



St. Joseph Hospital Visitation Policy Revised Due to 2009 H1N1 Influenza Pandemic

Oct. 22, 2009

BELLINGHAM – In an effort to further protect its most vulnerable patients from the 2009 H1N1 influenza, St. Joseph Hospital, including the Childbirth Center, is amending its visitation policy consistent with recommendations of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

All persons entering St. Joseph Hospital will be screened for illness and required to sanitize their hands. Visitors must be healthy and not showing any influenza-like illness, including fever, headache, body aches, cough, sore throat or nasal congestion. Anyone with symptoms of influenza-like illness will be asked to visit at a later date, when he or she is no longer contagious. In addition to being healthy, all visitors must be at least 12 years old. There will now be no accommodation made for younger children in the hospital.

According to the CDC, pregnant women, infants and children are among the most vulnerable populations. This group has a higher risk of severe complications, including death, if exposed to the H1N1 flu. That is why it is so important to reduce the risk of exposure by limiting the number of visitors to certain areas of the hospital.

In those areas of the hospital, there are additional restrictions on visitation. Therefore effectively immediately, visitors to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) and the Childbirth Center, which includes Labor and Delivery, Postpartum, Special Care Nursery and the Pediatric Unit, will be restricted to two adult support persons. No other visitors will be allowed to enter these units.

Nancy Steiger, St. Joseph Hospital CEO and chief mission officer, said that while restricting visitation may be inconvenient for patients' family and friends, it is an important step to protect patients from this flu pandemic. "It is our intent to do everything we can to ensure that every patient receives safe, evidence-based compassionate care at St. Joseph Hospital." said Steiger. "In our mission to provide the safest care for patients, all efforts are aimed at preventing

the spread of H1N1.”

Those planning to visit St. Joseph Hospital should expect to:

- be asked if they have had any symptoms of influenza-like illness (ILI) within the past week;
- sanitize hands before entering; and
- wear a mask, if directed to do so.

For the duration of this pandemic, those with symptoms of a flu-like illness and those under 12 will not be allowed to visit. As the H1N1 flu season progresses, the visitation policy may be amended further as needed. We will provide that notification. For more information, please visit <http://www.peacehealth.org/Whatcom/>.

St. Joseph Hospital, a not-for-profit full-service hospital sponsored by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace, is part of the PeaceHealth system with hospitals in Alaska, Washington and Oregon. In addition to the hospital and PeaceHealth Medical Group, local PeaceHealth services include a diagnostic laboratory and a joint venture outpatient imaging service.

#