



Patient & Family Guide  
2018

# Cardiovascular Intensive Care Unit (CVICU) 5.1

Halifax Infirmary

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[www.nshealth.ca](http://www.nshealth.ca)

# CVICU 5.1

This booklet gives helpful information to families with a loved one who is a patient in the Cardiovascular Intensive Care Unit (CVICU).

## Family spokesperson

- We ask patients to name one family spokesperson. Most often, the spokesperson is the patient's Substitute Decision Maker. If the patient has not filled out the form naming a substitute decision maker, please ask the nurse to set up a meeting with the doctor.
- The family spokesperson will be the main person to talk with the health care team about the patient's condition and plan of care. They will also help share news with family and friends.
- Having one spokesperson helps staff focus on patient care by limiting interruptions such as multiple phone calls and repeating similar information.

## Visiting the Cardiovascular Intensive Care Unit (CVICU)

- Family and friends are central to patients' lives. We are here to support both you and your family member during their stay with us.
- There is a phone at the door to the CVICU. When you pick up the phone, it rings directly into the unit.
- Please call into the unit and we will arrange your visit.
- There is a limit to the number of visitors at a bedside at a given time. There are also times when visiting is restricted because of patient procedures. Although the procedure may not involve your family member, this protects the privacy and dignity of all patients.
- Visiting is limited during nursing shift changes, from 6:30–8 a.m. and 6:30–8 p.m. Please try to limit phone calls to the CVICU during these times. The nurse who is leaving gives a full report to the new nurse, and the new nurse reviews the chart and does a head-to-toe exam of the patient.
- Restricting visitors and calls during this important time helps to protect patient privacy and reduces interruptions.

**Do not visit the ICU if you are sick.  
Patients are at great risk of infections.**

### **Visiting with children**

- Please ask the nurse before bringing children into the CVICU.

### **Preventing infection**

- Sometimes, visiting may be restricted due to infections. This decision will be made with the advice of Infection Prevention and Control experts.
- Please follow the team's instructions about cleaning your hands and wearing gloves, gowns or masks when visiting.
- Please feel free to ask members of the health care team if they have washed their hands.

- All visitors need to wash their hands or use hand sanitizer when entering and exiting the ICU, on each and every visit. Soap and water is best if your hands look dirty, and for certain illnesses.



## **What to expect in the CVICU**

- Visiting a family member in the ICU can be overwhelming. Many patients have a lot of equipment near them and may be taking medications to keep them sedated. Your family member may not look like their usual self, and may not be able to talk.
- Please talk to the patient and reassure them that they are being cared for and are not alone. Please ask us if you are worried or unsure.

- **Lines, monitors and alarms** – Patients are connected to a variety of intravenous (IV) lines and monitors. These help us assess changes in the patient’s condition. The ICU is noisy and there may be a lot of alarms; please don’t worry about these. Our team is trained to know which alarms need action and which do not. A few of the most common monitoring systems are:
  - › heart monitor – helps us keep a close watch on important information, such as heart rhythm
  - › arterial line – helps us watch blood pressure and get blood samples without using a needle each time
  - › oxygen saturation monitor – helps us assess the amount of oxygen in the body

## **Keeping patients safe and comfortable**

- Patients in the ICU are at risk for a number of problems. We don’t want to scare you, but we do want you to know of a few risks that our team will be working to lower. These include delirium, bedsores, and blood clots. Read more on the next two pages.

## **Delirium**

- Delirium is a type of confusion often seen in CVICU patients. We do many things to try to prevent or reduce delirium, including getting patients moving as soon as possible, reducing sedating medications as possible, and trying to let patients sleep at night.
- You can help by telling us about the patient. For example:
  - › what name they prefer to go by
  - › if they have hearing problems
  - › if they wear hearing aids or glasses
  - › what their usual sleep habits are
  - › what medications they were taking before they were admitted (including prescription, non-prescription and herbal medications)
  - › their alcohol and/or drug use. This information is very important to their care and will be kept confidential
- Talk with the patient clearly and simply. Reassure them. Tell them where they are and what is going on.

**What are your questions?**

**Please ask. We are here to help you.**

## **Pressure ulcers (bedsores)**

- These are injuries that happen when there is continued pressure on the skin and tissue. The pressure causes the skin to break down. Being very ill puts patients at high risk for bedsores. Some of the things we do to lower the risk are:
  - › check the skin often
  - › reposition or turn the patient often
  - › use a bed with a special surface to reduce pressure
  - › keep the skin clean
  - › reduce moisture on the skin
  - › provide good nutrition
  - › mobilize (get the patient moving) as soon as possible

## **Blood clots**

- Clotting is necessary for healing. However, an abnormal clot can sometimes form and cause harm. Anyone can have an abnormal clot, but it is more common in people who are very sick, have had surgery, or are very inactive.
- To reduce the risk of abnormal clots, we:
  - › give medications
  - › use special stockings to help reduce clot formation in the legs
  - › get patients moving as soon as it is safe to do so

## **Family waiting rooms**

- The CVICU is designed for patient care. People will be treated with dignity, respect and consideration, including patients, families and staff.
- There is a waiting room for the CVICU to the left of the elevators. This room is sometimes crowded. Please remember this is a shared area. If you hear or learn information about another patient or family, we ask that you be respectful and not repeat this information.

## **When your family member leaves the CVICU**

- For patients and families that have experienced a critical illness, leaving the CVICU can be stressful.
- Patients do not leave the CVICU until they are ready for a different level of care. Most patients in the CVICU are transferred to the Intermediate Care Unit (IMCU) on 7.1.
- Please talk with the team caring for your family member if you have questions about this process.

## **Taking care of yourself**

- It is important that you look after yourself during this stressful time. Some tips from other families who have gone through this experience are:
  - › try to eat regular healthy meals
  - › recognize that you need rest too
  - › take breaks from the CVICU
  - › go for a walk, or visit the hospital library or the spiritual area
  - › if you take medications, continue with your usual medication schedule
  - › talk with others about how you are feeling

## **Is there a way for me to give feedback?**

We welcome and value your feedback. We invite you to complete our anonymous Patient and Family Survey. Copies of the survey are available in the main family waiting areas. There is a locked box where you can drop off the survey, or you can mail it back to us. When you share your experience, it helps us to improve the care we provide.

Thank you in advance for sharing your thoughts with us.

# Who can I talk to if I have concerns?

We are committed to providing the best care possible for your family member. If you have any immediate concerns, please talk with your family member's doctor or nurse, the charge nurse, or the Health Services Manager.

You can also contact Patient Relations at 1-844-884-4177, or email [healthcareexperience@nshealth.ca](mailto:healthcareexperience@nshealth.ca).

## Looking for more health information?

Find this pamphlet and all our patient resources here: <http://library.nshealth.ca/PatientGuides>

Contact your local public library for books, videos, magazines, and other resources.

For more information, go to <http://library.novascotia.ca>

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

Learn about other programs and services in your community: call 211 or visit <http://ns.211.ca>

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WZ85-1888 © December 2018 Nova Scotia Health Authority

The information in this pamphlet is to be updated every 3 years or as needed.