January 11, 2021

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

FDA continues to monitor SARS-CoV-2 viral mutations and test accuracy

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is alerting clinical laboratory staff and health care providers that the FDA is monitoring the potential impact of viral mutations, including an emerging variant from the United Kingdom known as the B.1.1.7 variant, on authorized SARS-CoV-2 molecular tests, and that false negative results can occur with any molecular test for the detection of SARS-CoV-2 if a mutation occurs in the part of the virus’s genome assessed by that test. The FDA is taking action to ensure that authorized tests remain accurate by working with test developers and conducting data analysis. The FDA believes the risk that these mutations will impact overall testing accuracy is low.
Deadline tomorrow to reserve donated hand sanitizer

The Massachusetts Health and Hospital Association (MHA), in partnership with the Massachusetts Value Alliance (MVA), is receiving a donation of hand sanitizer from MD Science Labs that will be available to member organizations. More than eleven thousand 8-oz bottles of sanitizer will be available for pick up next week (location, date, and time to be determined). Interested organizations should complete this brief form by the end of business hours on Tuesday, January 12 to reserve sanitizer. MHA will then contact organizations early next week to confirm their order and pickup arrangements.

Please contact MHA’s Kim Stevenson with any questions at kstevenson@mhalink.org. Product details, including the safety data sheets, are here.

Find your COVID-19 vaccine CPT® codes

The American Medical Association (AMA) released a new tool to determine the appropriate CPT code combination for the type and dose of the vaccine being used.

Read more

Practice Management

Deadline February 1: 2020 MIPS Extreme and Uncontrollable Circumstances Exception application

To support clinicians during the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency (PHE), the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services (CMS) extended the 2020 Merit-based Incentive Payment System (MIPS) Extreme and Uncontrollable Circumstances Exception application deadline to February 1. For the 2020 performance year, MIPS-eligible clinicians, groups, and virtual groups can submit an application asking CMS to reweigh one or more performance categories to 0% due to the PHE. If you have concerns about the effect of the COVID-19 PHE on your performance data, including cost measures, apply and cite COVID-19 as the reason for your application.
Paycheck Protection Program reopens this week for new and existing borrowers

The U.S. Small Business Administration, in consultation with the Treasury Department, announced that the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) will reopen the week of January 11 for new borrowers and certain existing PPP borrowers. To promote access to capital, community financial institutions will be able to make First Draw PPP loans on Monday, January 11, and Second Draw PPP loans on Wednesday, January 13. The PPP will open to all participating lenders shortly thereafter.

Read more

BCBS MA authorization requirements waived until March 31

Recognizing that hospitals continue to experience administrative resource issues due to COVID-19, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts (BCBS MA) will continue to waive authorization requirements for inpatient acute care and mental health hospitals through March 31, 2021. This extension applies to:

- All inpatient acute care and mental health admissions, whether or not related to COVID-19
- Prior authorization and concurrent reviews for inpatient admissions
- Scheduled surgeries at inpatient acute care hospitals

The extension affects all Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts products, except the Federal Employee Program.

Read more
HHS renews public health emergency declaration

The Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) Alex Azar has extended the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency (PHE) declaration effective January 21, 2021, for an additional 90 days. This means that the many flexibilities and waivers implemented during the PHE will remain in effect until at least April 21, 2021.

CMS COVID-19 Office Hours Calls

Office Hour Calls provide an opportunity for hospitals, health systems, and providers to ask questions of agency officials regarding Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services’ (CMS) temporary actions that empower local hospitals and health care systems to:

- Increase hospital capacity – CMS Hospitals Without Walls
- Rapidly expand the health care workforce
- Put patients over paperwork
- Promote telehealth in Medicare

Next Office Hours:

- Date: Tuesday, January 12
- Time: 5:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m. ET
- Toll-free attendee dial-in: (833) 614-0820
- Passcode: 4688247
- Audio webcast

Telehealth policy and coverage: What you need to know for 2021

Telehealth was thrust onto the main stage in 2020 as a way to keep people safe while still receiving care amidst the pandemic. Telehealth continues to cement its place in care delivery now and into the future. The American Medical Association (AMA) has advocated for telehealth policies and coverage that support the long-term, sustainable use
of telehealth as an option for physicians and patients. Learn about the latest policy and coverage developments at the federal and state levels to ensure that your practice is prepared to successfully leverage telehealth in 2021.

- Date: Thursday, January 14, 2021
- Time: 1:00 p.m. – 2 p.m. ET
- Speakers: Sandy Marks, JD, AMA Senior Assistant Director of Federal Affairs; Kim Horvath, AMA Senior Legislative Attorney, Advocacy Resource Center

Register

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