



Patient & Family Guide
2026

Animal Visits



www.nshealth.ca

Animal Visits

- Spending time with animals can benefit a person's mental health and happiness.
- There are 3 kinds of animal visits at Nova Scotia Health hospitals and clinics:
 - › **Service dog:** this is a trained and certified dog that helps its owner with tasks (like moving, sound alerts, or 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.”
- Service dogs who are with their owners may go into any public area of a Nova Scotia Health building.
- In Nova Scotia:
 - › A service dog identification (I.D.) card gives a service dog the right to go into public areas. The service dog’s owner may be asked for the I.D. card when they are in a Nova Scotia Health building.
 - › Service dog I.D. cards are free.

How to get a service dog I.D. card

- To get a service dog I.D. card, the dog and the dog’s owner must be recognized as a **certified service dog team** under the Nova Scotia *Service Dog Act*.
- The act requires service dogs to be trained by:
 - › A school (like Assistance Dogs International or the International Guide Dog Federation)**or**
 - › The dog’s owner or another group, **if the dog passes the St. John Ambulance’s Nova Scotia Service Dog Assessment**
- For more information, 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 to watch your service dog:**
 - › Please call the department before your test to make a plan for 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. **Hospital 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 will have identification (I.D.) to show they are part of a program. This may be:
 - › A scarf
 - › A harness
 - › A collar
 - › A leash
 - › An I.D. tag

- Therapy dogs are available in some areas, like:
 - › Mental health and addictions
 - › Rehabilitation
 - › Palliative care
 - › Long-term 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 you want to bring your therapy dog to visit a loved one in the hospital, you must ask staff before the visit. The visit must be approved by your 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 pet visits are limited to cats and dogs that are 2 years old 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 your health care team and Infection Prevention and Control staff.

- 1 personal pet may visit at a time. Visits may last for up to 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 areas.
- **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 buildings are not designed to support pet visits
- In special cases, a visit may be allowed with permission. If you have 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 all patient education resources here:
www.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources

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

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<https://library.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources>