

Coronavirus (COVID-19) Fact Sheet for NIH Clinical Center (CC) Patients and Visitors

To protect patients, their visitors, and staff from COVID-19, the NIH CC has a screening process for patients and their visitors. This process is designed to prevent the spread of COVID-19 inside the NIH CC.

Please Note: The NIH CC is not a screening facility for the general public. Members of the public who believe they have coronavirus should seek care from their primary care doctor.

What will happen on entering the hospital?

You will be provided with a hospital mask. You will need to wear this all day unless you remove it for a test or treatment, or while eating or drinking. Everyone (patients, staff, and visitors) inside the NIH CC will wear a surgical mask that the NIH CC will supply.

What will happen when you arrive at your destination?

You will be asked several questions by a healthcare provider to determine if you are at risk for COVID-19 infection, including whether you have symptoms of COVID-19. If you are not at risk for COVID-19 infection, you will proceed with your appointment(s).

Will I be tested for COVID-19?

You may be tested for COVID-19 if you have COVID-19 symptoms, are having certain medical procedures, or if you will be an inpatient at the NIH CC. Visitors who are approved to room-in with a patient will also be tested. Other than these groups, we will not test anyone on request if they do not have symptoms.

What will happen if you have symptoms of COVID-19?

If you have COVID-19 symptoms, you and any visitors with you, will be asked to put on a mask and will be moved to another location for additional screening which may include testing for COVID-19. The test requires a swab of the inside of one nostril.

What will happen to my family members or visitors who are not patients if they have symptoms of COVID-19?

Family or visitors who have COVID-19 symptoms, but are not patients, will be asked to contact their primary care practitioner for follow up. They will not be allowed to remain at the NIH CC. The ONLY exception is if the family or visitor is the caregiver of an adult or pediatric (age 18 and under) patient and the caregiver and patient arrived together. In that instance, both the caregiver and patient will be escorted to another location in the hospital together for further assessment.

Why are the staff wearing masks?

Staff are wearing masks to avoid exposure to respiratory viruses, such as COVID-19, flu, and seasonal cold viruses.

Why am I asked to wear a mask?

All patients and visitors will be given a mask to wear while at the NIH CC so that everyone is protected. The mask can only be removed when eating or drinking, when a medical procedure requires it, and if the patient and visitor are alone in their room. The mask should be put on any time a staff member enters your room. We also encourage social distancing of at least 6 feet whenever possible.

If I have been vaccinated for COVID-19, do I still need to wear a mask?

Yes. It is important for everyone to continue wearing a mask while at the NIH CC.

If I have been vaccinated for COVID-19, do I still need to be tested for COVID-19?

Yes. Measures such as testing and wearing masks protect NIH CC patients, because many patients are at increased risk of severe COVID-19 if infected.

If I get COVID-19 testing, does that mean that I have COVID-19 infection?

You will be tested for COVID-19 if you have symptoms of COVID-19 or may be undergoing certain medical procedures. The symptoms of COVID-19 can be the same as other infections and medical conditions. Only a test for COVID-19 can determine whether COVID-19 infection is the cause of your symptoms.

How will I learn about my COVID-19 test results?

If the test result is available while you are at the NIH CC, you can ask your medical team for the result. This test result will also be available with your other medical records on the Patient Portal.

If my test is positive, will I have to leave the NIH CC?

If you have a positive test for COVID-19, your medical team will talk to you about the infection and your options for care. They will work with you to ensure that the best decision for your care is made and that all public health requirements are followed. If you are infectious, you may put others at risk and we will encourage you to stay at the NIH CC on isolation, plan to move you somewhere you can isolate safely, or may recommend you return home.

What other restrictions are in place for patients and visitors to the NIH CC?

Inpatients and their visitors must stay in their room until COVID-19 test results are available. They may leave their room for medical purposes. Once COVID-19 results are available and negative, inpatients and their visitors may walk in the public spaces of the hospital and outside. Patients must inform their nurse before leaving their unit to take a walk. Outpatients and their visitors are encouraged to stay inside the NIH CC for the full day of their visit. Patients and visitors may not visit any other patients and visitors. The NIH is a smoke-free campus so options for smoking during your visit are very limited. Please discuss options to quit smoking with your medical team or your primary care physician.

Who do I contact if I have more questions?

Please contact your NIH medical team if you have more questions about COVID-19.