



# Ascension

**March 19, 2010 2:00 p.m.**

**COVID-19 Update                      Ascension Wisconsin-North Region**

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**Note for Media:** The COVID-19 situation continues to rapidly evolve. This document is intended to provide information for Ascension Wisconsin facilities in central and northern Wisconsin for your respective audiences. Additional notices will be sent as conditions warrant.

**Media Protocol Reminder:**

With respect to our visitor restrictions and the call for social distancing, until further notice, we are not allowing any media or film crews on-site for interviews or footage on our campuses or in our facilities. This is in an abundance of caution, as our top priorities are the health and safety of our patients, associates, and visitors. We are still able to accommodate phone, online and virtual interview opportunities on a case-by-case basis, pending leadership or physician availability.

**Also a reminder that any questions or information regarding patients under investigation or confirmed test results should be directed to public health.**

As of Monday, March 16th, as part of our social distancing efforts, I am working remotely and will do so until further notice. **The best way to contact me is via email at [tom.weaver@ascension.org](mailto:tom.weaver@ascension.org) or by mobile phone call or text at 715.573.8465.**

**NEW IN THIS UPDATE:**

- 1. Elective Surgery/Non-Essential Procedures and Appointments Postponed Until Further Notice**
- 2. Remote Testing Sites Update**
- 3. Facility Access Points to Facilitate Visitor Screenings**
- 4. Consider virtual visitation to connect with your hospitalized loved one.**

**REMINDERS:**

- 1. Toll-Free Information Line Available**
- 2. Online Information**
- 3. Prevention/Social Distancing Information**

**Ascension Wisconsin Toll-Free Information Line:** Ascension Wisconsin has established a dedicated telephone resource for COVID-19 questions. This can be accessed 24/7 by calling **1-833-981-0711**. The launch of this service is intended to provide useful information to those in the community who have questions about COVID-19 and symptoms and is an effort to reduce the number of incoming calls to our hospitals and clinics. We ask that this resource be utilized only with questions about COVID-19 and its symptoms.

**Ascension COVID-19 Online Information:** Direct access to online information on COVID-19 can be found here: <https://healthcare.ascension.org/Specialty-Care/Coronavirus>

**Elective Surgeries and Non-Urgent Medical Appointments:** In order to protect against potential COVID-19 exposure, and to ensure the availability of resources to meet emergent health needs during this pandemic, Ascension Wisconsin is following guidance by the CDC, the U.S. Surgeon General, and American College of Surgeons and postponing elective services and non-urgent medical appointments.

Our top priorities are the health and safety of our patients, associates and visitors. Ascension providers will continue to provide emergency surgeries and procedures and clinically evaluate time-sensitive care delivery needs. We recognize that each case is unique, so processes are in place to review requests for procedures that might be considered elective to determine issues of optimal timing and resource support.

Elective procedures are those that have options in terms of timing/level of urgency to be completed, or are determined non essential at this time.

Examples of postponed services include:

- Nonurgent procedures that would require intensive care unit (ICU) care
- Elective procedures that post-procedure would require occupancy in an inpatient hospital bed
- Elective procedures on high risk patients whereby post-procedure status may require occupancy in an inpatient hospital bed
- Elective procedures on any patient
- Annual Wellness Visits Well Child Visits (when immunization is not involved)

Any impacted patients will be notified directly. As cases of COVID-19 increase, Ascension continues to diligently monitor the situation to ensure we are protecting our patients, associates and the communities we are privileged to serve.

**Drive-Through Testing Sites:** Ascension Medical Group Wisconsin is developing drive-through testing sites for COVID-19. When available, individuals who wish to be tested must first be pre-screened by an Ascension Medical Group provider, by phone, or virtually using Ascension Online Care. We are working diligently with local and state health officials to operationalize these sites as quickly as possible to keep the health and safety of the communities we're privileged to serve a top priority.

The screening involves answering a series of questions about symptoms, travel history and any potential contact with COVID-19 patients. Patients who meet the criteria, which is based on guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, will be given an appointment for drive-through testing at the appropriate site.

There also is an Ascension COVID19 Hotline set up for those who have questions about COVID-19, are experiencing symptoms, or those who want to receive a text message to schedule an Ascension Online Care appointment with a provider. The toll-free number for Wisconsin is 1-833-981-0711

**Expanded Visitor Restrictions:** Ascension is continuing its expanded visitor restrictions, in both inpatient and outpatient settings. Our goal is to protect our associates and those we are privileged to serve by limiting possible exposure to COVID-19 and directing people to the right level of care. The following visitor restrictions are similar to the infection control precautions we put in place in our hospitals and care sites every year during flu season to protect our patients, visitors and associates. The updated restricted visitation policy at Ascension Wisconsin includes the following:

- All visitors, associates, clinicians and vendors entering Ascension Wisconsin facilities will be screened for flu-like symptoms including fever, cough, runny nose/nasal congestion and or sore throat and travel history.
- Visitors will not be permitted for patients under investigation or with a confirmed case of COVID-19. Virtual options will be discussed with patients and families.
- Ascension hospitals in central and northern Wisconsin will have unified visiting hours of 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. daily.
- It is highly recommended that children under age 18 do not visit during this time.
- Visitors will be limited to one visitor per patient at any given time.
- Per guidance from the CDC, we are restricting visitors who have returned from a country within the past 14 days that the CDC has designated as Level 3 Warning or Level 2 for Novel Coronavirus.

Those who do visit are encouraged to please wash their hands and use hand sanitizer before and after any visit. We appreciate the cooperation of our visitors, patients, associates and providers to support our infection control efforts and help minimize the spread of respiratory infections and COVID-19.

**Tips for Virtual Visitation during COVID-19:** We understand that during this time it is important to stay connected to your loved ones and remain aware of their status while hospitalized. **We encourage communication through the use of personal devices.** Consider one of the following apps to connect virtually with your loved ones: Facebook Messenger, Facetime, Google hangouts, Google Duo, WhatsApp, Skype, Viber or Signal. You can download them in either the App Store (iPhone) or the Play Store (Android). Both patient and visitor will need to download the same application. Access to guest wi-fi at Ascension facilities is available by connecting to AH-Guest.

#### **Facility Access Points:**

To accommodate the screening program for those entering our facilities, Ascension Wisconsin has enacted limited access points. Members of the public should use the following entrances at the following locations:

##### **Ascension Eagle River Hospital, Eagle River**

Kalmar Clinic Entrance, available 24/7 (Note: Emergency Department Entrance is closed as the result of a construction project.)

##### **Howard Young Medical Center, Part of Ascension/Ascension Medical Group, Woodruff**

Rehabilitation Services, 6:45a-5p      Emergency Department, 24/7

##### **Ascension St. Mary's Hospital/Ascension Medical Group, Rhinelander**

Main Clinic Entrance, 6a-5p      James Beck Cancer Center, 6:30a-4:30p  
Emergency Department Entrance, 24/7

##### **Ascension Sacred Heart Hospital/Ascension Medical Group, Tomahawk**

Main Entrance, 7:15a-5:15p      Rehabilitation Services, 6:45a-5p  
Emergency Department,, 24/7

##### **Ascension Good Samaritan Hospital, Merrill**

Main Entrance, 6a-5p      Emergency Department, available 24/7

##### **Ascension St. Clare's Hospital/Ascension Medical Group, Weston**

Main Entrance (Door #4), 5:15a-8:30p      Emergency Department (Door #5), 24/7

##### **Ascension St. Michael's Hospital/Ascension Medical Group, Stevens Point**

Main Entrance, 5:15a-8:30p      Emergency Department, 24/7

##### **Ascension Our Lady of Victory Hospital, Stanley**

Main Entrance, 6a-4:30p      Emergency Department, 24/7

**All other clinic/outpatient locations should utilize the main entrance where screening will take place.**

**Social Distancing Efforts:** Ascension is adhering to the recommendations of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to minimize exposure and support the health of our communities by avoiding large gatherings and maintaining distance from others when possible. Here are some of the ways we are accomplishing this:

- Associates whose job duties allow working remotely are now required to do so.
- Facility Volunteer programs have been suspended until further notice.
- Job Shadowing opportunities have been suspended until further notice.
- Non-essential business travel by Ascension associates has been suspended.
- Use of virtual technology for business meetings and other operational issues is being utilized.
- Community event activities being held at Ascension Wisconsin facilities or hosted by Ascension Wisconsin including large events, defined as greater than 50 people, are postponed.
- These adjustments will be reassessed if the situation changes.

### **What should people do if they think they may have symptoms or have been exposed to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19)?**

Anyone who believes they may have had contact with someone who is confirmed to have, or is being evaluated for, the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), should **contact their physician**.

To help prevent the spread of disease, the CDC recommends that individuals **call ahead before going to a doctor's office or emergency room** and inform clinical staff about symptoms and any recent travel. Our healthcare professionals will work with public health and CDC to determine if you need to be tested for COVID-19.

There also is an Ascension COVID19 Hotline set up for those who have questions about COVID-19, are experiencing symptoms, or those who want to receive a text message to schedule an Ascension Online Care appointment with a provider. The toll-free number for Wisconsin is 1-833-981-0711.

### **Consider Virtual Care**

During this time, with many individuals who may be working from home, or who have children who are at home and out of school, or individuals who are working shifts at various times of day that may make it difficult to take off work to see a doctor, it may be a good time to consider 'virtual care' — an option for patients with low-acuity, urgent care issues who would like a virtual visit with a provider using the mobile device of their choice, smartphone, laptop or tablet.

Ascension Online Care offers visits with a doctor 24/7 from work, travel or home. Use code HOME for a discounted \$20 visit during the month of March. Download the app at [www.ascension.org/onlinecare](http://www.ascension.org/onlinecare). Available in all 50 states. No insurance required.

### **Preparation/Protocols/Precautions**

Our top priorities are the health and safety of our patients, associates and visitors. We have infection control specialists at our sites of care who work closely with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and local public health authorities to explore and identify avenues to detect, protect and respond in accordance with current recommendations and guidelines. We have strong infection control precautions and protocols in place based on current recommendations and guidelines, and our caregivers are trained in these protocols, so we can protect our patients, associates and visitors at all times. Our infection control specialists also work closely with the CDC and local public health authorities to stay updated on any additional measures we need to consider implementing as we all learn more about this virus and how to stop it.

### **Operational Key Points**

- Preparedness efforts are an ongoing activity for our organization and involve local, statewide and national resources.
- Each facility has an established Emergency Operations Plan with individualized plans for a number of scenarios, including pandemics.
- Ascension is committed to regularly communicating with our care team members across our all markets and settings.
- This includes keeping our care team informed with regular communication on the latest information related to COVID-19.
- Our facilities have activated our emergency response protocols which utilize the Incident Command System (ICS). ICS is a standardized system to allow efficient management and communication with internal and external agencies.

### **Updating Infection Prevention Protocols for novel coronavirus (COVID-19)**

Our infection control specialists work closely with the CDC and local public health authorities to follow proper infection control precautions and protocols to protect our patients, visitors and associates, including any additional measures we need to consider implementing. It is possible that the CDC may modify recommended procedures as they learn more about this virus. If they do so, we will update our procedures accordingly.

### **How can individuals best protect themselves and others from the novel coronavirus (COVID-19)?**

As COVID-19 continues to spread in Wisconsin communities, state and local public health officials are recommending community interventions such as social distancing, replacing in-person meetings with telework when possible, reviewing workplace sick leave policies, modifying, postponing or canceling mass gatherings, implementing restrictions on visitors to residential treatment and living facilities, and closures of schools, childcare settings. Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available. In addition,

- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed or unsanitized hands.

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.
- Reduce unnecessary travel and wear a mask when going out in public if you think you have a contagious respiratory infection.