

University Health Network Policy & Procedure Manual Clinical: Essential Care Partner COVID-19 Vaccination

Policy

University Health Network (UHN) is committed to providing high quality, person-centred care. UHN recognizes that family caregivers play an important role in the health and well-being of patients during the healing process. In response to the global COVID-19 pandemic, UHN has restricted access to its hospital and rehab sites, only permitting essential visitors or family caregivers, called “[essential care partners \(ECPs\)](#),” in accordance with guidelines from the Ontario Ministry of Health.

Note: Some exceptions apply on compassionate grounds or in emergency situations.

As of October 22, 2021, ECPs must show proof that they are [fully vaccinated](#) to entrance screeners. ECPs must have received their final (2nd) dose at least 14 days before the visit.

Proof of vaccination, if received in Ontario, can be obtained through the Government of Ontario’s [COVID-19 Vaccination Portal](#). [Vaccine records](#) from other jurisdictions will be accepted, as long as the ECP has received a Health Canada-approved vaccine.

ECPs who are not fully vaccinated against COVID-19 **will not** be permitted into UHN, unless they meet specific [exception criteria](#). If the not fully vaccinated ECP meets the [exception criteria](#), they must:

- show proof of a negative result from a COVID-19 polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test, received within the last 48 hours, **or**
- conduct a rapid antigen self-test at a UHN entrance and receive a negative test

Note: Any ECP that is unable to access PCR testing in the community will be able to perform a self-test at the main entrances.

Information about COVID-19 testing can be found at:

- **Government of Ontario:** [COVID-19 Test and Testing Location Information](#)
- **Public Health Agency of Canada:** [Understanding COVID-19 Testing](#)
- **Food & Drug Administration (U.S.):** [Coronavirus Disease 2019 Testing Basics](#)

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Exception Criteria

Consultation and collaboration with the care team is required to determine if an exception can be made and that a visit can be done safely. Unvaccinated ECPs visiting patients meeting the following criteria may be granted an exception:

- **Inpatient settings:**
 - a. **Patients who are at end-of-life (less than two weeks).**

Patients with a high risk of dying within the next two weeks must have 24 hour access to family/people of importance. Patients with more than two (2) ECPs (up to five (5) at Toronto Rehab) must be allowed access for others, including children. The clinical team must work with Infection Prevention and Control (IPAC) to enable access. Where space is limited, teams may offer scheduled access to accommodate different family members.
 - b. **Patients who are otherwise palliative or have a significant life limiting course with greater than two weeks expected** must have daily access to family/people of importance; up to two (2) visitors per day (up to five (5) at Toronto Rehab), at fixed times but not at the same time. Accommodations must be made for those with young children to allow for reasonable access.
 - c. **Patients who are under 18 years old.**
 - d. **Patients receiving a life altering diagnosis, experiencing a mental health crisis, or who have a significant developmental or intellectual delay.**
- **Outpatient settings:**
 - a. **Patients requiring a support person to safely attend their appointment** (e.g. due to dementia, significant developmental or intellectual delay, unable to effectively communicate, mobility issues, etc.).
 - b. **Patients who are under 18 years old.**
 - c. **Patients receiving a life altering diagnosis, experiencing a mental health crisis, or who have a significant developmental or intellectual delay.**

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ECP Validation Process

Inpatient Settings

- Patients/families must be asked for the names of their two (2) ECPs (up to five (5) at Toronto Rehab).
- Patients/families must be asked if these ECPs are fully vaccinated.
- If an ECP is not vaccinated, and the patient/family may request an exception, and the [exception criteria](#) must be reviewed.
- If an exception is appropriate and approved, the unit manager (or delegate) must note this exception in their communication with entrance screening staff.
- The ECP will be required to show proof of a negative PCR test done in the community within 48 hours of the visit, or do a rapid antigen self-test upon arrival.

Outpatient Settings

- During appointment reminder calls, patients must be asked if anyone is accompanying them to their appointment (i.e. an ECP). If so, the patient must be asked if the ECP is fully vaccinated.
- If the ECP is not fully vaccinated, the patient must be told about this policy and asked to bring someone who is fully vaccinated or come inside on their own, if safe to do so.
- If the patient does not have an alternate ECP and the ECP is required to attend the appointment for safety or compassionate reasons, the clinic must assess if the situation meets the [exception criteria](#).
- If the situation meets the [exception criteria](#), the clinic must communicate this to the entrance screeners.
- The ECP will be required to show proof of a negative PCR test done in the community within 48 hours of the visit, or do a rapid antigen self-test upon arrival.

Screening Process

- If an ECP has COVID-19 symptoms upon entrance screening, i.e. ECPs who are feeling unwell, have an infection, have symptoms of respiratory illness, flu-like illnesses or gastrointestinal symptoms, they **will not** be permitted to enter the hospital, regardless of their vaccination status.

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- Staff must enforce this policy whenever they suspect or have been informed of a visitor who is displaying any signs of illness, and the person must be asked to leave.

Note: If a conflict arises on this point and cannot be solved by staff, consult with the unit manager or administrator-on-site (AOS).

Note: ECPs should be advised to contact their healthcare provider or Telehealth Ontario for direction if they are unwell. COVID-19 testing is recommended, as applicable.

- ECPs who identify as any of the following **may not** visit.
 - a. COVID-19 positive
 - b. person under investigation (PUI)
 - c. a household member of a COVID-19 positive patient or PUI
 - d. under restriction from the [Health Protection and Promotion Act](#)
 - e. under restriction by the [Quarantine Act](#) (international travel)

Note: Exceptions may be made in certain circumstances, in consultation with the clinical manager and IPAC. If required, this will be referred via the [appeals process](#).

Appeals Process

The UHN clinical manager, the patient, or the ECP may contact Patient Relations. A collaborative decision will be made by Patient Relations, Bioethics, and IPAC.

Definitions

COVID-19 Vaccination Record: A government-issued record showing that all required doses of Health Canada-approved vaccine have been received at least 14 days before the visit date. Approved vaccines include two doses of Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, AstraZeneca/COVISHIELD, or one dose of Janssen/Johnson & Johnson.

Essential care partner (ECP): An ECP is a support person who is considered essential to the safety and well-being of a patient while they are in or at the hospital. They support a patient when the patient's safety is affected by being at the hospital by themselves.

This may include if the patient:

- has an intellectual or developmental disability
- has cognitive impairment (difficulty thinking clearly or using good judgement)
- is unable to communicate on their own

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- needs a caregiver's help to safely get to the appointment

ECPs will be permitted in accordance with the current criteria, as set out in Table 1 of the [Staff Tip Sheet: Essential Care Partners](#) guidance document.

Fully vaccinated: For the purpose of this policy, fully vaccinated means having received all required doses of a Health Canada-approved COVID-19 vaccine at least 14 days ago.

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