The Intensive Care Unit (ICU) Visitors’ Guide

This information describes what to expect while your loved one is in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) at Memorial Sloan Kettering (MSK).

The ICU can be overwhelming and stressful, and it can be hard to understand what’s going on. It’s normal to have questions, and the ICU team is here to help you. When you have questions or if there’s anything we can do to support you, please let us know.

About the ICU

The ICU is located at:

1275 York Avenue (between East 67th and East 68th Streets)
New York, NY 10065
M elevator to the 11th floor

Admissions Process

After your loved one is brought to the ICU, please wait in the Visitors’ Lounge on the 11th floor. Volunteers in the Visitors’ Lounge (daytime and evening) will be there to answer your questions and help you. They’re also available to talk with you and provide emotional support. The volunteers wear blue coats so that you can find them easily.

The admissions process can take up to 2 hours, depending on your loved one’s condition. Please be patient during this time. We are doing everything we can to make your loved one as comfortable as possible and to make sure they’re safe and stable.
As soon as your loved one can have visitors, a member of the ICU team will come to the lounge and bring you to your loved one’s room.

**What to Expect in the ICU**

Each patient in the ICU has their own room. Most patients will be attached to medical devices with cables and tubing. Each medical device has alarms that alert the nurses to changes in the patient’s clinical condition or as a response to their movements. The nurses know what these alarms mean and will respond to them as needed.

**About the ICU Team**

The ICU team includes many well-trained healthcare providers that are experts and experienced in intensive care (also known as critical care). These ICU team members can include any of the following roles:

- **The ICU Attending** is the doctor who makes decisions about the patient’s care. They’re trained in critical care medicine. The ICU Attending leads all the members of the ICU care team twice a day, in the morning and in the evening, in visiting and discussing the progress of each ICU patient. This process is called “doing rounds.”

- **ICU Fellows** are doctors who have been trained in internal (general) medicine or another specialty and are now being further trained in critical care.

- **Residents** are doctors who have completed their medical school training.

- **Nurse Practitioners (NPs) and Physician Assistants (PAs)** have training and experience in critical care. They’re also known as Advanced Practice Providers (APPs).

- **ICU nurses** are registered nurses (RNs) who specialize in critical care nursing. They give patients day-to-day bedside care. The same nurse will care for your loved one daily as much as possible so that they get to know your loved one and their needs. Our ICU nurses work 3 shifts: 7:00 AM to 7:30 PM, 12:00 PM to 12:30 AM, or 7:00 PM to 7:30 AM.

- **Social Workers** help families deal with emotional and practical issues that can come up when a person is very sick. There is a Social Work office in the
Visitors’ Lounge. Please feel free to step in and talk to the ICU Social Worker.

- **Respiratory Therapists** are specially trained to care for patients with breathing problems.
- **Clinical Dietitian Nutritionists** make sure that ICU patients get proper nutrition when it’s appropriate. They will help them make food choices when they can eat or eat with a feeding tube placed in their stomach.
- **Physical Therapists (PTs)** help patients get their physical strength back during and after their illness.
- **Occupational Therapists (OTs)** help patients care for themselves as much as possible. The OTs help patients work on the skills they will need to do for everyday activities.
- **Patient Care Technicians (PCTs)** and **Nursing Assistants (NAs)** help nurses with bedside care.
- **Unit Assistants** help the ICU work more smoothly by answering phone calls, responding to patient and visitor questions, and coordinating services.
- **Medical students** may work with other healthcare providers and observe care during the day.
- During each shift, the ICU is managed by a **Charge Nurse** and the **ICU Nurse Leader**. The Charge Nurse and Nurse Leader manage patient care and patient transfers within the ICU unit. They work closely with all members of the ICU team and talk with patients and family members as needed. Family members and patients can also schedule time with the Charge Nurse or Nurse Leader if they have questions or concerns.
- **The ICU Clinical Nurse Specialist** works with the care team to oversee the nursing practice. They serve as a clinical resource.

**Visiting Your Loved One in the ICU**

It’s important for patients to have visits from family and friends. You can visit your loved one every day between 11:00 AM and 7:00 PM. Visits can sometimes be tiring for patients, so it’s important to keep track of your time with your loved one. Talk with the bedside nurse to come up with a visiting schedule that’s best for your loved one. ICU Quiet Time is between 3:00 PM and 4:00 PM every day.
This gives the ICU patients time to rest. During this time, we ask that family and friends go to the Visitors’ Lounge.

While in the ICU Visitors’ Lounge, please follow these guidelines:

- Be respectful to other visitors’ and be mindful of your use of space and the volume and content of your conversations.
- Help keep the Visitor’s Lounge as clean as possible. Eat your meals in the cafeteria on the first floor and not in the lounge. You may bring snacks or drinks into the lounge, but always clean up after yourself. There are 2 vending machines with snacks in the lounge.
- Limit the time you spend in the Visitors’ Lounge. No more than 4 people from 1 family or group should be in the Visitors’ Lounge at one time. There’s extra space in the main hospital waiting area on the first floor (1275 York Avenue) where you can wait if you have more than 4 people with you.
- The Visitors’ Lounge can comfortably seat 35 visitors. Don’t bring other furniture, such as chairs, bedding, or air mattresses into the Visitors’ Lounge at any time.
- The Visitors’ Lounge is cleaned every night between 11:00 PM and 12:30 AM. During that time, you will need to leave the lounge so that our staff can keep it clean.
- There are 2 bathrooms in the ICU Visitors’ Lounge. There are more bathrooms on the first floor near the M elevators.
- While you’re walking to your loved one’s room, be respectful of the privacy of the other patients and their visitors. Please don’t gather in the ICU hallways.

While you’re in your loved one’s room, please follow these guidelines:

- No more than 2 visitors can be at your loved one’s bedside at one time.
- Let your loved one know you’re there with them and that you support them. You can do this by:
  - Touching and holding their hands
  - Talking to your loved one and reminding them what day and time it is
  - Bringing in pictures or newspapers
• There may be times during visiting hours when the ICU staff asks you to step outside to the Visitors’ Lounge so that they can provide care to your loved one. If the nurse asks you to leave the room, please understand that it’s in your loved one’s best interest.

• Space in patients’ rooms are limited, so please take home any belongings that your loved one doesn’t need.

• Don’t use your cell phone at the patient’s bedside. Make calls outside the ICU. You can make calls from the Visitors’ Lounge, but be mindful of other visitors.

• Food and drinks brought into the patients’ rooms can’t be stored in the shared patient refrigerator. This is to prevent the spread of infection.

Preventing Infection

Hand hygiene

Germs are often found on your hands or on things you touch. When germs get on or in the body, they can cause an infection. All patients are at risk for infection while they’re in the hospital.

Hand hygiene is the best way to prevent the spread of germs and infections. It only takes 15 seconds of washing your hands or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer (such as Purell®) to kill the germs that cause infections.

• If you’re washing your hands with soap and water, wet your hands, apply soap, rub them together thoroughly for 15 seconds, then rinse. Dry your hands with a disposable towel and use that same towel to turn off the faucet.

• If you’re using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, be sure to cover every part of your hands with it, rubbing them together until they’re dry.

• Read the resource Hand Hygiene and Preventing Infection (www.mskcc.org/pe/hand_hygiene) for more information.

Infection control precautions

All patients in the ICU are placed on ICU standard isolation precautions (safety measures). These precautions help protect your loved one. There is a sign posted on the door of the patient’s room or on the electronic display outside the patient’s room to let you know what type of isolation they will need.
- All staff and visitors who enter the patient’s room must clean their hands either with Purell® hand sanitizer or soap and water and wear a gown and gloves. The gowns and gloves are kept outside the patient’s room.

- Each time you enter the room, you will need to put on a new clean gown and gloves.

- Before you leave your loved one’s room, take off the gown and gloves and throw them out in the garbage bin inside the room. As soon as you leave the room, clean your hands with either Purell® hand sanitizer or soap and water.

- Anyone who has a cold or any signs of illness shouldn’t visit the ICU.

- Use the hooks outside the room to hang your coats and personal belongings.

- **Don’t bring fresh flowers or live plants into the ICU.** The water in vases and soil in plants may carry germs that can cause infections in very sick patients.

- To prevent exposing patients to contagious viruses and infections, visitors shouldn’t bring infants and young children who aren’t able to follow the infection control precautions into the ICU.

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**Rehabilitation Therapy and Early Mobility**

ICU patients are assessed by physical and occupational therapists to see how they can improve their strength and conditioning. When you visit, try to help your loved one feel awake and alert during the day. This way, they can participate in the physical and occupational therapy sessions that will help improve their overall health and well-being.

All patients attached to mechanical ventilators (machines that help people breathe) are assessed for our Early Mobility Program. In this program, the bedside nurse and a team of therapists (physical, occupational, and respiratory therapists) help patients increase the amount of activity they can do each day. This may include doing activities in bed, sitting in a chair, or walking.
Delirium

Patients in the ICU may sometimes develop delirium, which is a sudden change in the way a person thinks and acts. Many things can cause delirium, and you should talk with your loved one’s healthcare team about what may be causing it. The ICU staff members are trained to help your loved one if they develop delirium and know ways to manage and treat it. You can help prevent delirium or help your loved one if they get delirium by doing the following things:

- Talk with your loved one about where they are, the date, and the time.
- Encourage your loved one to get help from a physical and occupational therapist.
- Bring your loved one’s glasses and dentures, if they have them, to the hospital so they can use them.
- Show them pictures of your family or familiar items and talk with them about it.
- Limit TV and provide quiet time by letting your loved one take naps during the day and sleep at night.

For more information about delirium and how you can help, read the resource Caring for Someone with Delirium (www.mskcc.org/cancer-care/patient-education/delirium). You can also talk with a member of your loved one’s healthcare team.

Patient Updates

Different members of the ICU team can give you a daily progress report either at the ICU bedside, in the ICU conference room, or in the consultation room in the Visitors’ Lounge. More formal family meetings can also be planned with members of the ICU team, if needed. It’s important to know that the ICU team works closely with your loved one’s primary doctor (oncologist or surgeon) to coordinate care and will also review their case with other specialists as needed.

MSK follows the national standards for security and confidentiality of health information. These are the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) standards. You can read about the MSK privacy policy by going to www.mskcc.org/cancer-care/privacy.
Calling for updates

There should be 1 contact person assigned by the family to get updates and information about your loved one. They should also give the nurse their contact information so that the nurse can call if there are any changes in your loved one’s condition. The contact person can call the ICU at 212-639-7555 for updates. The contact person should share updates with the rest of the family or friends as your loved one would want.

If possible, avoid calling between 7:00 AM and 9:00 AM and between 7:00 PM and 9:00 PM. During these times, the nurses are getting ready to change shifts and may not be able to take your call.

Caring for Yourself

Having a relative or friend in the ICU can be very stressful. It’s important that you take care of yourself. Your loved one needs you to be strong and well. The following suggestions may help.

- Get some rest. Leave the hospital at night after visiting hours and try to sleep at home.
- Eat regularly and drink plenty of liquids so you can stay healthy and hydrated.
- There is a cart with free coffee, tea, and pastries brought into the ICU Visitors’ Lounge each morning.
  - You can also buy snacks and drinks from the vending machines in the Visitors’ Lounge or use the hospital’s cafeteria or gift shop located on the 1st floor.
- Try to spend some time outside the hospital. While your loved one is resting, you may want to go out to eat or take a walk.
- Keep in contact with your family and friends.
- Relax in the Visitors’ Lounge. Feel free to use the hospital’s “guest” wireless (WiFi) network, the computers, or the USB outlets to charge your phone.
MSK Support Services

Chaplaincy Services
212-639-5982
Our chaplains are available to listen, help support family members, pray, contact community clergy or faith groups, or to simply be a comforting companion and a spiritual presence. Anyone can request spiritual support, regardless of formal religious affiliation.

The Mary French Rockefeller All Faith Chapel is located in room M106 near the main lobby of the hospital at 1275 York Avenue (between East 67th and East 68th Streets). It’s open 24 hours a day.

Chaplains can be reached during the day at 212-639-5982. If you have an emergency, please call the hospital operator at 212-639-2000 and ask for the chaplain on call. You can also ask the nurse to arrange for a chaplain to visit.

Integrative Medicine Service
646-888-0800
Our Integrative Medicine Service offers many therapies to complement traditional medical care. Some of our services include music therapy, mind/body therapies, dance and movement therapy, yoga, and touch therapy. Our services are available to patients, their families and caregivers, and the general public and can be reached at 646-888-0800.

Supportive Care Service
Our Supportive Care Service is dedicated to relieving pain and improving the quality of life for patients at MSK. Supportive Care (sometimes called Palliative Care) includes any treatment given to relieve the symptoms caused by cancer. Patients can get supportive care at any point during treatment.

Our doctors and nurses specialize in helping patients manage physical symptoms, such as pain, shortness of breath, and nausea, as well as emotional issues, such as sadness, depression, and anxiety. We work with the patient’s primary team, providing an extra layer of support. If you feel that you or your loved one may benefit from the care provided by the Supportive Care Service, talk with your doctor or nurse.
Patient Representatives
212-639-7202
The Patient Representatives (Patient Reps) can be reached at 212-639-7202 and are here to make sure your rights are respected, and your concerns are addressed. The Patient Reps can speak on your behalf, represent your interests, and answer any questions you have about hospital policies and procedures.

For a full list of support services at MSK, read the resource MSK Support Services (www.mskcc.org/cancer-care/patient-education/mskcc-support-services).

If you have any questions, contact a member of your healthcare team directly. If you're a patient at MSK and you need to reach a provider after 5:00 PM, during the weekend, or on a holiday, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.