

For immediate release

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Elizabethtown Community Hospital Asks for Public's Help
Hospital announces strict changes to its visitor policy due to area flu activity

Elizabethtown, N.Y. (October 28, 2009) – Elizabethtown Community Hospital announces that visitors to the hospital will have to adhere to particular standards.

Visitors will have to meet the following criteria: they will have to be over 12, be symptom-free and they will have to wash their hands or use hand sanitizer before entering any patient area. If the visitor shows evidence of flu-like symptoms, the he or she must agree to wear a mask that covers the mouth and nose area.

Additionally, any person registering at the hospital who presents with flu symptoms will be required to wear a mask.

According to Julie Tromblee, the hospital's infection-control nurse, this is done in an effort to keep the flu virus from affecting hospital patients. "Our staff must follow standard precautions when interacting with patients", she said. "It simply makes sense, during this particularly virulent flu season, that we ask our visitors to do the same."

"Standard precautions" is a term referring to a group of infection prevention practices that apply to all patients, regardless of suspected or confirmed infection status, in any setting in which healthcare is delivered. It includes hand washing, using protective equipment (masks, gloves), disinfection, proper cough etiquette, isolation, etc.

According to Rod Boula, CEO and administrator, this flu season requires an exceptionally strict visitor policy. "There are hospitals that ask visitors to leave when they refuse to wear a mask", he said. "While a hospital has every right to do that, I certainly hope it does not come to that point. But bear in mind that patient safety, along with the safety of our staff, is this hospital's top priority."

Perhaps the most important message is that if someone is experiencing flu-like symptoms (especially a cough or fever) they simply shouldn't visit hospital patients.

That being said, according to Jane Hooper, director of community relations, the hospital staff is able to use its discretion to evaluate individual situations. “One of the nice things about a smaller hospital is that staff is able to make exceptions as required”, she said. “Obviously, we feel that it’s important for patients who are suffering from a serious illness or significant injury to maintain connections with family. If someone needs to visit, our doctors and nurses can evaluate the situation and make an exception as long as proper precautions are followed.”

About Elizabethtown Community Hospital

Elizabethtown Community Hospital (ECH) is a 25-bed Critical Access Hospital primarily serving local communities that are home to over 30,000 full-time residents, along with thousands of tourists and seasonal residents. In 2008, it treated 730 inpatients and over 4,600 emergency room patients. ECH has a network of primary health care clinics in Elizabethtown, Wilmington and Westport. The hospital maintains a 24-hour emergency room and a large variety of specialty clinics staffed by board certified physicians. The hospital has 196 employees.

Elizabethtown Community Hospital is accredited by the Joint Commission and is licensed and certified by the New York State Department of Health and the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services. The hospital is a member of the Hospital Association of New York State, the Iroquois Health Care Consortium and the Eastern Adirondack Healthcare Network. ECH received its Critical Access Hospital status in 1997.