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## **Health Care Professional Office Practice**

# **Guidance and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) Regarding Companions**

**May 20, 2021**

Providers are encouraged to check the Division of Consumer Affairs [website](#) for additional information.

The State of New Jersey COVID-19 Information Hub is [here](#).  
The NJ Department of Health COVID-19 Information Hub for Health Care Providers is [here](#).

Coronavirus disease 2019 (“COVID-19”) is the disease caused by a new coronavirus first detected in humans in December 2019. In March 2020, due to the effect of COVID-19 increasing hospitalizations, intensive care admissions, and ventilator usage, the State of New Jersey temporarily suspended elective surgeries and procedures in order to preserve the health care system’s capacity to treat and save COVID-19 patients.

Beginning in May 2020, due in part to social distancing measures, the number of COVID-19 cases and the requisite demand for emergency personnel and equipment dedicated to fight the disease decreased drastically, making it possible for health care professionals in the State of New Jersey to resume the performance of elective surgeries and procedures. On May 15, 2020, Governor Murphy signed Executive Order No. 145, allowing elective medical and dental surgeries and procedures to resume beginning on May 26, 2020. On May 18, 2020, the Acting Director of the Division of Consumer Affairs issued Administrative Order 2020-07, which established standards for the safe provision of in-person office-based health care services during the COVID-19 pandemic.

On May 6, 2021, the Acting Director of the Division of Consumer Affairs issued Administrative Order 2021-11, which supersedes AO 2020-07, updating and clarifying those standards. *Among other things, AO 2021-11 clarifies that a patient is permitted to have a companion accompany them during pregnancy-related medical office visits.*

*Because the presence of companions is an important aspect of medical care – including pregnancy-related medical care – the Division is issuing this FAQ to address questions surrounding the Administrative Order’s companion-related provisions.*

## **Companion-Specific Questions**

### **1. May a patient be accompanied by anyone in the office?**

Yes. One person, known as a “companion,” **must be allowed** to accompany the patient if:

- the patient is a minor,
- the companion’s presence is necessary to provide the patient with assistance with mobility, communication, or understanding, or
- the companion is supporting a patient receiving pregnancy-related care.

### **2. Who is considered a “companion”?**

A “companion” is anyone who:

- assists an adult patient with mobility, communication, or understanding,

- provides support to a patient receiving pregnancy-related care, or
- accompanies any minor patient.

### **3. What is “pregnancy-related care?”**

Pregnancy-related care is interpreted broadly, and includes, but is not limited to, labor and delivery, prenatal appointments, office-based ultrasounds, abortion-related care, genetic counseling, miscarriage management, fertility care, and postpartum exams.

### **4. What should I do if a companion answers “yes” to a screening question or has a temperature above 100.0 degrees?**

If a companion answers “yes” to a screening question or has a temperature above 100.0 degrees, the practitioner should advise that the companion may not enter and must instead wait outside for the patient. Practitioners should also try to use telemedicine to include the patient’s companion.

### **5. Should I follow the same infection control and masking protocols for companions as I do for patients?**

Yes. Like patients, companions should answer the screening questions listed in the Administrative Order and, unless exempt under the terms of the Administrative Order, should be required to wear masks during visits.

### **6. Are the protocols different if an individual has only assisted a patient with transportation?**

Yes. If a person accompanying a patient is needed only for transportation to the appointment and is not acting as a companion during the visit, that person should wait outside the premises if feasible.

## **General Questions**

### **7. Where can I find a copy of the current administrative order controlling office practices?**

You can access Administrative Order 2021-11 [here](#).

**8. Which licensees are covered by Administrative Order 2021-11?**

AO 2021-11 covers health care licensees of the following boards:

- New Jersey State Board of Dentistry;
- State Board of Medical Examiners;
- Electrologist Advisory Committee of the State Board of Medical Examiners;
- New Jersey Board of Nursing;
- New Jersey State Board of Optometrists;
- New Jersey State Board of Ophthalmic Dispensers and Ophthalmic Technicians;
- State Board of Respiratory Care;
- Board of Pharmacy;
- Acupuncture Examining Board;
- State Board of Chiropractic Examiners;
- Occupational Therapy Advisory Council;
- State Board of Physical Therapy Examiners;
- Orthotics and Prosthetics Board of Examiners;
- State Board of Polysomnography;
- Athletic Training Advisory Committee; and
- Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology Advisory Committee.

**9. I see Administrative Order 2021-11 requires practitioners to act in specific ways when patients or companions have COVID-19 “compatible symptoms.” What are those “compatible symptoms?”**

“Compatible symptoms” are:

- Fever or chills;
- Cough;
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing;
- Fatigue;
- Muscle or body aches;
- Headaches;
- New loss of taste or smell;
- Sore throat;
- Congestion or runny nose;
- Nausea or vomiting;
- Diarrhea; or
- Such other symptoms of COVID-19 as may be identified by the CDC.

## **10. What should a patient and companion expect when arriving at an office?**

When coming to the office for an in-person visit, a patient and any companion may be asked to remain in the car or outside the office while waiting for the appointment. The patient and companion must wear a well-fitting face covering or face mask(s) covering their mouth and nose while on premises unless it poses a health risk to the individual, the individual is under two years old, or when the face covering must be removed for services to be rendered. The health care professional must provide a suitable face covering to any patient or companion who arrives without one. For each patient and companion, the health care professional or staff must ask screening questions and take temperatures.

Patients should be advised that telemedicine may be used for follow-up care to the greatest extent possible and to contact the office if they become ill or are diagnosed with COVID-19 within 14 days after the appointment.

## **11. What screening questions should be asked of patients and companions when they arrive at the office?**

At a minimum, patients and companions should be asked the following questions:

- Within the past 24 hours, have you had any of the following symptoms? (Yes or No)
  - Fever or chills
  - Cough
  - Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
  - Fatigue
  - Muscle or body aches
  - Headaches
  - New loss of taste or smell
  - Sore throat
  - Congestion or runny nose
  - Nausea or vomiting
  - Diarrhea
  
- Within the past 14 days, have you had a known exposure to any individual suspected or confirmed to have COVID-19 or who has traveled to a location after which self-quarantine is recommended? (Yes or No)

**12. What if the patient who comes for an appointment is sick?**

Patients with COVID-19 compatible symptoms or who have a fever over 100.00 degrees should be immediately isolated in a separate location or single patient room and the door should be closed, or care should be deferred, if appropriate.

For additional information, refer to the [Interim Infection Prevention and Control Recommendations for Healthcare Personnel During the Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) Pandemic](#).

**13. I am a patient and my health care provider is not following the administrative order or CDC Guidance. What should I do?**

Patients should file a complaint against a health care provider believed to be violating the administrative order or CDC guidance with the provider's licensing board. Administrative Order 2021-11 directs health care professionals to report violations of the Administrative Order to the appropriate licensing board and to protect staff who make such reports from retaliation.