

NIH Clinical Center Patient Education Materials

Service Animals: Guidelines for Inpatients

Are service animals permitted at the Clinical Center?

Service animals are welcome at and may accompany patients and visitors to the Clinical Center. The term “service animal” is used to include any dog or miniature horse that is individually trained to do work and perform tasks for the benefit of an individual with a disability, including physical, sensory, psychiatric, intellectual, or other mental disability. Other species of animals, whether wild or domestic, trained or untrained, are not service animals for the purposes of this definition, and, along with pets, are generally excluded from the Clinical Center. Dogs whose sole function is for crime deterrence, comfort, or emotional support are not considered service animals, and will ordinarily be excluded as well.

A service animal may be removed from the Clinical Center if the animal:

- is not under the control of the patient (or visitor);
- is not housebroken;
- exhibits aggressive behavior such as snarling, biting, scratching, or teeth baring;
- is excessively noisy;
- is determined to be infectious or ill by the Clinical Center veterinarian; or
- otherwise poses a direct risk to the health or safety of people or other service animals.

Your animal may not be permitted in certain parts of the Clinical Center due to patient safety concerns and infection control standards. These include, but are not limited to, operating rooms and surgical suites, sterile areas, and food preparation areas. You are responsible for your animal’s care during your visit. This includes feeding, grooming, and walking.

Should I bring paperwork about my service animal?

If you will be staying at the Clinical Center as an inpatient, you must bring the following:

- Name and telephone number of the

veterinarian who cares for the animal; and

- Documentation of current rabies vaccination and core current vaccines as directed by the service animal’s primary veterinarian.

Service animals accompanying inpatients will have routine and constant interactions with staff, patients, and visitors over the course of admission. The information requested above will help the Clinical Center to maintain patient care, patient safety, and infection control standards.

Outpatients and visitors with a service animal are not required to provide documentation of vaccinations due to the more limited frequency and duration of interactions with staff, patients, and visitors.

Should I notify the Clinical Center in advance that I will be bringing a service animal?

Inpatients who will be bringing a service animal into the Clinical Center are encouraged to notify their care team in advance of their appointment or visit.

Should I contact my service animal’s veterinarian before my visit?

It is a good idea to alert your veterinarian that you want to bring your service animal to your inpatient stay. The Clinical Center veterinarian may also wish to contact your veterinarian if there are any concerns.

What happens when I arrive?

If the Clinical Center was notified of your inpatient admission in advance, all paperwork will be in place and noted in your medical record. If the Clinical Center was not made aware, the veterinarian will make all reasonable efforts to determine the required documentation for the service animal, from your local veterinarian.

The Clinical Center veterinarian is available to meet to discuss Clinical Center policies and answer any questions if needed. Veterinary examination is not normally necessary unless the animal exhibits overt

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signs of infection, illness, evidence of parasites, and/or aggression.

Additionally, hospital staff will post a sign, "Service Animal in Residence," on the door of your inpatient room.

Where can I walk my service animal?

Service animals are permitted in all public areas across the NIH campus. There are recommended walking areas around the Clinical Center, including the grassy section at the NW corner of the Mark O. Hatfield Clinical Research Center near the children's playground and the lawn just beyond the Warren G. Magnuson Clinical Center South Entrance. You must clean up and dispose of your animal's waste.

Note: Your service animal must always be on a leash or harness.

Should I bring my animal's food and water bowls?

If requested, the Clinical Center veterinarian will provide sterile, stainless steel bowls for your animal's food and water.

May my service animal always stay with me?

Your service animal may stay with you anywhere the general public is permitted to go within the hospital. Exceptions include if the presence of your animal poses a direct risk to the health or safety of people or other service animals or if the situation poses a risk to the animal directly.

If your patient care unit cannot house your animal (e.g., acute inpatient hospital settings including intensive care units, stabilization units, locked mental health units) and family/friends cannot assist, your admitting Institute may arrange to board your service animal outside of the NIH campus. If this is necessary, you will be responsible for paying for boarding.

What if I am unable to care for my service animal during my stay?

You are responsible for the care of your service animal. If you are temporarily unable to walk, feed, or perform other care duties for your animal with the assistance of family and friends, then your care team may assist, if resources permit. If this is not

practical, your Institute will arrange to board the animal. If this is necessary, you will be responsible for paying for boarding.

May visitors bring service animals to the Clinical Center?

As stated above, visitors may bring their service animals to the Clinical Center, and documentation is not required. The same rules and limitations for exclusion or removal apply to visitors and their service animals.

Questions?

If you have questions about bringing service animals into the Clinical Center, contact:

Lisa G. Portnoy, DVM DACLAM
Clinical Center Animal Program Director
Telephone: 301-435-5304
Email: portnoyl@cc.nih.gov

This information is prepared specifically for persons taking part in clinical research at the National Institutes of Health Clinical Center and may not apply to patients elsewhere. If you have questions about the information presented here, talk to a member of your health care team.

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[Questions about the Clinical Center?](#)

