

Guidance on Service Animals during COVID-19 Emergency

As our visitor policies broaden, we are also making an adjustment to our policy on service animals on NM.org: “NM accommodates service animals for people with disabilities, as long as the presence of a service animal and designated handler does not violate current hospital visitor policies related to COVID-19 or infection prevention concerns. Contact your care team for questions and assistance.”

Current Restrictions Related to COVID-19

- **Inpatient and ED Settings:** Patients are able to have service animals in inpatient and ED settings, if a designated handler is present to take care of the service animal. Decisions around whether to allow a designated handler for a service animal should be based on current visitor policies. For example:
 - At **Central and West Region hospitals** (besides Marianjoy), a service animal and designated handler would be allowed in non-COVID units and the Emergency Department during approved hours, given the June visitor policy. Additionally, a service animal and designated handler would be allowed in COVID+ units, if a visitor is present as part of a visitor policy exception. For example:
 - Pediatric patient with a parent present, who could also care for the service animal
 - Patient with an intellectual, developmental or cognitive disability who has a support person as a reasonable accommodation that could also care for the service animal
 - At **Northwest Region hospitals**, a service animal and designated handler would only be allowed if a patient has a visitor or support person present as a visitor policy exception. For example:
 - Pediatric patient with a parent present, who could also care for the service animal
 - Patient with an intellectual, developmental or cognitive disability who has a support person as a reasonable accommodation that could also care for the service animal
 - For additional exceptional cases, contact your manager or evening administrator.
- **Outpatient Settings:** If a patient is able to care for the service animal during their outpatient visit (most common situation), they are allowed to have their service animal. If the patient is unable to care for their animal during their appointment (e.g., outpatient procedures), then a designated handler is required. Decisions on whether to allow a designated handler should be made based on current visitor policies for outpatient areas. Exceptions apply for those who have a visitor present who can also serve as the designated handler, such as pediatric patients with a parent present and patients with intellectual, cognitive, and developmental disabilities who has a support person present as an accommodation.
- As a reminder, employees should not serve as the designated handler of a patient’s service animal.

If We Cannot Allow a Service Animal

- Patient Relations can provide suggestions of boarding services and give the patient the opportunity to make such arrangements or identify a family member/friend to care for the service animal at home. Many local animal hospitals offer overnight boarding for dogs. Fees are the responsibility of the patient.
- If appropriate, we can offer that the patient can do a video call to see their service animal to help with maintaining the bond.
- We should consider alternative ways to meet the patients’ needs in the absence of the service animal.

Reminder on Areas where Service Animals are Not Allowed Due to Infection Prevention Concerns

- Further information on settings where we typically do not allow service animals due to Infection Prevention concerns can be found in local policies on Policy Manager. These continue to apply during COVID.