

Why Hospitals Should **BADGE EVERY VISITOR**

Your guide to safely allowing visitors in a COVID-exposed world



Prepared by



A new threat has been added to your list

COVID-19 means more vigilance, even when infections decline.



Hospitals have always had to manage the risk of infectious diseases. But ever since the onset of COVID-19, it has become harder than ever to keep patients, staff, and visitors safe. This highly contagious and deadly disease still poses a threat to everyone's health.

So hospitals have had to implement much more stringent preventive measures. As a result, all visitors (and employees and patients, for that matter) receive careful scrutiny before being allowed to enter. This is a good thing and should continue.

When cases and deaths decline, visits increase, heightening more traditional security concerns, like workplace violence, drug use, and theft. These risks, combined with the COVID-19 threat (however diminished), will still make screening and identifying visitors necessary to ensure everyone's security.

***Increased scrutiny
of visitors should
continue.***

Now, more than ever, you must know who is in your building

This requires signing in, identifying, and tracking your visitors.



How to know who has permission to be in your hospital.

When was the last time you saw a healthcare worker who *wasn't* wearing some form of identification? More than other institutions, hospitals have vulnerable occupants who need to know the people in charge of their care have authorized access to their bedside. A presumption of safety is critical to effective patient care. Hospitals always badge their staff, so why not all the other people they let through their doors, like visitors, vendors, and outpatients?

More important than the badge a visitor wears is what it says about them:

- I am who I say I am – today.
- I signed in at the front desk – today.
- I have permission to be here – today.

Without proof of the above three assertions on their chest, visitors may as well be allowed into your hospital wearing someone else's badge – or no badge at all.

Verification comes in two ways:

1. Requiring visitors to show their driver's license (or some other government-issued I.D.) before getting a badge.
2. Making it obvious that a visitor's badge is valid by some visual cue or alert. A photo helps. So does a readable date. Even better is a badge that has time sensitivity built in, so you can tell when it has expired.

Once you issue a badge to a visitor, your system needs to be able to tell you where they are going, where they should be, and – after they depart – where they were (and when). This helps you in case there's ever an incident or even if you just want to know visitor volume trends for staffing purposes. Now, of course, another reason is contact tracing for COVID-19.

How to manage your visitors



Your visitor policy should help you do the following:

CONTROL

Managing your visitors begins with limiting how many you allow and when. Then limit how many points of entry are open to the public. Since all visitors must be screened and badged, the ideal is one entrance per building.

Once visitors are inside, funnel them to your screening station with clear signage. *Don't make visitors have to figure out where they are supposed to go.*

Then, once you have screened a visitor and granted them entry, limit how many you allow at a time for each patient and how long they are allowed to stay. During visiting hours, you must control where you allow them to go, such as common areas like family lounges.

SCREEN

Nobody should get in without going through some kind of screening process. Recommended criteria include:

- **Pre-approved** – a visitor has an appointment, such as an outpatient, or the situation warrants consent, such as an end-of-life scenario

- **Essential** – expected (pre-approved) vendors who come for deliveries, maintenance, or repairs
- **COVID-free** – no current COVID symptoms or recent high-risk contacts

AUTHORIZE

Follow your hospital's screening process to **grant or deny permission** to enter. Your policy for how many visitors you allow per room or patient may necessarily **delay** some visitors. Whatever the outcome, it's important to follow an official script when you have to disappoint the public, so your message is consistent. When possible, suggest or provide alternatives to in-person visits, like video phone calls on a mobile device.

VERIFY, SIGN IN, and BADGE

Finally, once you have approved visitors to enter, **sign them in** (preferably with their driver's license to **confirm their identity**) and require them to:

- Wear a **visitor badge**, ideally with a current photo
- Wear a mask
- Practice good hand hygiene, surface avoidance, and social distancing

How to choose the right visitor management system (VMS) for signing in and badging your visitors



A good visitor management system, or VMS, lets you sign in, identify, and track your visitors. This helps protect your patients and staff from outsiders.

Every hospital has different needs. So ask yourself the following questions to help you choose the right visitor management system for your hospital, as determined by its policies and procedures.

How much security should my VMS provide?

- Does it take a driver's license or other government issued I.D.?
This verifies that visitors are who they say they are.
- Does the badge show instantly ...
 - If a visitor has signed in today?
And not just reusing an old badge?
 - That a visitor is in the right place?
More than ever, visitors must not be allowed to wander.
 - That a visitor has been screened?
Is it your policy that no one gets a badge unless they have been screened?

- Does it keep a record that can be easily referenced?
How quickly can you determine if or when a visitor has been here before?
- How reliable is your VMS?
What happens if you lose power or internet access? Do you have a back-up system, like a visitor sign-in book with badges?

How much should my VMS cost?

- Said another way, what is security worth to you?
- To help you assess the value of badging your visitors, see the sections on **Risks** (page 7) and **Benefits** (page 8).

How easy is it to set up and to use?

- Does your VMS integrate with electronic medical records or is it stand-alone (for simplicity and privacy)?
- Does it require a lot of training for your staff or volunteers?
- Can it be used by visitors to sign themselves in?
- Does it require much data storage or is it cloud based?
- Are updates included and easily implemented?



How quickly does my VMS process visitors?

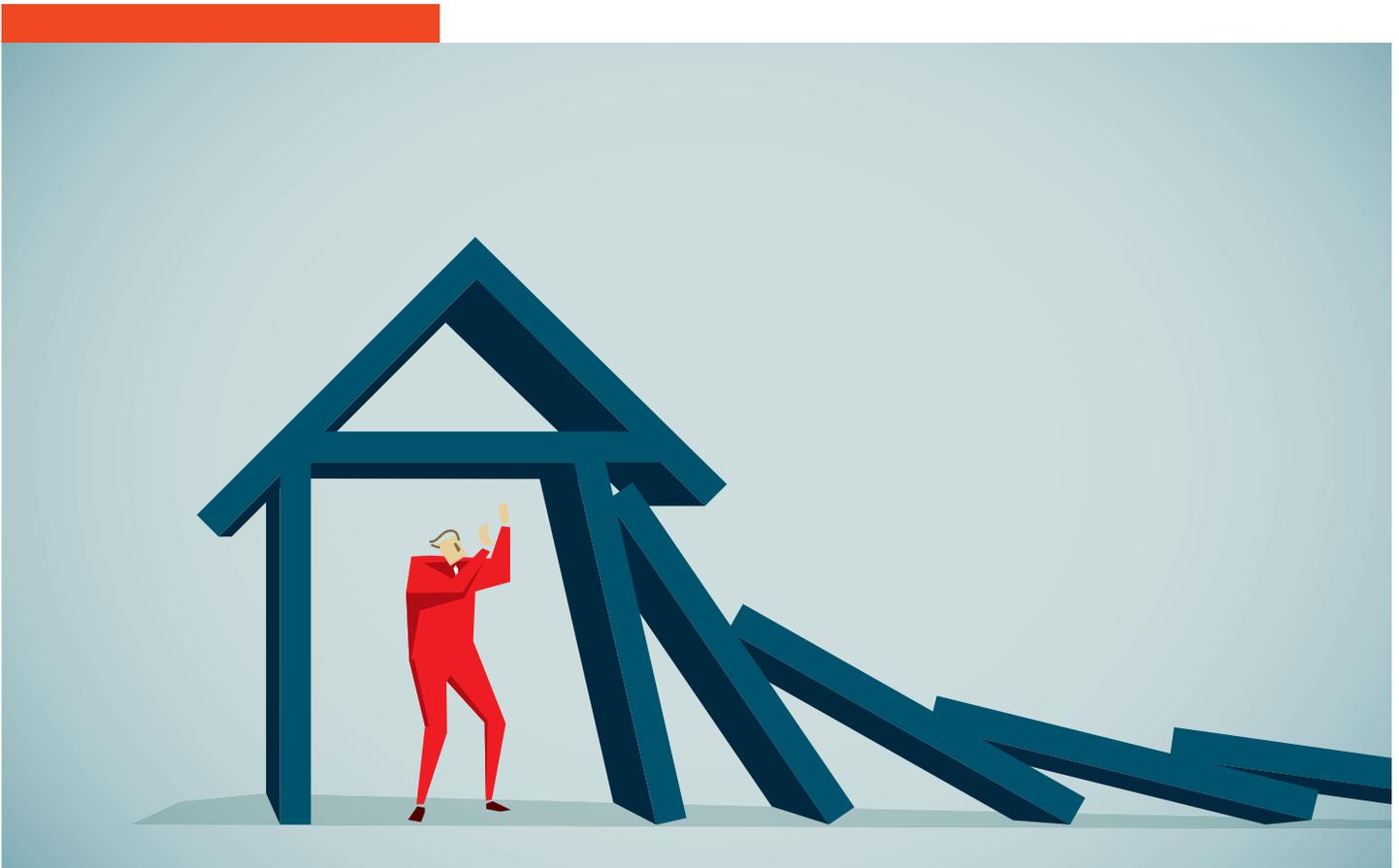
- Hospitals have always had to balance the convenience of their visitors with the health and safety of their patients and staff. Lately the balance has shifted more toward the latter.
- Still, with tighter screening procedures, your visitor management system should not create longer lines in your lobby.
- Speed as a priority for your VMS may depend on how many visitors you allow and how complex you make your screening process.

How does my visitor management system appear to the general public?

- Do the badges literally “look good”?
- More important, does the system convey the appearance of added security that will **(a)** improve visitor behavior and **(b)** give visitors the confidence they can enter your hospital safely?
- Does the system ensure that visitors sign in each day?
- Does it add to, or detract from, the patient experience and overall satisfaction?

Choosing the right VMS requires asking the right questions.

The risks of not managing your visitors properly



Any unauthorized visitor should be considered a security breach, with assumed bad consequences, such as:

- Bringing **disease** into your hospital, now more than ever
- **Physically harming** your patients, staff, and other visitors
- Being under the influence of a controlled substance and/or seeking to **steal drugs** from your facility (and to use drugs within it)
- **Stealing personal belongings and hospital assets** – now including basic supplies (masks, sanitizer, disinfecting wipes) that are in greater demand by the general public

At best, not identifying visitors makes employees wonder about them. At worst, it leaves people exposed to potential harm.

The benefits of an effective visitor management system



A good VMS, in support of your visitor policies:

- Requires visitors to **check in** at the front desk
- Allows the front desk to **authorize visits** (and to refuse them)
- Helps staff to **identify and assist strangers** in the halls
- **Keeps a record** of who visited whom, and when, in case of an incident and for contact tracing
- **Assures building occupants** that a security procedure is in place and gives them the confidence that they can work, be treated, and visit in a safe environment
- Helps you **comply with guidelines** recommended for safety and privacy by the leading health organizations, as well as improve your hospital safety grade
- Lets you **know who is in the building** at all times, especially for emergency evacuations
- Shows that visitor management is among the most affordable, easiest, and quickest ways to **improve your security**

A visitor management system should tell you who has permission to be in your facility and who does not.