

Healthcare Access & COVID-19

Frequently Asked Questions

The Down Syndrome Association of Central Ohio has collected the following information to shed light on some of the most common questions and concerns we are hearing related to COVID-19, specifically as it relates to access to healthcare. This document contains information about individual's rights, hospital visitor policies, best practices related to adults under guardianship, and up-to-date information from national organizations.

Information Clarifying Individual Rights & Access to Care

We strive to provide up-to-date, accurate information about COVID-19 and disability rights. We have been following the news regarding state disaster preparedness plans—specifically those that explicitly or implicitly put people with intellectual and developmental disabilities at a lower priority than others to receive lifesaving treatment if resources are scarce. Over the last few weeks, there have been official complaints against Washington, Alabama, Tennessee, and Kansas filed with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services Office of Civil Rights (“HHS-OCR”).

On March 28, 2020 the HHS-OCR issued a guidance document making clear that disability rights laws apply to rationing decisions. “HHS is committed to leaving no one behind during an emergency, and this guidance is designed to help health care providers meet that goal,” said Roger Severino, OCR Director. “Persons with disabilities, with limited English skills, or needing religious accommodations should not be put at the end of the line for health services during emergencies. Our civil rights laws protect the equal dignity of every human life from ruthless utilitarianism,” Severino added. The full **HHS-OCR bulletin** can be found here:

<https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ocr-bulletin-3-28-20.pdf>

On April 3, 2020 a coalition of Ohio's disability organizations sent a letter to Governor Mike DeWine and Ohio Department of Health Director Dr. Amy Acton asking the state to provide guidance to healthcare providers to not make decisions about the availability of care or equipment that is based on a person's disability. The letter identifies other states that have rules in place that allow ventilators and other care to be redirected away from people with disabilities to provide care for those without disabilities. The letter states, in part, “These protocols fail to recognize the humanity and dignity of people with disabilities by devaluing their lives. They also violate, among other laws, the Americans with Disabilities Act (“ADA”), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (“Section 504”), and Section 1557 of the Affordable Care Act (“ACA”).” The letter, drafted by Disability Rights Ohio and signed by DRO, Ohio DD Council, Nisonger Center, Cincinnati Children's Hospital UCEDD, OSILC, National MS Society, Ohio Association of Area Agencies on Aging, is available on [DRO's COVID-19 Resource page](#).

DSACO believes that state level guidance on this issue would provide consistent care policy in hospitals throughout the state of Ohio and would best protect the rights of individuals with Down syndrome and other developmental disabilities. To that end, we continue to be engaged in discussions with collaborative advocacy agencies to address this issue. It should be noted, however, that we are not currently aware of any circumstances in which care for someone with a developmental disability has been rationed.

Summary of Hospital Access & Visitors Policies – Pediatric Patients (Under 18)

Overall, all hospitals are applying stricter visitor guideline during this public health crisis. We understand that information on some websites is not always clear and the thought of potentially being kept from a loved one causes heightened anxiety. It is fair to assume that all hospitals require visitors to be healthy/symptom-free, even if it is not spelled out in their policy.

Nationwide Children's Hospital

- All inpatients will be limited to one visitor per day in their rooms. A second visitor can be designated but cannot rotate in the same day. The visitors cannot change during the patients' stay, must be healthy, and over the age of 18. In addition, visitors must wear a mask and inpatient visitors will undergo temperature screens.
- All Nationwide Children's Hospital Urgent Care locations remain open. Due to new visitor restrictions, only one adult may accompany a patient to any outpatient location. Call your child's pediatrician or family doctor before seeking urgent care unless your child's physician is unavailable, or your child is experiencing a medical emergency.

Summary of Hospital Access & Visitors Policies – Adult Patients

Overall, all hospitals are applying stricter visitor guideline during this public health crisis. We understand that information on some websites is not always clear and the potential of being kept from a loved one causes heightened anxiety. The following is a summary of hospital visiting policies for patients receiving care throughout the DSACO's 23-county service area. It is fair to assume that all hospitals require visitors to be healthy and symptom-free, even if it is not spelled out in their policy.

OhioHealth (Berger Health, Doctors Hospital, Dublin Methodist, Grady Memorial, Grant Hospital, Mansfield Hospital, Marion General, O'Bleness & Riverside)

- **Patients with disabilities who need assistance are allowed to have one caretaker.** Also authorized for patients who are disoriented, disabled or in need of an interpreter.

The Ohio State Wexner Medical Center (All visitors to hospitals and ambulatory facilities will be screened for symptoms/travel/exposure history and a temperature check)

- **Outpatient or Ambulatory**
 - Limit one (1) visitor/support person in the building
- **Emergency Department**
 - Visitors are no longer allowed
 - Exceptions: Patient is under 18 and behavioral health patients (minor patients can have a parent or guardian, adult patients that require guardianship are also allowed)
- **Hospital**
 - Visitors are no longer allowed, but exceptions are made for individuals with significant physical disabilities are limited to one support person.

Mount Carmel Healthcare Systems (St. Ann's, Mount Carmel East & Grove City)

- People with significant physical disabilities (one support person: must be 18 years or older, immediate family member, have power of attorney, guardian or patient representative and have no symptoms of illness)

Fairfield Medical Center

- Visitors are allowed for children and adults with disabilities.

Genesis Healthcare System

- Visitation restrictions at Genesis Hospital have been changed to no visitors allowed, however, there are exceptions for patients with disabilities.

Holzer Health System

- Patients with a disability are allowed to have one caregiver with them.

Knox Community Hospital

- Patients with a disability can have one parent or caregiver with them.

Licking Memorial

- Patients with disabilities who need assistance may have one caregiver visit

Madison County Hospital

- Individuals with significant physical disabilities may have one support person in addition to a visitor.

Memorial Health

- Patients with disabilities may have one visitor or support person (must be the same person throughout the patient's stay)

Adena Health System

- Individuals with significant physical disabilities are limited to one support person.

Hospital Access & Advice Regarding Adults with Down Syndrome

We reached out individually to all of the hospital systems included above. Not all systems immediately responded, but of those that did, ALL stated that **pediatric visitor rules should also apply to adults under guardianship**. In addition, in cases where the patient needs physical assistance, the visitor or guardian attending with the patient needs to be able to provide that assistance.

We reached out to Attorney Derek Graham of [Resch, Root, Phillips & Graham LLC](#) for his advice on how guardians should prepare if their loved one requires medical care. His advice is as follows:

Guardians of adults with developmental disabilities will be subject to the visitation rules and guidelines established by the hospital. The Franklin County Probate Court and most surrounding probate courts have issued guidance that Guardians should follow the advice and direction of local health authorities when determining whether to visit a person under guardianship. Accordingly, if necessary, Guardians must be ready for remote decision-making. This means that they should have copies of their Letter of Guardianship both in written form and also electronically. At this time, then annual Guardians reports and related filings are still due on their original due date. However, the court is very liberally granting extensions upon request. If you have your annual filings coming due during this time, the court is asking Guardians to file them by mail and avoid traveling to the courthouse. The Probate Court floor is currently closed to the general public.

Additional Resources from our National Partners

- **Comprehensive Q&A document** was collaboratively produced by the Down Syndrome Medical Interest Group-USA, LuMind IDSC, NDSS, NDSC, and Global Down Syndrome Foundation
 - o Expanded version: <https://www.ndsccenter.org/wp-content/uploads/COVID19-DS-QA-EXP-03-27-20.pdf>
 - o Abbreviated version: <https://www.ndsccenter.org/wp-content/uploads/COVID19-DS-QA-ABBR-03-27-20.pdf>
- **LuMind IDSC:** <https://www.lumindidsc.org/coronavirus-and-down-syndrome/>
- **NDSS:** https://www.ndss.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Coronavirus_Fact_Sheet_-1.pdf
- **NDSC:** <https://www.ndsccenter.org/programs-resources/covid-19-resources/>
- **Global Down Syndrome Foundation:** <https://www.globaldownsyndrome.org/covid-19/>
- **MassGeneral Down Syndrome Clinic:** <https://us18.campaign-archive.com/home/?u=091e3808ad727b47f62136992&id=4808ab3761>
- **Adult Down Syndrome Center:** <https://adscresources.advocatehealth.com/resources/?category=COVID-19>
- **Easy-to-Read Information for Self-Advocates:** <https://selfadvocacyinfo.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Plain-Language-Information-on-Coronavirus.pdf>

Questions & Contact Information

If you have any questions about the information in this document or additional resources the Down Syndrome Association of Central Ohio can provide, a list of the best contacts for most areas are listed below.

New & Expectant Parents	If you are a new or expectant parent looking for resources and support; including First Connect, DSACO's parent mentoring program.	Carey Eash , Program Coordinator of New Parent Outreach ceash@dsaco.net
Financial Assistance Program Inquiries	Financial Assistance Program is available to all DSACO families facing financial hardship.	Kirsti Osborne , Social Worker info@dsaco.net or kosborne@dsaco.net
Bike Camp & Fitness Programs Questions	Including questions about registration confirmation, a new registration, and other general information.	Caitlyn Lowe , Program Coordinator of Health Services clowe@dsaco.net
Medical Referrals & Resources	If you or a family member are looking for a medical provider or community resource referral.	Kim Baich , Program Coordinator of Medical Initiatives kbaich@dsaco.net
Advocacy Support & Assistance	If you are interested in joining DSACO's Grassroots Advocacy Network or need guidance relating to advocacy for you or your loved one.	Marge Barnheiser , Director of Advocacy & Adult Services mbarnheiser@dsaco.net or Stephanie Leppert , Outreach & Advocacy Associate sleppert@dsaco.net
African American Outreach Events	If you have questions about upcoming African American outreach events or are interested in engaging with future events and initiatives.	Gail Hubert , Program Coordinator of Outreach Services ghubert@dsaco.net
Summer Learning Academy	Including questions about registration confirmation, application questions, and other general information.	Kari Jones , President & CEO kjones@dsaco.net
Latino Outreach & Spanish Translation Needs	Para preguntas en español cualquiera que sea su necesidad.	Vanessa Armenta , Program Coordinator of Latino Outreach varmenta@dsaco.net
New or Existing Membership Needs	Membership is free and open to anyone with a passion and connection to our mission.	To join or update your contact info: http://dsaco.net/about-us/membership-application/
Sponsorship & Events	Questions about an upcoming event or postponed event (<i>Summer Picnic, Golf Classic, Buddy Walk, Holiday Party, Dancing with our Stars Gala, World Down Syndrome Day Celebration</i>); or any questions about donations or sponsorship.	Evanthia Brillhart , Director of Marketing & Events ebrillhart@dsaco.net
Third-Party Fundraising	Questions and guidance on fundraising events you are personally hosting to benefit DSACO (<i>this does not include Buddy Walk fundraising events</i>).	Katie Garcia , Marketing & Events Coordinator kgarcia@dsaco.net
General Donation Inquiries	Including general donations, recurring donations, and donations directly to our Financial Assistance Program.	Barb Leman , Office Manager info@dsaco.net

Finance & Operations Questions	Including donation/tax receipts, other recently completed financial transaction, or registration assistance.	Barb Leman , Office Manager: info@dsaco.net
General Questions, Comments or Concerns		Kari Jones , President & CEO kjones@dsaco.net