

# Essential Care Partner and Visitor Restrictions on Labour & Delivery and Maternal Newborn Units

## Frequently Asked Questions:

---



Thunder Bay Regional  
Health Sciences  
Centre

### What is the current visitation policy?

One support person may remain with a laboring mother for the duration of labour and birth and may remain for up to 6 hours post-partum, provided they pass the entrance screen.

### Why are these restrictions necessary?

We take the safety of moms and newborns very seriously and will do everything we can to protect our most vulnerable patients. Unfortunately, it is impossible to ensure appropriate physical distancing in the Maternal Newborn area for both patients and staff. For example, semi-private rooms would have two moms, plus two babies, two support people, plus additional staff – that many bodies in one area goes against Public Health guidelines.

Giving everyone Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) isn't an option due to global shortages. We must preserve PPE for the most appropriate usage by frontline health care workers.

It is important that we do everything we can to protect our most vulnerable patients, now, more than ever as our community starts to open up again. We recognize that for many these restrictions might seem to be too tight, however we do not want to find ourselves in a situation where we have an exposure or outbreak.

### Why is the limit 6 hours?

We recognize the importance of parents having time to bond with one another after the arrival of their baby. Many other birthing centres only allow support partners to remain for 2 hours after birth, but we felt that was not enough time. We wanted to allow sufficient time for the mother and baby to transition to the Maternal Newborn Unit and get settled, prior to the support partner having to leave.

The time limit of 6 hours had to be set in order to minimize the number of people that are in semi-private or ward rooms at one time after

the mother and baby have been transferred and also to provide consistency in the length of time support partners can remain. Each family's experience will be different, but equity and consistent access is imperative.

The limit of 6 hours provides time for bonding with the new baby, while also allowing us to stagger admissions to the same room. For example, we can keep a new mom and support person in Labour & Delivery for a few extra hours if necessary so that they aren't admitted to Maternal Newborn until the first person's support person is gone. Any longer than 6 hours, and that would become too difficult to manage due to the volume of patients.

### Are there exceptions for Essential Care Partners if the patient is in a private room?

No. Our Hospital is committed to providing equitable care. Exceptions for patients in private rooms will result in a two-tiered system where only patients who have the benefit of receiving a private room would get this privilege. In addition to this, demand for private rooms often exceeds availability which would further complicate our processes.

### How was this decision made?

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, specific guidelines and restrictions were developed for support partners during and after birth. Guidelines for the Women and Children's department were developed in alignment with the Hospital's Essential Care Partner guidelines, Patient and Visitor Movement Restrictions, COVID-19 best practices and recommendations, and in review and collaboration of other acute care hospitals in the province.

Our Hospital's guidelines are consistent with recommendations of the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care, and the Provincial Council for Maternal Child Health.

## **Are other hospitals in Ontario doing the same thing?**

All Hospitals in Ontario are in agreement that a mother has support during her labour and birth. The amount of time after birth that the support person can remain is what varies from hospital to hospital and is based on key factors such as space to maintain physical distancing, the availability of personal protective equipment, and the ability to ensure all patients and care partners remain compliant with the necessary infection control measures.

While some Level 1 birthing centres can allow care partners to stay with the new mother until discharge, most Level 2 birthing centres (like our Hospital) have similar or even stricter guidelines, with some hospitals requiring the care partner to leave 2 hours post-partum. This is because most Level 2 birthing centres have higher volumes of patients, as well more high risk births/patients that require additional precautions.

Each Hospital has developed their policies based on the recommendations of the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care, and the Provincial Council for Maternal Child Health.

## **How long do newborns and moms typically stay in the Labour & Delivery and Maternal Newborn unit?**

After a vaginal birth, mothers can go home as early as 4 hours after delivery and can be discharged directly from the Labour & Delivery department.

The average post-partum stay at our Hospital is 24 hours and the mother and baby would be transferred to the Maternal Newborn Unit approximately 2-4 hours after birth.

After a C-section, an average stay is three to four days on the Maternal Newborn Unit.