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ILLINOIS HEALTH FACILITIES REQUIRED TO ALLOW SUPPORT PERSONS FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

CHICAGO/SPRINGFIELD – The Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) released new guidance to help families support their loved ones with developmental disabilities. Persons with disabilities can rely on reasonable accommodations in Illinois hospitals during their treatment, which is more important than ever during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Friday’s announcement from IDPH clarifies and strengthens a previously issued [bulletin on non-discrimination in health care](#).

Hospitals and health facilities should allow individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) to be accompanied by a support person, such as a guardian, family member, caregiver, or paid support worker during their time in the hospital.

“It’s critical that individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities can effectively communicate with healthcare workers when they are in hospital settings,” said IDHS Secretary Grace Hou. “Although serious social distancing and other COVID-19 related precautions are still in effect, people with disabilities deserve access to excellent health care, which often requires a support person.”

“This guidance brings protection for patients with disabilities and their families during this critical time,” said Allison Stark, Director of the Division of Developmental Disabilities at IDHS. “I hope many people can now sleep a little bit easier knowing they have this support in these uncertain times.”



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Without effective communication between medical providers and people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, medical providers risk substituting misplaced assumptions and potential biases about the person with a disability for verifiable information and medical history.

In addition, effective communication leads to better transparency in process and protocols, which helps to ensure that the medical provider and the person with a disability understand each other and agree.

The IDPH guidance asks hospitals to establish a protocol that allows at least one support person to be present with any individual with I/DD in a hospital emergency room and to accompany individuals admitted to the hospital.

For hospitalized patients, especially those with prolonged hospitalizations, the individual or legal guardian should be allowed to designate two different support people.

The support person should always adhere to hospital policies and wear a designated identification tag provided by the hospital. Specifically, support persons must wear hospital-provided Personal Protective Equipment, as directed, and comply with all hospital infection control procedures.

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