



# Arkansas Department of Health

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Governor Asa Hutchinson  
Nathaniel Smith, MD, MPH, Secretary of Health

To: Hospitals

From: Dr. Nate Smith, Secretary of Health

Date: March 11, 2020

Regarding: **Guidance for Limiting the Transmission of COVID-19 for Hospitals**

On March 9, 2020, in response to the emerging threat of COVID-19, the Arkansas Department of Health released guidelines for limiting the transmission of the coronavirus in long-term care facilities. These measures include screening all staff and visitors for symptoms and travel history.

This unusual measure was taken because the residents of long-term care facilities are uniquely vulnerable to the spread of COVID-19. Because of the residential nature of these facilities, they are often freely accessible by visitors who may inadvertently expose residents to infectious agents. Many residents interact frequently and closely with visitors and with each other. The residents themselves are in the highest-risk group for COVID-19, since most are older and many have other serious health conditions. Significant spread of the disease in some long-term care facilities in Washington state and other countries shows how dangerous COVID-19 can be in this setting.

Vulnerable Arkansans in the highest risk groups are also served in many other health care settings, including hospitals.

Hospitals have criteria for visitors, especially in intensive care units; frequent rounding by medical professionals ensures patients are closely monitored for changes in symptoms; management of communicable disease is a common activity; and facilities are available for airborne isolation.

While the current status of the outbreak does not require hospitals to screen all visitors and employees as is the case in long-term care facilities, the Arkansas Department of Health recognizes that some hospitals may wish to implement similar safeguards, depending on their unique situation. Therefore, the following voluntary, suggested screening criteria can be adapted into hospital-level policy if desired. Hospitals may choose to require individuals meeting the criteria to wear masks or other personal protective equipment, or to limit access to some or all sections of the hospital.

## Voluntary, Suggested Screening Criteria for Employees and Visitors to Hospitals

- Have you had a fever of 100.4°F or greater?
- Do you have cough or shortness of breath?
- Do you have other symptoms that seem like flu or pneumonia?
- Have you traveled out of state or out of the country in the last 14 days? Where did you travel?
- In the last 14 days, have you had contact with anyone who has had lab-confirmed COVID-19?

Hospitals are encouraged to review their visitation criteria and to consider whether temporarily limiting the type or number of visitors is appropriate during this high-risk period.