



**Thursday, March 19, 2020 - 1:30 P.M.**

## **COVID-19 Update Ascension Wisconsin**

The COVID-19 situation continues to rapidly evolve. This document is intended to provide information for Ascension Wisconsin facilities in northeast Wisconsin. Additional notices will be sent as conditions warrant. Thank you for your patience and understanding during this unprecedented time.

### **Media Protocol Update:**

With respect to our visitor restrictions and the [CDC guidance for social distancing](#), until further notice, we are not allowing any media or film crews on-site for interviews or footage on our hospital campuses or in our facilities. This is in an abundance of caution, as our top priorities are the health and safety of our patients, associates, and visitors. We are still able to accommodate phone, online and virtual interview opportunities on a case-by-case basis, pending leadership or physician availability.

**Please note:** Any questions or information regarding patients under investigation (PUIs) or confirmed test results should be directed to public health.

For additional information on COVID19 and Ascension resources, please visit:  
<https://healthcare.ascension.org/Specialty-Care/Coronavirus> or call 1-833-981-0711.

### **NEW IN THIS UPDATE:**

- 1. Dedicated COVID-19 Information Hotline**
- 2. COVID-19 Testing Sites In Development**
- 3. Elective Surgeries Postponed**
- 4. Non-Medical United Way Information**
- 5. Expanding Hospital Capacity**
- 6. Tips for Virtual Hospital Visitation during COVID-19**

### **REMINDERS:**

- 1. Visitor Restrictions & Associate and Visitor Screening**
- 2. Social Distancing Efforts**



### **COVID-19 Testing Sites in Development**

Ascension Medical Group Wisconsin is developing drive-through testing sites for COVID-19. When available, individuals who wish to be tested must first be pre-screened by an Ascension Medical Group provider, by phone, or virtually using Ascension Online Care. We are working diligently with local and state health officials to operationalize these sites as quickly as possible to keep the health and safety of the communities we're privileged to serve a top priority.

The screening involves answering a series of questions about symptoms, travel history and any potential contact with COVID-19 patients. Patients who meet the criteria, which is based on guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, will be given an appointment for drive-through testing at the appropriate site.

There also is an Ascension COVID19 Hotline set up for those who have questions about COVID-19, are experiencing symptoms, or those who want to receive a text message to schedule an Ascension Online Care appointment with a provider. The toll-free number for Wisconsin is **1-833-981-0711**.

### **Ascension Wisconsin has launched a Toll-Free Information Line:**

Ascension Wisconsin has established a dedicated telephone resource for COVID-19 questions. This can be accessed 24/7 by calling **1-833-981-0711**. The launch of this service is intended to provide useful information to people in the communities we are privileged to serve who have questions about COVID-19. The hotline is an effort to reduce the number of incoming calls to our hospitals and clinics. We ask that this resource only be used for questions about COVID-19 and its symptoms. If you are experiencing a medical emergency, please dial 9-1-1.

### **Elective Surgeries Postponed**

In order to protect against potential COVID-19 exposure, and to ensure the availability of resources to meet emergent health needs during this pandemic, Ascension Wisconsin is following guidance by the CDC, the U.S. Surgeon General, and American College of Surgeons and postponing elective services and non-urgent medical appointments.

Our top priorities are the health and safety of our patients, associates and visitors. Ascension providers will continue to provide emergency surgeries and procedures and clinically evaluate time-sensitive care delivery needs. We recognize that each case is unique, so processes are in place to review requests for procedures that might be considered elective to determine issues of optimal timing and resource support.

Elective procedures are those that have options in terms of timing/level of urgency to be completed, or are determined non essential at this time.



Examples of postponed services include:

- Nonurgent procedures that would require intensive care unit (ICU) care
- Elective procedures that post-procedure would require occupancy in an inpatient hospital bed
- Elective procedures on high risk patients whereby post-procedure status may require occupancy in an inpatient hospital bed
- Elective procedures on any patient
- Annual Wellness Visits Well Child Visits (when immunization is not involved)

Any impacted patients will be notified directly. As cases of COVID-19 increase, Ascension continues to diligently monitor the situation to ensure we are protecting our patients, associates and the communities we are privileged to serve.

### **Non-Medical Services - United Way 2-1-1**

United Way's 2-1-1 service is now accepting calls for questions related to the Covid-19 crisis that are non-medical in nature. These calls might pertain to such needs as:

- Food delivery programs for home-bound seniors
- Transportation options, as some public transit services close down
- Nutrition programs for children who rely on free and reduced meals at school
- Information on emerging resources in the community

Residents across the state of Wisconsin as well as in Northeast Wisconsin region can access this service by calling 2-1-1 (or 1-800-924-5514). In addition, residents can text COVID19 to 211-211 to receive links to CDC information about the virus.

### **Hospital Capacity**

To prepare our health system for a possible surge of patients due to COVID-19, Ascension Wisconsin hospitals, ambulatory sites of care and clinics are postponing non-urgent procedures and medical visits in order to protect patients, preserve staff, personal protective equipment and patient care supplies.

These system-wide strategies help ensure patient and staff safety, while expanding available hospital capacity. Preparedness efforts are ongoing and involve local, statewide and national resources.

As cases of community spread of COVID-19 increase, Ascension continues to aggressively respond to this evolving situation to ensure we are protecting our patients, associates and the communities we serve.

### **Visitor Restrictions**

Ascension is further expanding temporary visitor restrictions, in both inpatient and outpatient settings. Our goal is to protect our associates and those we are privileged to serve by limiting possible exposure to COVID-19 and directing people to the right level of care.

The following visitor restrictions are similar to the infection control precautions we put in place in our



hospitals and care sites every year during flu season to protect our patients, visitors and associates. The updated restricted visitation policy at Ascension Wisconsin includes the following:

- All visitors, associates, clinicians and vendors entering Ascension Wisconsin facilities will be screened for flu-like symptoms including fever, cough, runny nose/nasal congestion and or sore throat.
- No visitors who screen positive for cough, fever or difficulty breathing will be permitted into the facility.
- To implement this, Ascension Wisconsin facilities will be implementing minimized entrance points as needed.
- Visitors will not be permitted for patients under investigation (PUIs) or with a confirmed case of COVID-19. Virtual options will be discussed with patients and families.
- It is highly recommended that children under age 18 do not visit during this time.
- Only one visitor per patient is allowed at one time, with the exception of pediatrics, obstetrics (labor and delivery) and end-of-life care.
- Our hospitals in northeast Wisconsin are limiting visiting hours:
  - Ascension St. Elizabeth in Appleton and Ascension Mercy in Oshkosh: 11a - 7p daily.
  - Ascension Calumet Hospital in Chilton: 8a - 6p daily.
- Per guidance from the CDC, we are restricting visitors who have returned from a country within the past 14 days that the CDC has designated as Level 3 Warning or Level 2 for COVID-19.

Those who do visit are encouraged to please wash their hands and use hand sanitizer before and after any visit. We appreciate the cooperation of our visitors, patients, associates and providers to support our infection control efforts and help minimize the spread of respiratory infections and COVID-19.

#### **Tips for Virtual Visitation During COVID-19:**

We understand that during this time it is important to stay connected to your loved ones and remain aware of their status while hospitalized. We encourage communication through the use of personal devices. Consider one of the following apps to connect virtually with your loved ones: Facebook Messenger, Facetime, Google hangouts, Google Duo, WhatsApp, Skype, Viber or Signal. You can download them in either the App Store (iPhone) or the Play Store (Android). Both patient and visitor will need to download the same application. Access to guest wi-fi at Ascension facilities is available by connecting to AH-Guest.

#### **Social Distancing Efforts:**

Ascension is adhering to the [recommendations of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) to minimize exposure and support the health of our communities by avoiding large gatherings and maintaining distance from others when possible. Here are some of the ways we are accomplishing this:

- Associates whose job duties allow working remotely are now required to do so.
- Facility Volunteer programs have been suspended until further notice.
- Job Shadowing opportunities have been suspended until further notice.



- Non-essential business travel by Ascension associates has been suspended.
- Use of virtual technology for business meetings and other operational issues is being utilized.
- Community event activities being held at Ascension Wisconsin facilities or hosted by Ascension Wisconsin including large events, defined as greater than 50 people, are postponed.
- These adjustments will be reassessed if the situation changes.

### **What should people do if they think they may have symptoms or have been exposed to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19)?**

Anyone who believes they may have had contact with someone who is confirmed to have, or is being evaluated for, the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), should **contact their physician**.

To help prevent the spread of disease, the CDC recommends that individuals **call ahead before going to a doctor's office or emergency room** and inform clinical staff about symptoms and any recent travel. Our healthcare professionals will work with public health and CDC to determine if you need to be tested for COVID-19.

### **Consider Virtual Care**

During this time, with many individuals who may be working from home, or who have children who are at home and out of school, or individuals who are working shifts at various times of day that may make it difficult to take off work to see a doctor, it may be a good time to consider 'virtual care' — an option for patients with low-acuity, urgent care issues who would like a virtual visit with a provider using the mobile device of their choice, smartphone, laptop or tablet.

Ascension Online Care offers visits with a doctor 24/7 from work, travel or home. Use code HOME for a discounted \$20 visit during the month of March. Download the app at [www.ascension.org/onlinecare](http://www.ascension.org/onlinecare). Available in all 50 states. No insurance required.

### **Preparation/Protocols/Precautions**

Our top priorities are the health and safety of our patients, associates and visitors. We have infection control specialists at our sites of care who work closely with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and local public health authorities to explore and identify avenues to detect, protect and respond in accordance with current recommendations and guidelines. We have strong infection control precautions and protocols in place based on current recommendations and guidelines, and our caregivers are trained in these protocols, so we can protect our patients, associates and visitors at all times. Our infection control specialists also work closely with the CDC and local public health authorities to stay updated on any additional measures we need to consider implementing as we all learn more about this virus and how to stop it.

### **Operational Key Points**

- Preparedness efforts are an ongoing activity for our organization and involve local, statewide and national resources.
- Each facility has an established Emergency Operations Plan with individualized plans for a number of scenarios, including pandemics.



- Ascension is committed to regularly communicating with our care team members across our all markets and settings.
- This includes keeping our care team informed with regular communication on the latest information related to COVID-19.
- Our facilities have activated our emergency response protocols which utilize the Incident Command System (ICS). ICS is a standardized system to allow efficient management and communication with internal and external agencies.

#### **Updating Infection Prevention Protocols for novel coronavirus (COVID-19)**

Our infection control specialists work closely with the CDC and local public health authorities to follow proper infection control precautions and protocols to protect our patients, visitors and associates, including any additional measures we need to consider implementing. It is possible that the CDC may modify recommended procedures as they learn more about this virus. If they do so, we will update our procedures accordingly.

#### **How can individuals best protect themselves and others from the novel coronavirus (COVID-19)?**

According to the CDC, the complete clinical picture with regard to COVID-19 is not fully known. COVID-19 is a new disease and we are still learning how it spreads, the severity of illness it causes, and to what extent it may spread. The best ways to prevent the spread of viruses are to:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed or unsanitized hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.
- Reduce unnecessary travel and wear a mask when going out in public if you think you have a contagious respiratory infection.