August 19, 2020

The MMS will continue to monitor developments related to the coronavirus (COVID-19) and the response by state and federal agencies. For current information, including updates from NEJM, visit the dedicated page on the MMS website: massmed.org/covid-19.

Public Health

Boston sports teams, MMS team up to encourage mask use

The Massachusetts Medical Society, along with the Boston Bruins, Boston Celtics, Boston Red Sox, New England Patriots, and New England Revolution, produced a video encouraging the region’s sports fans to wear a mask and prevent the spread of COVID-19. Dr. Eric Goralnick, past chair of the Committee on Preparedness and a member of the MMS' COVID Advisory Group, helped to develop and coordinate the video’s production.

The video features Medical Society president Dr. David Rosman, Bruins captain Zdeno Chara, Red Sox pitcher Martin Perez, Celtics center Tacko Fall, Patriots special teams captain Matthew Slater, and Revolution defender Brandon Bye telling fans to “mask up.” Perez, a native of Venezuela, delivers his plea in Spanish. The 90-second spot concludes with Rosman and the athletes donning organization-branded masks and asking fans to put on a mask and post photos to social media using the hashtag #Maskup!
“We can protect our family, our friends, and our community with three simple actions,” Rosman said. “Wear a mask, wash your hands, and stay six feet apart.” View and share the video here

Seven questions patients might ask about managing risk and wearing masks

It is more important than ever that everyone do their part and #MaskUp to stop the transmission of COVID-19. As the U.S. continues to grapple the new normal of wearing masks as part of their daily attire, patients might have questions. With “understandable confusion about masks because the recommendation changed,” as JAMA Associate Editor Dr. Preeti Malani notes, patients may have questions have about managing risk and wearing masks during the COVID-19 pandemic. Read more

Practice Management

BCBS MA authorization update

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts (BCBS MA) will continue to extend time-limited authorizations for outpatient procedures delayed because of the COVID-19 emergency. All other administrative requirements related to these services continue to apply. For the duration of the Massachusetts public state of emergency, BCBS MA is granting extensions for the services listed below.

Assisted reproductive technology services
For assisted reproductive technology services listed in our medical policy that require prior authorization:

- BCBS MA will extend existing authorizations for the period of January 1, 2020-June 30, 2020 to December 31, 2020.
- BCBS MA will give new authorization requests 180 days for the service to be completed. After that time, an authorization extension would be required.
Neuropsychological testing services
For neuropsychological testing services listed in the [medical policy](#) that require prior authorization, BCBS MA typically gives the member 365 days to complete the authorized services. However, it was decided to extend existing authorizations for the period of March 1, 2019 – December 31, 2019 to December 31, 2020. New authorization requests will continue to have 365 days for the service to be completed. After that time, an authorization extension would be required.

Added modifiers for non-emergency ground ambulance services
BCBS MA updated the previous [April 20, 2020 article](#) about the temporary coverage for non-emergency ground ambulance services to include the following modifiers:

- NJ*: Skilled nursing facility to freestanding end-stage renal disease (ESRD) facility
- JN*: Freestanding end-stage renal disease (ESRD) facility to skilled nursing facility
- *Note: These modifiers do not apply to Federal Employee Program members.

If you have questions, please contact BCBS MA clinical coordination department at 1-800-327-6716.

Harvard Pilgrim Health Care immunizations update
Harvard Pilgrim recognizes that the COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically disrupted the routine operations of many provider offices and clinics since March, causing many non-emergent services to be put on hold and shifting priorities at facilities across the country. Harvard Pilgrim launched a health services initiative to support efforts to get patients in for vaccinations. The initiative is focused on reminding members about the importance of getting vaccinated and assuring them that doctors’ offices and clinics are taking the necessary precautions so they can continue to come in and receive their immunizations.

Harvard Pilgrim has begun urging members to call their primary care physicians and make appointments for themselves and their children for any immunizations they may have missed during lockdown/stay-at-home orders.
As a reminder, pediatric patients can have their annual well visit split into two parts, if needed, with a portion done remotely and the vaccination and physical done in-person. This is reimbursed at the same rate as in-office visits. Only one visit can be billed once all the components of the visit are completed. More information on Harvard Pilgrim’s interim policy regarding telemedicine/telehealth during the COVID-19 pandemic can be found here.

Harvard Pilgrim is here to support physicians in maintaining optimal patient and community health during August’s National Immunization Awareness Month and beyond. It's recommended that physicians and/or office staff refer to the following resources to support physical distancing in your practice while you bring patients back:

- [CDC guidance on immunizations during a pandemic](#)
- [AAP National Immunization Awareness Month link](#)
- [CDC print resources to post in your office](#)
- [Infectious Diseases Society of America COVID-19 poster](#)

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