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. 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. Please let us know when you have questions or if there’s anything we can do to support you.

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

The ICU Admissions Process

The ICU admissions process can take up to 2 hours, depending on your loved one’s condition. Please be patient during this time. We do everything we can to make your loved one as comfortable
as possible and to make sure they’re safe and stable.

**Visiting Your Loved One in the ICU**

Ensuring the health and safety of our patients and staff is our top priority as we continue to meet the challenges presented by COVID-19. Limiting the number of people in our facilities is one of our most important safeguards. To maintain proper social distancing and comply with New York Department of Health regulations, we must limit the number of visitors. Visitors should register 1 day in advance using the visitor registration form.

Please note that our visitor policy may change suddenly at any time.

ICU visiting hours are from 11:00 AM to 7:00 PM.

Patients in the ICU can have 2 visitors per day. Only 1 visitor is allowed at a time. Visitors can switch out once per day. Once you leave the hospital, you won’t be able to go back in.

It’s important for patients to have visits from family and friends, but visits can sometimes be tiring for patients, so it’s important to keep track of your time with your loved one.

**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.

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

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

**About the ICU Team**

The ICU team includes many well-trained healthcare providers who are experts in intensive care (also called critical care). These ICU team members can include any of the following healthcare providers:

- The **ICU Attending** is the doctor who makes decisions about
your loved one’s care. They’re trained in critical care medicine. Twice a day (in the morning and evening), the ICU Attending leads all the members of the ICU care team in visiting each ICU patient and discussing their progress. This 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. As much as possible, the same nurse will care for your loved one so 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 people manage emotional and practical issues that can come up when their loved one is very sick. To talk with a social worker, ask your loved one’s healthcare provider for a referral or call 212-639-7020.

- **Respiratory Therapists** are specially trained to care for
patients with breathing problems.

- **Clinical Dietitian Nutritionists** make sure patients get proper nutrition when it’s appropriate. They’ll help your loved one make food choices when they can eat. If your loved one can’t eat, a clinical dietitian nutritionist will plan the nutrition they get 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. They also help patients work on the skills they’ll need 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. 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 to talk with the
Charge Nurse or Nurse Leader if they have questions or concerns.

- The **ICU Clinical Nurse Specialist** works with the ICU team to oversee the nursing practice. They serve as a clinical resource.

## 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 20 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 and apply soap. Rub your hands together thoroughly for 20 seconds, then rinse. Dry your hands with a paper towel and use that same paper 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](http://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’s a sign posted on the door of your loved one’s room or on the electronic display outside their room to let you know what type of isolation they’ll need.

- All staff and visitors who enter the patient’s room must clean their hands with an alcohol-based 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’ll 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 an alcohol-based 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 cut, dried, or live flowers or plants into the ICU.** They can carry germs that can cause infections in very sick patients.
- To prevent exposing patients to contagious viruses and
infections, ICU visitors shouldn’t bring infants and young children who aren’t able to follow the infection control precautions.

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 to help them breathe) are assessed for our Early Mobility Program. In this program, the ICU 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. Delirium 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.
- If your loved one uses glasses or dentures, bring them to the hospital so they can use them.
- Show your loved one 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/pe/delirium](http://www.mskcc.org/pe/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. 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 their care. They’ll also
review your loved one’s 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
Choose 1 contact person to get updates and information about your loved one. This person should also give the nurse their contact information so 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 the ICU 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 loved one in the ICU can be very stressful. It’s important to take care of yourself. Your loved one needs you to be strong and well. The following suggestions may help.
• Get 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.

• Keep in contact with your family and friends.

**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**
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/pe/support).

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.