

# What to Expect if Your Loved One is in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) during COVID-19

We know this is a difficult time, and we are here to help and support you.

Read this brochure for information about:

- the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) and who is on the health care team
- treatment that people in the ICU may receive
- how you can stay informed about your loved one's condition

We hope you find this information useful.

## What is the ICU?

ICU stands for Intensive Care Unit. Patients in the ICU are very sick, and need to be watched closely or need some form of advanced life support.

## Who is part of the health care team?

Many people will help care for your loved one. The people that may be involved with your loved one's care are:

| <b>Role</b>                 | <b>What they do</b>   | <b>The name of this health care team member is:</b> |
|-----------------------------|---|---|
| <b>ICU Nurse</b>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• the nurse who supports your loved one's care</li></ul>  |   |
| <b>Medical Resident</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• a doctor who is completing their specialty training under the staff physician's supervision</li><li>• 3 to 4 medical residents are always in the ICU and provide 24-hour medical care to your loved one</li></ul> |   |
| <b>Critical Care Fellow</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• a doctor doing further training in intensive care medicine. They supervise the medical residents.</li><li>• 3 to 4 critical care fellows work in the ICU</li></ul>  |   |

| <b>Role</b>                           | <b>What they do</b>  | <b>The name of this health care team member is:</b> |
|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| <b>Staff Physician</b>                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the doctor in charge of the ICU</li> <li>• every Monday, one staff physician takes charge for that week</li> </ul>        |   |
| <b>Consultant Physician</b>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• other doctors who are contacted to provide specialty care, if needed</li> </ul>   |   |
| <b>Nurse Manager</b>                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the nurse in charge of the ICU</li> </ul>   |   |
| <b>Patient Care Coordinator (PCC)</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• coordinates the patient care activities and the daily running of the ICU</li> <li>• helps the nurse manager</li> </ul>    |   |
| <b>Charge Nurse</b>                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• coordinates the activities of the unit for the shift</li> </ul>   |   |
| <b>Patient Care Assistant (PCA)</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• helps the nurses with patient care</li> <li>• helps move patients to different areas of the hospital</li> </ul>           |   |
| <b>Pharmacist</b>                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• assesses each patient's medication needs</li> <li>• makes sure they get the right medicines at the right times</li> </ul> |   |

| <b>Role</b>                        | <b>What they do</b>   | <b>The name of this health care team member is:</b> |
|------------------------------------|---|---|
| <b>Physiotherapist (PT)</b>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• gets patients moving to help bodies become stronger and keep lungs clear</li> </ul>  |   |
| <b>Occupational Therapist (OT)</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• helps to get patients moving and doing activities</li> <li>• provides strategies to help with mood, thinking, skin health and reduce muscle stiffness</li> </ul>       |   |
| <b>Respiratory Therapist (RT)</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• checks and treats breathing issues to make sure patients receive the right amount of oxygen and support from breathing machines (ventilator)</li> </ul>                |   |
| <b>Dietitian</b>                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• makes sure that patients receive the right energy and nutrients their body needs to support the healing process</li> </ul>   |   |
| <b>Speech-Language Pathologist</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provides support to help patients communicate while on a breathing machine</li> <li>• assesses when it is safe for the patient to start eating and drinking</li> </ul> |   |

| Role                                | What they do  | The name of this health care team member is: |
|-------------------------------------|---|--|
| <b>Social Worker</b>                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provides supportive counselling to patients and their families</li> <li>• coordinates family meetings and talks about discharge planning</li> </ul>  |  |
| <b>Spiritual Care Practitioners</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• are available if you would like their help</li> <li>• do not represent any specific religion</li> <li>• work with patients' belief system to help support them during difficult times</li> </ul> |  |

## Your loved one's care and treatment

Each patient has their own treatment plan based on their condition. The health care team meets every day to discuss how each patient is doing and how they are responding to treatment. Most of our patients are on different life support treatments.

### What is life support?

Life support is medicine or treatment that can help support your loved one while we try to cure their very serious illness or keep it from becoming worse.

Life support treatments may include:

- a breathing machine called a ventilator to help them breathe

- fluid restriction or removing fluid from the body using medicines or dialysis
- a large intravenous (IV) line (tube) placed into their main or central vein
- a feeding tube to provide calories and nutrients
- devices that check how well these treatments are working
- Extracorporeal Life Support (ECLS). This is a heart lung machine that takes over the function of the lungs or heart until they can recover.
  - A type of ECLS that your loved one may receive is ExtraCorporeal Membrane Oxygenation (ECMO). ECMO is a therapy that provides oxygen to the blood when your lungs are not able to. A member of the health care team called a Perfusionist operates the ECMO machine.
- chest tubes
- laying a patient on their stomach (also called proning) to help air flow evenly in their lungs and improve breathing
- physiotherapy

Some medicines that may be used to care for your loved one are:

- corticosteroids to reduce swelling in the lungs
- nitric-oxide to help with moving oxygen into the lungs
- antibiotics
- sedatives and pain medicines that will help keep your loved one comfortable or make being on a breathing machine (ventilator) easier
- paralytics to prevent the muscles from moving. They may be used to help the breathing machine work better and help reduce injury from the breathing machine
- blood pressure medicines

Life support treatments can be very hard on your loved one's body. They can sometimes cause problems, and these problems can also be very serious. This is why we very carefully monitor whether or not these treatments are helping.

## **How are decisions about treatment made in the ICU?**

We will always discuss your loved one's treatment options with them. If your loved one is very seriously ill and not able to make their own decisions, we will meet with you to talk about what kinds of treatment may help.

By Ontario law, if a person cannot make decisions about their care, the health care team must work with the person's Substitute Decision Maker (sometimes called "SDM"). The law lists, in order, the person (or people) who can act as the Substitute Decision Maker. The Substitute Decision Maker works with the health care team to help decide on the right treatment for the patient.

The patient may have legally chosen a person to make care decisions for them when they are not able to. This person is called their Attorney for Personal Care (sometimes called Power of Attorney or "POA"). In this case, the Attorney for Personal Care becomes the Substitute Decision Maker.

If you know that the patient has a legal Power of Attorney for Personal Care document, please email it to [UHN Health Records](mailto:HealthRecordServices@uhn.ca) (HealthRecordServices@uhn.ca). They will add it to your loved one's health record.

## **How does a Substitute Decision Maker decide the right treatment to choose?**

By law, a Substitute Decision Maker makes care decisions that follow the patient's wishes. If these wishes are not known, the Substitute Decision Maker makes decisions that would be in the patient's best interests.

This includes thinking about whether or not a treatment will:

- improve their health
- prevent their illness from getting worse
- slow down how quickly the illness becomes worse
- benefit them more than any risk of harm
- help just as well as a more invasive treatment (such as a breathing machine)

A Substitute Decision Maker might also think about other values and beliefs that matter to the patient.

Making treatment decisions can take time. We will work with you to make the right decision for your loved one.

Please discuss your loved one's care goals with us as soon as they are admitted to our unit. At any time the health care team may need to make decisions quickly that reflect your loved one's wishes and values.

## **Will life support help my loved one?**

The life support used to treat your loved one may or may not help to improve a serious injury or health condition.

If your loved one is not getting better with life support, we will talk to you about not increasing or even removing life support to focus on your loved one's comfort. **We will always talk to you about any changes to the care plan.**

If you feel that life support treatments are not helping, please talk to us.

**Remember:** You are not alone. The health care team is here to support and help you in any way we can. Please ask us any questions you have, any time.



## **How long will my loved one be on life support?**

We don't know how long your loved one will need to be on life support. It depends on how they respond to treatment and whether any medical problems happen.

Problems that could happen include:

- infections from the breathing machine, the IV line, dialysis lines or devices that check how the patient is doing
- severe diarrhea
- blood clots
- bleeding
- strokes or heart attacks

Any of these problems can be very serious and even life threatening. If they happen, we will talk with you about how they might affect your loved one's chances of getting better.

## **How long will they stay in the ICU?**

When your loved one arrives on the unit, the health care team discusses with you and your loved one how long they may need to stay. The health care team assesses them every day. When your loved one is stable enough they move to either an acute care unit or general unit. We will work together to make sure their discharge is safe and successful.

At the end of someone's hospital stay, we provide instructions (called discharge summary) and a prescription for any medicines they need. Discharge summaries are available in myUHN Patient Portal.

If you have any questions about your loved one's discharge or their care needs before they leave the hospital, please ask a member of their health care team. We are here to help you.

## **How to stay informed about your loved one's care and condition**

Call the ICU at the hospital where your loved one is staying:

- Toronto General Hospital: 416 340 3601
- Toronto Western Hospital: 416 603 5818

**Please note:** Our unit is currently very busy and you may not be able to reach us right away.

If your loved one is able to speak, it may be best for them to call you directly. If your loved one does not have access to a mobile phone or another way to contact you, tell us and we will try to arrange phone access for them.

### **Choose a spokesperson**

Please ask 1 person to be the main contact with the health care team. We recommend that this person also be the Substitute Decision Maker or Attorney for Personal Care. This person will receive updates from the health care team and pass the information on to family or friends.

Choosing a spokesperson reduces confusion, protects patient privacy and lets the health care team focus on what is most important – caring for your loved one. Please provide us with the name and contact number for this person.

### **When will I hear from the health care team?**

Someone from your loved one's health care team will call the spokesperson or main contact person once a day with updates. We will also call you if there are any changes in your loved one's care.

We will try to answer all your questions when we speak. If we are not able to answer any of your questions, we will write them down and answer them during the next phone call.

## Can I visit my loved one?

Only Essential Care Partners may visit patients at this time. An Essential Care Partner is a support person who is considered essential to the safety and well-being of a patient while they are in the hospital.

If you would like to support your loved one as an Essential Care Partner during their hospital stay, please ask the unit manager if you are eligible.

If you are not able to visit your loved one in person, we can help them arrange a video call with you. Ask your loved one's health care team to set up a video call using a tablet on the unit.

Read about the [Limits on Who Can Enter UHN During the COVID-19 Pandemic](https://www.uhn.ca/PatientsFamilies/Health_Information/Health_Topics/Documents/Limits_On_Who_Can_Enter_UHN_During_COVID19.pdf)

([https://www.uhn.ca/PatientsFamilies/Health\\_Information/Health\\_Topics/Documents/Limits\\_On\\_Who\\_Can\\_Enter\\_UHN\\_During\\_COVID19.pdf](https://www.uhn.ca/PatientsFamilies/Health_Information/Health_Topics/Documents/Limits_On_Who_Can_Enter_UHN_During_COVID19.pdf)).

## Monitor your loved one's care using the myUHN Patient Portal

If your loved one can make their own decisions about their care, you will need to get their consent to access their **myUHN Patient Portal** account. The myUHN Patient Portal is a free and secure website for patients of University Health Network (UHN). The website lets patients safely see their appointments and results from all UHN sites as soon as they are ready.

If your loved one is not able to make their own decisions **and** you are their Substitute Decision Maker or Attorney for Personal Care, you can create a myUHN Patient Portal account on your loved one's behalf.

## What will I see in myUHN?

myUHN provides real-time access to appointments and electronic results and reports. Users can:

- see appointments and receive appointment reminders
- see lab results

- see UHN reports, such as pathology and imaging reports, clinic notes and discharge summaries
- find links to education resources, medical dictionaries and other helpful websites
- share their health information with others

## **How to access your loved one's health records on myUHN Patient Portal**

If your loved one already has a myUHN account, go to the [myUHN portal](http://www.myuhn.ca) (<http://www.myuhn.ca>) and sign in with their email address and password.

If your loved one does **not** have a myUHN account and you would like to create one for them, you will need to get an 8-digit registration code:

1. Ask for a registration code. Call myUHN Support at 416 340 3777, [email myUHN Support](mailto:myUHN@uhn.ca) (myUHN@uhn.ca), or ask a member of your loved one's health care team for a registration code.

If you are requesting a registration code by email, please send the following information:

- If you are the **Attorney for Personal Care**:
  - the completed [UHN Authorization Form](https://www.uhn.ca/PatientsFamilies/Patient_Services/Documents/HealthRecords_Disclosure_Authorization.pdf) ([https://www.uhn.ca/PatientsFamilies/Patient\\_Services/Documents/HealthRecords\\_Disclosure\\_Authorization.pdf](https://www.uhn.ca/PatientsFamilies/Patient_Services/Documents/HealthRecords_Disclosure_Authorization.pdf))
  - a copy of your loved one's Power of Attorney for Personal Care document
  - your loved one's first and last name, medical record number (MRN) or Ontario Health Card number (OHIP), and date of birth
- If you are a **Substitute Decision Maker**:

- ❑ the completed [UHN Authorization Form](https://www.uhn.ca/PatientsFamilies/Patient_Services/Documents/HealthRecords_Disclosure_Authorization.pdf) ([https://www.uhn.ca/PatientsFamilies/Patient\\_Services/Documents/HealthRecords\\_Disclosure\\_Authorization.pdf](https://www.uhn.ca/PatientsFamilies/Patient_Services/Documents/HealthRecords_Disclosure_Authorization.pdf))
  - ❑ your loved one's first and last name, medical record number (MRN) or Ontario Health Card number (OHIP), and date of birth
2. Once myUHN Support has received this information, they will give you a registration code and instructions on how to set up your loved one's account.

### **Need help registering or signing in?**

Call myUHN Support at 416 340 3777 or [email myUHN Support](mailto:myUHN@uhn.ca) (myUHN@uhn.ca).

**Note:** myUHN office hours are Monday to Friday, 9:00 am to 5:00 pm. We are working remotely during COVID-19. Please leave a voicemail stating:

- your name
- your loved one's first and last name, medical record number (MRN) or Ontario Health Card number (OHIP), and date of birth
- the reason for calling
- a phone number where we can reach you

We will return your call as soon as we can.

### **Can I drop off items for my loved one?**

We recommend that patients limit the number of personal items they have at the hospital. Fewer personal items lowers the chances of COVID-19 spreading and keeps their area easy to clean.

We will take care of all of your loved one's care needs in the ICU. If your loved one needs any personal items, the health care team will contact you to let you know. They will provide you with instructions on how you can drop these items off.

We ask that patients try their best to leave valuables, such as jewelry, at home. If your loved one has any valuable items with them, the health care team will contact you to arrange to pick it up. This helps prevent items from getting lost.

## **Who can I talk to if I have questions?**

Talk to any of the medical staff caring for your loved one about any concerns you may have. We understand this is a difficult time and we are here to answer your questions. Please ask us to repeat or explain information in a different way that makes it easier to understand.

You can also contact UHN Patient Relations by phone at 416 340 4907 or by [email](mailto:PatientRelations@uhn.ca) (PatientRelations@uhn.ca). We are available Monday to Friday, 8:30 am to 4:00 pm.

For more information or to provide feedback on this document, please email [UHN Patient Education & Engagement](mailto:pfep@uhn.ca) (pfep@uhn.ca).