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 experience 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 on the 11th floor of the main hospital at MSK. It’s located at 1275 York Avenue, between East 67th and East 68th Streets. To get to the ICU, take the 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.

The admissions process can take up to two hours, depending on the patient’s condition. Please be patient during this time. We are doing everything we can to make your loved one as comfortable as possible and make sure they’re safe and stable.

As soon as your loved one is able to have visitors, a member of the ICU team will come to the lounge and bring you to your loved one’s room.

What You Should Expect in the ICU

Most patients in the ICU are surrounded by medical devices and tubing. Each
piece of equipment has an alarm that alerts the nurses to changes or movements. The nurses are skilled in understanding these alarms and responding appropriately.

**About the ICU Team**

The ICU team includes many healthcare providers that have a lot of training and experience in intensive care (also known as critical care).

- The ICU attending is the doctor who makes decisions about the patient’s care. They are trained in critical care medicine.
- ICU fellows are doctors who have completed training in internal medicine or another specialty and are now getting advanced training 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.
- ICU nurses are registered nurses (RNs) who specialize in critical care nursing. They give patients the 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 and their needs. Our ICU nurses work 3 shifts: 8:00 am to 8:30 pm, noon to 12:30 am, or 8:00 pm to 8:30 am.
- Social workers help families deal with non-medical emotional and practical issues that come up when a person is very sick.
- Respiratory therapists are specially trained to care for patients with breathing problems.
- Dietitians make sure that patients get proper nutrition while they are in the ICU, when they are able to eat.
- 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 with less pain and fatigue. They help patients improve the skills they need to do everyday activities.
- Patient care technicians (PCTs) help nurses with bedside care.
Clinical nurse specialists (CNS) help patients and families understand complex treatments and help staff nurses when needed.

The nurse leader and charge nurse (nurse in charge of each shift) oversee the delivery of all patient care within the unit. They work closely with the other members of the ICU team, patients, and family members. Family members and patients can schedule time with the nurse leader or charge nurse if they have questions or concerns.

Medical students observe care throughout the day.

Volunteers in the visitors lounge can 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 identify them easily.

### Visiting Your Loved One

You can visit your loved one every day between 11:00 am and 7:00 pm. It’s important for patients to have visits from family and friends. However, visits can sometimes be tiring for patients, so please keep track of your time in the patient’s room. Talk with the bedside nurse to come up with a visiting schedule that’s best for your loved one.

While in the ICU, please follow these guidelines:

- Be respectful to other visitors.

- Limit the time you spend in the visitors lounge. No more than four people in one family group should be in the visitors lounge. There’s extra space in the main waiting area on the first floor of the hospital, where you can wait if you have more than four people with you.

- The visitors lounge is cleaned every night from 11:00 PM to 12:30 AM. During that time, you will need to leave the lounge so that our staff can keep it clean.

- ICU Quiet Time is between 3:00 pm and 4:00 pm every day. This is to allow the ICU patients to rest. During this time, we ask that family and friends go to the visitors lounge.

While you’re in the room with your loved one, please follow these guidelines:
• No more than two visitors can be at the patient’s bedside at a time. The rest of the visitors can wait in the ICU visitors lounge on the 11th floor or the main waiting area on the 1st floor.

• If the nurse asks you to leave, please understand that it’s in your loved one’s best interest.

• Reassure your loved one of your support and presence.

• Touch and hold your loved one’s hands.

• Talk to your loved one and remind them what day and time it is.

• Bring pictures, newspapers, a TV schedule, or a calendar.

• Respect the privacy of other patients in the ICU.

• Take home any patient belongings that you can. Space in the ICU is limited.

• Don’t use your cell phone at the patient’s bedside. Instead, please make calls outside the ICU. You can make calls from the visitors lounge.

• Food and drinks that have been brought in to the patient’s room can’t be stored in the shared patient refrigerator. This is to prevent the spread of infection.

**Preventing Infection**

**Hand hygiene**

Germs are often carried on your hands or on objects that you touch. When germs get into the body, they can cause an infection. All patients are at risk for infection while 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.
Infection control precautions

All patients in the ICU are placed on ICU standard isolation precautions. These precautions help protect your loved one during their stay. There is a sign posted on the door of the patient’s room to let you know what type of isolation they will need.

- All staff and visitors who enter the 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 room.
- Each time you enter the room, you will need to wear 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 should not visit the ICU.
- Use the hooks outside the room to hang your coats and personal belongings.
- No fresh flowers or live plants are allowed in the ICU. The water in vases and soil in plants may carry germs that can cause infection in very sick patients.

Early Mobility Program

All patients on mechanical ventilators (machines that help patients 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.

Try to engage your loved one so that they feel awake and alert during the day. This way they can participate in occupational and physical therapy as best as they can. This will help to improve their overall health and well being.

Patient Updates

The ICU team makes rounds every morning and evening to discuss each patient’s plan of care. The team works closely with the patient’s primary doctor.
(oncologist or surgeon) and will also work with other specialists as needed.

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.

We encourage you to ask questions. Family meetings can be planned with members of the ICU team, including the attending, NP, PA, nurse, social worker, and a patient representative, if 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

We ask that there be 1 contact person to receive information about your loved one. Information about the patient will be given to that person only. 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 the patient would wish. They should also give the nurse their own contact information so that the nurse can call if there are any changes in the patient’s condition.

If possible, please don’t call between 7:30 am and 9:30 am and between 7:30 pm and 9:30 pm. This is the time when the nurses are busy exchanging information with the next shift of nurses and may be unable to take your call.

Caring for Yourself

Having a relative or friend in the ICU can be a very stressful experience. It is 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 to maintain your strength.
- There is a cart with coffee, tea, and pastries that is brought into the ICU
visitors lounge each morning.

- You are also welcome to enjoy refreshments from the beverage area in the visitors lounge or use the hospital’s cafeteria or gift shop located on the 1st floor.

- For your well-being, 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.

- Maintain contact with family and friends.

- Relax in the visitors lounge. Please feel free to use the wireless network, the computers or the outlet based USB connectors to charge your phone.

You can also donate blood and ask friends and family members to do the same. Call the Blood Donor Room at 212-639-7643 for more information or to make an appointment.

**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 Ave, between East 67th and East 68th Streets. It’s open 24 hours a day. If you have an emergency, please call the hospital operator at 212-639-2000 and ask for the chaplain on call.

**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.

The Bendheim Integrative Medicine Center is located at 1429 First Avenue, at East 74th Street.
Palliative Medicine Service
Our Palliative Medicine Service is dedicated to relieving pain and improving the quality of life for patients at MSK. Palliative care includes any treatment given to relieve the symptoms caused by cancer. Patients can get palliative 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 Palliative Medicine Service, talk with your doctor.

Patient Representatives
212-639-7202
The patient representatives at MSK are here to make sure your rights are respected and your concerns are addressed. We can speak on your behalf, represent your interests, and answer any questions you have about hospital policies and procedures. We’re available anytime, but are most helpful while a situation is occurring, instead of after the fact.

Social Work
212-639-7020
Our social workers provide emotional support and guidance to patients and their families and friends. Some of our services include ongoing programs for patients who are in treatment and their caregivers and in-person and online support groups. We can also help with practical issues such as transportation problems and financial concerns.

Social workers are available on every patient floor of the main hospital and at all of the outpatient facilities, including our regional clinics. To speak with a social worker, ask your doctor or nurse, or call the number listed above.

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