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MaineGeneral Medical Center makes visitation policy restrictions in response to H1N1

MaineGeneral Medical Center is taking steps to restrict visitors to its two inpatient campuses due to the spread of the H1N1 virus throughout Maine.

The measures being taken at the Thayer Campus in Waterville and the Augusta Campus include limiting how many visitors a patient can see at one time and setting age limits for visitors. Some specific requirements may vary by department. Restrictions to critical-care and maternity areas, for example, will be tailored specifically for patients in those departments.

“We are reminded almost daily that the H1N1 virus is spreading in Maine, and vaccine at this point is in short supply,” said Dr. Steve Diaz, vice president for medical administration at MGMC. “The steps we’re taking strike the right balance between being cautious on the medical side and allowing our patients and loved ones to interact with one another.”

MaineGeneral follows the lead of the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention, among other agencies, in developing its guidelines, Diaz said. Here are the new measures being adopted this week:

- Visitors will be limited to no more than two at a time in most cases.
- No visitors under the age of 16 will be permitted, except for sibling visits to healthy new mothers and babies. Visiting children will be screened for cough, sore throat or fever of 100 degrees or higher before being allowed access to a patient.
- Visitors to patients admitted with influenza-like illnesses will be limited to two people chosen by the patient. Children under the age of 16 will be restricted from visiting patients with influenza unless there are extenuating circumstances.
- Visitors will see signs about proper hand and respiratory hygiene. Visitors should use hand sanitizers upon entering the hospital, entering the patient’s room, leaving the room and leaving the hospital.
- Persons who are ill will not be allowed to visit patients and will be encouraged to leave the facility.
- Visitors must follow isolation precautions as directed by posted signs outside of the patient’s room.

Sherri Woodward, senior vice president of patient services and chief nursing officer at MaineGeneral, noted the H1N1 virus can spread from visitors and patients to staff and from staff to patients. Hundreds of MaineGeneral employees who deal directly with patients have been vaccinated against H1N1, she said.

“We are taking these additional steps to protect our patients and our staff from getting H1N1,” Woodward said, adding that MaineGeneral Medical Center expects to lift the new restrictions once the H1N1 flu activity subsides throughout the region.

For more information about the H1N1 virus, go to: www.maineflu.gov and to www.mainegeneral.org.