



Patient & Family Guide

2024

Animal Visits



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Animal Visits

- Spending time with animals can be good for a person's mental health and happiness.
- There are 3 kinds of animal visits at Nova Scotia Health facilities (hospitals and clinics):
 - › **Service dog:** This is a trained and certified dog that helps its owner with tasks (like moving, sound alerts, seizure alerts). For example, a guide dog for a person who is blind.
 - › **Therapy dog:** This is a trained dog that visits hospitals, schools, and other places with its owner, as part of a special program.
 - › **Personal pet:** This is an animal that a person keeps for pleasure and company.
- **All visiting animals should be on a leash, or in a kennel or a covered carrier until they reach a patient's room.**

Service dogs

- Service dogs must have a collar or a harness that says "Service Dog."
- Certified service dogs with their owners may enter any public area of our facilities.

- In Nova Scotia:
 - › A service dog identification (ID) card gives a service dog the right to enter public areas. The service dog's owner may be asked for the ID card when they are in the facility.
 - › Service dog ID cards are free.
- Nova Scotia's *Service Dog Act* requires service dogs to be trained by a school like Assistance Dogs International or the International Guide Dog Federation. If the dog has been trained by their owner or by another group, it must pass St. John Ambulance's Nova Scotia Service Dog Assessment. For more information, please visit:
 - › <https://novascotia.ca/servicedogs>
- If you are coming for a test (like an X-ray) or for radiation therapy, your service dog may not be able to come into the testing or therapy room with you. This is for the dog's safety.
- **If you do not have a support person with you:**
 - › Please call the department before your test to make sure staff will be able to watch your service dog.
 - › Staff **may** watch your service dog while you have the test or therapy.
 - › Staff will help you while you are not with your service dog.

- If you are admitted to the hospital, please plan to have someone look after your service dog. **Staff are not responsible for caring for your service dog.**

Therapy dogs

- Therapy dogs are part of a program like St. John Ambulance or Therapeutic Paws of Canada™.
- Therapy dogs are identified by a scarf, a collar, an ID tag, a harness, or a leash that shows they are part of a program.
- Therapy dogs are available in some areas (like Mental Health and Addictions, Long-term Care, Rehabilitation, and Palliative Care).
- Therapy dogs and their trainers visit patients in their beds or in a group setting.
- Therapy dog visits to patients who are not in an approved area of the hospital are treated as personal pet visits.
 - › For example, if someone wants to bring their therapy dog to visit their loved one in the hospital, they must ask staff before the visit. The visit must be approved by their loved one's health care team. This would only be allowed in special cases.

Personal pets

- Personal pet visits in acute (short-term) care areas are **not** allowed, except in special cases (like a dying patient's request).
- Personal pets are limited to cats and dogs that are 2 years of age or older.
 - › Adult animals act and react better in new places, and are less likely to have accidents (pee or poop).
 - › Other animals, including reptiles, birds, and guinea pigs, are not allowed.
- Personal pet visits must be approved by the patient's health care team and Infection Prevention and Control staff.
- 1 personal pet may visit at a time. Visits may last for up to 60 minutes (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.**
- Visits are limited because:
 - › Animal visits are a health concern for some patients.
 - › Health care facilities are not set up for pet visits.
- In special cases, limited visits may be allowed with permission. If you have any questions, please ask a member of your health care team.

Notes:

This pamphlet is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider. The information may not apply to all situations. If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

Find this pamphlet and all our patient resources here:
<https://library.nshealth.ca/Patients-Guides>

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time:
Call 811 or visit: <https://811.novascotia.ca>

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