

<b>Vermont Psychiatric Care Hospital Policy and Procedure</b>		
<b>Restricted Items and Search Policy</b>		
Effective: December 2018	Revised: May 2023	Due to Review: May 2025

## **POLICY**

To maintain a safe and secure environment, the Vermont Psychiatric Care Hospital (VPCH) may search persons and items entering the facility. Item(s) that are determined to pose risk may be prohibited, restricted in certain areas of the facility, or limited to a very specific use.

## **DEFINITIONS**

Inspection: An *inspection* is a visual scan for potentially unsanitary or unsafe conditions. Items may be moved and/or uncovered to facilitate an inspection.

Person Search: A *person search* is a thorough examination of an individual and their clothing and belongings for the purpose of identifying and securing restricted items.

Room Search: A *room search* is a thorough examination of a room or specific area for restricted items or other unsafe condition.

Unit Search: A *unit search* is a thorough examination of all unit bedrooms and all common areas of the unit.

Visitor: A hospital *visitor* is defined as any individual who cannot access the facility using their own state issued identification badge and keys. For the purpose of this policy an individual who is issued badge/key access is no longer considered a visitor.

## **PROCEDURE**

### Inspection

Personnel shall continuously inspect their working spaces and the care environment to identify actual or potentially unsanitary or unsafe conditions.

Inspections of the yard and other off unit spaces shall be conducted to identify whether any restricted items or other potential hazards are present prior to hospitalized individuals occupying the space.

### Person Search

Person searches can be used for both visitors and hospitalized individuals. The process for visitor searches is distinctly different and is outlined in the *VPCH Visitor Policy*.

When conducting searches of hospitalized individuals, more invasive techniques may be used as described in the procedure below. This procedure shall only be conducted for hospitalized individuals and shall occur at the following times:

- During the admission process and before escort to the unit
- Upon return from elopement
- When returning from escorts outside of secure areas
- When mechanical restraints or seclusion is initiated
- Whenever there is reasonable suspicion that restricted items may be hidden on the individual (i.e., consider a search following an act of self- or other-directed violence, or when an ordered observation status is increased).

The invasiveness of a search for a hospitalized individual shall be determined by assessing relative risks and benefits of the search, including the potential for harm, the imminence of the harm, the risk of trauma to the individual, and whether less intrusive procedures exist which could verify the presence or absence of restricted items. Searches shall be conducted in a trauma-informed manner that respects the individual's dignity and privacy.

1. With a minimum of two (2) personnel, trained in search procedures, conduct the search in an area where privacy and safety can be assured. Personnel shall not leave a hospitalized individual unobserved at any time during the search process until it is complete.
2. Explain the search process to the individual, and specifically ask whether they have any restricted item(s) in their possession.
3. Ask the individual to remove their outer layers of clothing, to empty all pockets and turn them inside out.
4. Personnel shall ask the individual to stand with feet apart and with arms lifted away from the body.
5. To determine whether objects are concealed, staff shall scan the individual with a metal detector wand.
6. Whether listed in this policy as a restricted item or not, item(s) that are determined by the searcher to pose risk may be prohibited, restricted in certain areas of the facility, or limited to a very specific use. Whenever there is any uncertainty, questions shall be referred to the on-duty Nursing Supervisor.
7. At the discretion of the personnel conducting the search, they may:
  - Turn removed clothing inside out, check pockets, etc.
  - Inspect shoes.
  - Lightly run the back of gloved hands/fingers down the sides of the individual's arms, legs, torso, etc. to feel for the presence of restricted items that may be concealed.
8. If there is reason to suspect that restricted items may be concealed on the person and not discoverable using the above listed steps, the Nurse Supervisor and on-duty Physician shall be consulted to determine whether a more invasive search is necessary.
9. When conducting a *Person Search* where the last remaining layer of clothing removal will be requested, a Physician or a Registered Nurse shall be present. The gender of the

staff conducting the search shall be determined in collaboration with the hospitalized individual and after considering relevant clinical factors.

10. Using an individualized and trauma-informed approach, the individual may be asked to remove their clothing and don searched clothing.
11. Searches at VPCH will not be more invasive than visualization of the skin as described in the process above. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Chief Nursing Executive (CNE), and Executive Medical Officer (EMO), or their designees, shall collaborate on a plan as needed to determine next steps (i.e., transfer for imaging, etc.) if a more invasive search is deemed necessary and/or if the individual is not cooperative with the searchers' requests.
12. The personal belongings of hospitalized individuals shall be searched and inventoried in accordance with the *VPCH Patient Personal Effects Policy and Procedure*. Unless otherwise warranted by health, safety, or security concerns, individuals must be given the option of observing a search of their belongings.
13. Whenever restricted item(s) are identified, the item(s) shall be removed, the incident shall be documented in the individual's medical record and an event report shall be completed.

### Room and Unit Searches

An unscheduled and unannounced search of each unit/room shall be conducted weekly. Individual room searches are conducted as part of broader unit searches. In addition to this weekly search, a unit and/or room search may occur whenever there is reasonable suspicion that restricted items may be concealed.

1. Unless clinically contraindicated or unless otherwise warranted by health, safety, or security, hospitalized individuals have a right to be present for a search of their room and their belongings.
2. A minimum of two personnel, trained in search procedures, shall be present in order to search an individual's room.
3. The search shall include, but is not limited to, the following:
  - a. Behind and under furniture, above door and window frames
  - b. Contents of storage spaces
  - c. Clothing items (look in pockets, socks, sleeves, and legs of all clothing)
  - d. Pillows and mattresses - with attention paid to incisions or protrusions
  - e. Under mattresses
4. Personnel shall also complete a thorough search of common areas of the unit including the bathrooms, laundry room, visitor's rooms, dining room, etc. Particular attention shall be paid to areas behind and under furniture, appliances, and fixtures as well as door and window frames.
5. Personnel shall document that the unit search was conducted using the corresponding *Unit Search* form and provide documentation to the Nurse Supervisor.

### Whenever Restricted Items are Found

1. Whenever restricted items are found, the items shall be removed, secured, and inventoried in accordance with the *VPCH Patient Personal Effects Policy* as applicable.

2. Applicable clinical documentation and a corresponding event report should be completed as soon as possible, but no later than the end of the shift on which the restricted item(s) was discovered.
3. The on-duty Nursing Supervisor shall be notified when restricted items are found and is responsible for ensuring that any restricted items have been properly secured or disposed of and that the appropriate documentation and event reporting have been completed.


**Weapons and Drugs**

The VPCH CEO, CNE, or their designee, shall be immediately notified of any illegal restricted items found on hospital premises and shall coordinate any necessary notification of law enforcement authorities. Questions about whether any item requires a call to the State Police shall also be referred to the CEO, CNE, or their designee.

- Alcohol that is found during a search shall be discarded by pouring down a drain.
- Marijuana or marijuana products found during a search shall be discarded by VPCH pharmacy personnel.
- Illegal drugs shall be turned over to the Vermont State Police. Other restricted items shall be removed and securely stored with the patient's belongings.
- Weapons of any kind shall be turned over to the Vermont State Police.

**References (if applicable):**

- VPCH Visitor Policy
- VPCH Patient Personal Effects Policy

<b>Approved by</b>	<b>Signature</b>	<b>Date</b>
Emily Hawes Commissioner Vermont Department of Mental Health	 <p>DocuSigned by: Emily Hawes C50275615A62462...</p>	5/9/2023

## Appendix A: Restricted Items List

Items that pose a potential risk of harm and are therefore generally prohibited across the facility include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Weapons or items that readily lend themselves to use as weapons (guns, metal knives, Zip ties, etc.)
- Medications not provided by VPCH (over the counter and prescribed), illegal drugs, alcohol, and toxic substances
- Matches, lighters, cigarettes, and other smoking materials

In addition to the above list, items that pose a potential risk of harm and are therefore generally prohibited within the designated care areas of the facility include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Gum or other items of similar texture
- Hair products (e.g., high alcohol content, pumps, large size/weight, etc.), aerosol products, and razors
- Hair dryers, curling irons, and other electric devices
- Scissors, sewing kits, and other sharp objects
- Mirrors, bottles, and other items made from glass
- Cellphones/cameras/smartwatches or other photographing/recording devices
- Shoelaces, zip ties, neck ties, string, straps, cords, belts, scarves, drawstrings, and other items that present a potential strangulation hazard
- Plastic bags
- Non-essential keys
- Strings or cords
- Perishable food
- Certain jewelry that could pose a strangulation or other injury risk hazard
- Certain jewelry, metal/wire within clothing items
- Any other item that, at the discretion of staff, poses a potential risk of harm to self or others
- Plastic dining utensils are not considered restricted items; however, access to plastic utensils shall be closely monitored when a patient has been determined to be at high risk for serious harm to self or others

If a hospitalized individual needs to utilize or access a restricted item, it would be done so under supervision unless otherwise specified by a physician order or in an individual's treatment plan.