.on.ca/VisitorInformation.

Please be prepared to show your results – either a paper copy or on your mobile device – to a screener upon entry.

Can inpatients have multiple visitors during each visiting block as long as they only visit one at a time?

No, at this time inpatients may only have one visitor throughout each time block. Reducing the number of people entering the hospital supports physical distancing and is an important infection prevention and control measure.

Can two people visit at one time?

To support our infection prevention and control practices, only one visitor per patient is permitted in each block. Limiting the number of individuals in the hospital at one time allows for proper physical distancing, which is important to reducing the potential spread of the coronavirus.

When am I able to visit?

Inpatients (those admitted to the hospital) may have one visitor during each block:

- 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.
- 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.

It is recommended that each inpatient's family and friends agree to a visitation schedule in advance to ensure patients only have one visitor throughout each time block.

How long can I expect screening to take?

Screening must be completed every time you enter the hospital. If you did not fill out the printable or online form prior to arriving, a team member will ask you a series of questions. The time it takes for screening depends on the number of people coming into the hospital. This includes those with scheduled appointments. If you filled out the printable or online screening form, please have your results ready to show the screeners.

Please remember to stay two metres (six feet) away from others while waiting to enter the building.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Updated December 10, 2020



Visiting our sites

Planning your visit



What is the difference between an inpatient and someone coming for an appointment?

Inpatients are those who have been admitted to the hospital, meaning they are in a room on one of our units. This does not include patients coming for an appointment to areas such as Diagnostic Imaging (eg. X-Rays, CT scans, bone scans, etc.), the Walker Family Cancer Centre and Dialysis Units, as well as visits to our Emergency Departments and Urgent Care Centres.

Patients coming for appointments are asked to come alone if possible. We have team members who would be happy to assist you. If you need to bring someone to assist you, please let your care team know ahead of time as all visitors need to be approved in advance. Anyone accompanying you must also pass hospital screening. Please visit our [resuming services page](#) for more information.

Are there any exceptions? How are exceptions determined?

Exceptions are made by our care team on a case-by-case basis. This includes:

- Additional visitors and longer visiting hours may be arranged on compassionate grounds.
- Patients on the Pediatric and Neonatal Intensive Care units may have one visitor.
- Women in labour may have one support person at all times. In addition, if patients have a doula supporting them, this person may attend the birth as part of the care team.

Other exceptions as determined by the care team. Please contact the manager on the unit where the patient is staying if you have questions.

If I request an exception and it is denied, can I appeal this decision?

After a conversation with your care team where an exception to our visiting restrictions is denied, you may appeal the decision through Patient Relations. For urgent cases – decisions will be made within 24-hours. For non-urgent cases, you will receive acknowledgement of your appeal within one business day and decisions will be made within three business days.

I'm coming from out of country to visit a loved one for compassionate reasons. Can I enter the hospital?

Please visit the Government of Canada website [here](#) for more information about compassionate entry for travellers and limited release from quarantine.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Updated December 10, 2020



Visiting our sites

During your visit



Do I need to wear masks the whole time while visiting?

Yes. Visitors who do not wear a mask will not be permitted to enter the building.

Can I take my loved one outside while visiting?

We are asking that visitors limit their movement while in the hospital. As part of this, we ask that you stay in the patient's room for the duration of your stay. Going for walks is not currently permitted. Family members/caregivers must not go to any common areas unless to purchase food/beverages from a cafeteria/café or use a public washroom.

Can I bring food to my loved one while visiting?

Visitors may bring food to their loved ones while at the hospital; however, food must be eaten in the patient's room and visitors must take any leftover food with them when they leave. We are no longer accepting food outside of the designated visiting times.

Can I bring food or drinks into the hospital for myself?

Visitors may not bring food or drink on the premises for their own consumption and are not allowed to eat in patient rooms.

Can I purchase food and drinks in the hospital cafeterias?

Yes, you can purchase food and drinks in the cafeterias at our St. Catharines and Welland sites, and Tim Hortons at our Greater Niagara General and St. Catharines sites.

Our Douglas Memorial, Greater Niagara General and Port Colborne sites have cafeteria space for dining, however food and drinks are not available for purchase at these sites.

While using our dining areas, please follow physical distancing guidelines – maintaining a six feet (two metre) distance from others - and do not move the furniture which has been spaced out appropriately for everyone's safety. You will also notice new cleaning stations available in our cafeterias for disinfecting tables and chairs. This is an added measure that we've put in place to keep everyone safe as we are gradually welcoming back visitors to our sites. Please follow the instructions on the signage provided and use the cleaning supplies provided to disinfect the tables.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Updated December 10, 2020



Visiting our sites

After your visit

How will I know when visiting hours are over?

An announcement will be made on the overhead speakers to indicate when visiting blocks are over. We ask that you remember to maintain proper physical distancing while exiting and only have two people in the elevator at a time.

How do I pay for parking?

A gated system is in place at our St. Catharines, Greater Niagara General and Welland sites. Pay and display systems are in use at the Port Colborne and Fort Erie sites.

How to use our gated parking systems:

We recommend that you use your VISA or MasterCard, swiping upon entry and exit. Please note that the same card must be used to enter and exit. No ticket is required. If you take a ticket, you can also use your VISA or MasterCard to pay at the exit gate. Insert your ticket into the machine, followed by your VISA or MasterCard.

You can take a ticket upon entry into the parking lot. Bring the ticket into the hospital with you – do not leave it in your vehicle. There are kiosks at the entrances, and you are encouraged to pay using VISA or MasterCard before leaving the building.

Please note that the parking system cannot take debit or debit cards.

Please remember to maintain a proper physical distance from others while waiting to use the parking kiosks and clean your hands afterward. You may also wish to pay at the gate with your VISA or MasterCard to avoid lining up with others.

When parking in pay and display lots, please purchase a ticket in the machine and display it on your dashboard.





FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Updated December 10, 2020



Coming in for an appointment

As Niagara Health moves through our recovery planning, clinical activity is operating at approximately 75% of our pre-COVID volumes.

Can I call to schedule an appointment?

Safety continues to be an important focus as appointments increase. Patients will be notified when their surgery or appointment is scheduled. They do not need to contact the hospital.

Patients who have concerns about their health status should contact their clinic or physician's office for guidance.

Anyone experiencing serious symptoms should call 9-1-1 or go to the nearest Emergency Department if able.

When will I be contacted regarding my appointment?

We are doing our best to see patients as quickly as possible; however, it will take time. We ask for your support and understanding as we work to resume services safely.

Services are being prioritized based on the ethical framework provided by Ontario Health, considering multiple factors such as the patients' condition, the implications of delaying care, equity of services and impact on vulnerable populations.

I'm coming in for an appointment, does this mean I can bring someone with me?

To help maintain physical distancing, patients coming for clinic visits or other outpatient services are asked to come alone. We have staff available to assist patients while in the hospital. If you require a support person, please speak to a member of your care team at Niagara Health before coming to the hospital. This support person must pass screening and follow the processes above.

What is the difference between an inpatient and someone coming for an appointment?

Inpatients are those who have been admitted to the hospital, meaning they are in a room on one of our units. This does not include patients coming for an appointment to areas such as Diagnostic Imaging (eg. X-Rays, CT scans, bone scans, etc.), the Walker Family Cancer Centre and Dialysis Units, as well as visits to our Emergency Departments and Urgent Care Centres.

Patients coming for appointments are asked to come alone if possible. We have team members who would be happy to assist you. If you need to bring someone to assist you, please let your care team know ahead of time as all visitors need to be approved in advance. Anyone accompanying you must also pass hospital screening. Please visit our [resuming services page](#) for more information.

I'm bringing my loved one to an appointment. If I cannot enter, how will I be informed of their results or care needs?

We encourage family members and caregivers to follow up with the patient's care provider.



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Updated December 10, 2020



Coming in for an appointment

I have an appointment booked. Could it change?

We will do everything possible to keep your appointment once it's scheduled.

However, it is possible that appointments could change. The COVID-19 pandemic is not over and we will need to alter services if there is an increase in COVID patients in the hospital. We will continue to prioritize emergency and urgent cases.

I have an upcoming surgery/procedure, how can I prepare for it?

As you get ready for surgery/procedure, you must self-isolate from others as much as possible. If you develop symptoms of COVID -19 (such as fever, cough, trouble breathing) before your surgery/procedure, please contact your physician for further instructions.

When should I arrive?

When your appointment is booked, your clinic will let you know when to arrive. To support physical distancing, we are spacing out appointments to avoid crowding in the hospital and waiting rooms. Please give yourself enough time to get to your appointment, but please do not come early.

Will I be seen in person or can my appointment be held virtually?

We continue to look at new ways to provide safe, high quality care for our patients. Where possible, we may book patient appointments virtually. This means you will be seen by your care provider by phone, or through a video virtual visit. Our care providers who offer this service are highly skilled and you will receive excellent care.



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Updated December 10, 2020



Providing support

Are Mental Health and Addictions services available?

COVID-19 has affected everyone differently and some people may be feeling worried, anxious and/or overwhelmed. There are services available at Niagara Health and in the community for those needing support. If you would like to know more about mental health and addiction resources across the Niagara Region, visit our [website](#).

If you or your loved one is experiencing a mental health and addiction emergency, we encourage you to go to the nearest Emergency Department. If you are experiencing any symptoms of COVID-19 or are unable to get to the hospital safely (for example if you have taken an overdose), stay home and call 9-1-1.

Please note: This printed handout is single-use only. Please do not share this handout with others. Visitors, please take this handout home with you.