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June 22, 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

DPH's COVID-19 Health Equity Advisory Group recommendations released

To address the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on communities of color and marginalized populations, the Department of Public Health's (DPH) COVID-19 Health Equity Advisory Group released recommendations to inform the state's ongoing COVID-19 pandemic response. The recommendations include new DPH data that show marked differences in COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, and deaths for different races and ethnicities:

- Black non-Hispanics and Hispanics have a 3x higher positive case rate than White non-Hispanics.
- Black non-Hispanics and Hispanics have higher rates of hospitalizations.
- Age-adjusted mortality rates show that these groups bear a higher burden of COVID-19 deaths compared to White or Asian populations.

Convened by DPH Commissioner Dr. Monica Bharel, the COVID-19 Health Equity Advisory Group included 26 community leaders, health and racial equity experts, and members of communities and populations disproportionately impacted by the coronavirus pandemic.

See the full list of recommendations and advisory group members [here](#).

New COVID-19 testing website launched – Community contact tracing emphasized

The Commonwealth launched a revamped testing website, “Get Tested MA,” as a one-stop resource for the public to find information about testing. The website, [Mass.gov/gettested](https://www.mass.gov/gettested), has information on who should get tested, what to do if an individual tests positive, and details about the available tests.

The page also includes information about the [Community Tracing Collaborative](#)—the Commonwealth’s contact tracing program. Contact tracing is essential to help slow the spread of the virus. Participation in contact tracing will not only help connect individuals to medical support and resources, but answering calls from the MA COVID Team helps flatten the curve and keep family, friends, and the community safe.

Practice Management

Accepting new applications for Economic Injury Disaster Loans and Advance program

To further meet the needs of U.S. small businesses and non-profits, the U.S. Small Business Administration reopened the [Economic Injury Disaster Loan \(EIDL\) and EIDL Advance program portal](#) to all eligible applicants experiencing economic impacts due to COVID-19:

- The SBA is offering low-interest federal disaster loans for working capital to small businesses and non-profit organizations that are suffering substantial economic injury as a result of COVID-19 in all U.S. states, Washington D.C., and territories.
- These loans may be used to pay debts, payroll, accounts payable and other bills that can't be paid because of the disaster's impact, and that are not already covered by a Paycheck Protection Program loan. The interest rate is 3.75% for small businesses. The interest rate for non-profits is 2.75%.
- To keep payments affordable for small businesses, SBA offers loans with long repayment terms, up to a maximum of 30 years. Additionally, the first payment is deferred for one year.
- In addition, small businesses and non-profits may request, as part of their loan application, an EIDL Advance of up to \$10,000. The EIDL Advance is designed to provide emergency economic relief to businesses that are currently experiencing a temporary loss of revenue. This advance will not have to be repaid, and small businesses may receive an advance even if they are not approved for a loan.
- The SBA is also assisting small businesses and non-profits with access to the **federal forgivable** loan program—the [Paycheck Protection Program](#)—which is currently accepting applications until June 30, 2020.

For additional information, please visit the SBA disaster assistance website at [SBA.gov/Disaster](https://www.sba.gov/disaster).

CMS new FAQ

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) released additional Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) on recent COVID-19-related waivers to help physicians, hospitals, and rural health clinics. The document includes information about:

- Payment for specimen collection for purposes of COVID-19 testing
- High-throughput COVID-19 testing
- Medicare telehealth
- Scope of practice
- Chronic care management services

- Teaching physician regulations

To learn more, [click here](#).

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts updates

Increased fees for COVID-19 lab and specimen collection codes

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts (BCBS MA) is increasing reimbursement for COVID-19 lab and specimen collection codes, retroactive to their effective date, in response to the [Massachusetts Division of Insurance \(DOI\) Bulletin 2020-16](#) issued on May 18, 2020. BCBS MA will reprocess all claims for these testing codes back to the code effective date and will continue to monitor reimbursement for these codes as new information becomes available. This change applies to all products except Medicare Advantage. See the [COVID-19 temporary payment policy](#) for additional information on reimbursement and billing requirements.

Extending prior authorization waiver

BCBS MA continues to waive referral and prior authorization requirements for all inpatient levels of care. This includes acute, long-term acute, acute and subacute rehabilitation, and skilled nursing facility admissions. Starting with dates of service on or after **October 1, 2020**, you will need to submit authorizations. This applies to all products, excluding the Federal Employee Program.

What does this mean?

- Providers still need to notify BCBS MA of all inpatient levels of care and submit the appropriate supporting documentation.
- While this notification-only requirement is in place, BCBS MA will not perform medical necessity reviews for inpatient levels of care.
- Timely notification helps facilitate optimal care coordination, mobilize additional services to support transition-of-care and discharge planning, and ensure claims processing.
- This is an extension to the waiver that was announced on March 24 and was set to expire on June 23, 2020. See [COVID-19: Latest news \(March 24\)](#).

Getting started with the Provider Relief Fund for Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) distribution webinars

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, through the Provider Relief Fund, expects to distribute \$15 billion to eligible Medicaid and CHIP providers. Join this webcast, hosted by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), to learn more about the application process. Please pre-register to reserve a spot at one of these upcoming sessions:

Session 1

- Date: Tuesday, June 23
- Time: 2:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m. EDT
- [Register here](#)

Session 2

- Date: Thursday, June 25
- Time: 2:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m. EDT
- [Register here](#)

CMS coronavirus stakeholder calls

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) hosts recurring stakeholder engagement sessions to share information related to the agency's response to COVID-19. These sessions are open to members of the health care community and are intended to provide updates, share best practices among peers, and offer attendees an opportunity to ask questions of CMS and other subject-matter experts.

CMS call details:

- Date: Tuesday, June 23
 - Time: 5:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m. EDT
 - Attendee dial-in: 833-614-0820
 - Access passcode: 5775248
 - [Click here](#) to access the audio webcast
-

DOI & CHIA meeting for providers: Testing, telehealth, and prior authorization

The Division of Insurance (DOI) and the Center for Health Information and Analysis (CHIA) hosts regular meetings offering providers an opportunity to raise questions and concerns related to Governor Baker's emergency order commercial insurance provisions.

The next meeting, which will be recorded, will be held from **2:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m. on Thursday, June 25**, and will focus on testing, telehealth, and prior authorization.

To join the meeting, please see below.

- [Meeting URL](#)
 - Meeting ID: 290 289 5643
 - Password: 501
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