

Animal Visits

Spending time with animals is good for our mental health and happiness. Any dog allowed to visit should be on a leash until it reaches the patient's room.

There are 3 kinds of animal visits at our hospitals and clinics:

- › **Service dog** - a trained and certified dog that helps its owner with tasks such as mobility (movement), sound alerts, seizure alerts. Guide dogs for people who are blind are an example of a service dog.
- › **Therapy dog** - a trained dog that visits hospitals, schools, and other places with its owner, as part of a special program
- › **Personal pet** - an animal kept for pleasure and company

Service dogs

- Certified service dogs with their owners may enter all areas of the hospital that are open to the public.
- Service dogs are identified by a collar or harness that says "Service Dog."
- In Nova Scotia, service dog ID cards give service dogs the right to access public areas. Owners may be asked for the ID card when in the hospital. In Nova Scotia, service dog ID cards are free. For more information, please see the Nova Scotia Service Dog Act online: <https://novascotia.ca/servicedogs>.
- The Nova Scotia Service Dog Act requires service dogs to be trained by a school such as Assistance Dogs International or the International Guide Dog Federation. If the dog has been trained by their owner or another group, it must pass St. John Ambulance's Service Dog evaluation.
- If you are coming to the hospital for a test such as an X-ray or radiation therapy, your service dog might not be able to come into the testing room with you. This is for the dog's safety. If you do not have a support person with you, staff may watch your service dog while you have the test and help you while you are not with your service dog.
- If you are admitted to hospital, be sure to make plans to have a family member or friend look after your service dog. Hospital staff cannot take responsibility to care for your service dog.

Therapy dog programs

- Therapy dog programs are available in specific areas, such as Mental Health, Long Term Care, Rehabilitation, and Palliative Care.
- Therapy dogs are part of programs such as St. John Ambulance or Therapeutic Paws of Canada.
- Therapy dogs are identified by a scarf, collar, ID tag, harness, or leash that shows they are part of a program.
- Therapy dogs and their trainers regularly visit patients in their beds or in a group setting in a certain room as part of an ongoing program.
- Therapy dog visits to patients who are not in an approved area of the hospital will be treated as personal pet visits. For example: a daughter would like to bring her therapy dog to visit her father. She must ask staff before her visit and the visit must be approved by the medical team. This would only be allowed in a special situation.

Personal pets

- Personal pet visits in acute care areas are not allowed except in special situations, such as a dying patient's request.
- Personal pets are limited to cats and dogs over 2 years old. Adult animals react better in unfamiliar places and are less likely to have bladder or bowel accidents, or behave unexpectedly.
- Other animals, including reptiles, birds, and guinea pigs, are not allowed.
- Personal pet visits must be approved by the medical team and Infection Prevention and Control staff.
- One personal pet may visit at a time and visits may last up to 1 hour.
- The pet may only visit the patient who requested the visit. For health and safety reasons, other patients and staff should not have contact with the pet.
- Personal pets are not allowed in outpatient areas, including clinics, X-ray departments, and blood collection.

We understand that your pet is an important part of your life. Limited visits may be allowed with permission in special situations. Animal visits are a health concern for some patients and health care facilities were not set up for pet visitation. This is why visits are limited to special situations.

What are your questions? Please ask. We are here to help you.