

Coronavirus (COVID-19) Fact Sheet for NIH Clinical Center Patients and Visitors

Community spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) is being detected in certain regions of the United States, including the National Capital Region. To protect patients and staff, the NIH Clinical Center has implemented a screening process for all patients and their visitors. The screening process is designed to prevent the spread of COVID-19 inside the NIH Clinical Center.

Please Note: the NIH Clinical Center is not a screening facility for the general public. Members of the public who believe they have coronavirus should seek care from their primary care doctor.

What will happen at the screening location?

You will have your temperature taken and will be asked several questions to determine if you are at high risk for COVID-19 infection, including whether you have symptoms of COVID-19 infection. If you have low risk for COVID-19 infection, you will proceed to your appointment(s). Everyone (patients, staff, and visitors) inside the Clinical Center will wear a surgical mask that the Clinical Center will supply.

Will I be tested for COVID-19?

You may be tested for COVID-19 if you have COVID-19 symptoms, are having certain medical procedures, or if you will be an inpatient at the Clinical Center. Visitors who are rooming-in with a patient will also be tested. Other than these groups, we will not test anyone on request if they do not have symptoms.

What will happen if you have symptoms of COVID-19?

If you are found to have symptoms, you and any visitors with you will be asked to put on a mask and will be moved to another location for additional screening, which may include testing for COVID-19. The test requires a nasal swab.

What will happen to my family members or visitors who are not patients if they have symptoms of COVID-19?

Family members or visitors who have symptoms, but are not patients, will be asked to contact their primary care practitioner for follow up. They will not be allowed into the Clinical Center.

Why are the staff wearing protective gear?

Staff are wearing protective gear to avoid exposure to respiratory viruses, including flu, seasonal cold viruses, and COVID-19.

Why am I asked to wear a mask?

After screening, all patients and visitors will be given a mask to wear while inside the Clinical Center so that everyone is protected. The mask can only be removed when eating or drinking, when a medical procedure requires it, and if the patient and visitor are alone in their room. The mask should be put on any time a staff member enters your room. We also encourage social distancing of at least 6 feet whenever possible.

If I get COVID-19 testing, does that mean that I have COVID-19 infection?

If you are tested for COVID-19, it means you may have symptoms of COVID-19 or may be undergoing certain medical procedures. Other infections and other medical conditions can give you the same symptoms. Only a test for COVID-19 can determine whether COVID-19 infection is the cause of your symptoms.

How will I learn about my COVID-19 test results?

If the test result is available while you are at the Clinical Center, you can ask your medical team for the result. This test result will also be available with your other medical records on the Patient Portal.

If my test is positive, will I have to leave the NIH?

If you have a positive test for COVID-19, we will talk to you about the infection and your options for care. We will work with you to ensure that the best decision for your care is made and that all public health requirements are followed. If you are infectious, you may put others at risk and we will encourage you to stay at the Clinical Center on isolation or make arrangements to move you somewhere that you can isolate safely.

What other restrictions are in place for patients and visitors to the NIH Clinical Center?

Our goal is to keep our patients, visitors and staff safe through the pandemic. This has resulted in many changes to our daily routines. Inpatients and their visitors must stay in their room until COVID-19 test results are available unless they must leave their room for medical purposes. Inpatients and their visitors must stay inside the Clinical Center at all times, and must alert their nurse before leaving their unit to take a walk inside the building. Outpatients and their visitors are encouraged to stay inside the Clinical Center for the full day of their visit. The NIH is a smoke-free campus so options for smoking during your visit are very restricted. Please discuss options with your medical team or personal physician and seek information on how to quit smoking.

Who do I contact if I have more questions?

Please contact your medical team if you have more questions about COVID-19.