November 2, 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.

Practice Management

Deadline approaching for Provider Relief Fund applications

Providers have until Friday, November 6, 2020 to initiate their application for Phase 3 General Distribution funding. [Apply here](#).

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is distributing up to $20 billion to health care providers under a Phase 3 General Distribution through the Provider Relief Fund (PRF). Applications will be considered regardless of whether an organization was previously eligible for, applied for, received, accepted, or rejected prior PRF payments. For this new phase, funding will be allocated to providers based on assessed financial losses and changes in operating expenses caused by COVID-19. To learn more:

- Review the Phase 3 General Distribution [fact sheet](#)
- Visit the Provider Relief Fund [webpage](#)
- Watch a recording of the [October 15 webcast](#)
- Read through the Provider Relief Fund [Frequently Asked Questions](#)
AMA survey results: COVID-19's financial impact on physician practices

As the pandemic stretches on, physician practice viability remains under threat. A new American Medical Association (AMA) survey about the COVID-19 pandemic’s impact provides a window into the financial pressures physician practices have faced and continue to experience. The survey was conducted online from mid-July through the end of August.

- The average number of in-person visits to physician offices fell from 97 per week to 57, according to the survey of 3,500 physicians who provided at least 20 hours of patient care a week before the pandemic.
- Physicians averaged a 32% drop in revenue since February, the AMA survey shows. About one in five doctors saw revenue drop by 50% or more, while nearly one-third saw declines of between 25% and 49%. Only 19% of physicians reported no drop in revenue.

These graphics, which represent the results of an AMA nationwide physician survey, illustrate the precarious trends and realities physicians now face.

Medicare coverage and payment of vaccines and therapeutics

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) issued a fourth COVID-19 Interim Final Rule with Comment that provides coverage and payment details for COVID-19 vaccines and therapeutics.

Medicare will cover the cost of COVID-19 vaccines and their administration and will waive out-of-pocket costs for both traditional fee-for-service beneficiaries and beneficiaries enrolled in Medicare Advantage plans. Medicare will pay physicians $28.39 to administer coronavirus vaccines. For vaccines that require two doses, Medicare will pay $16.95 for the first dose and $28.39 for the second dose. These rates will be geographically adjusted.
The rule also requires Medicaid, Children’s Health Insurance Program agencies, and most private health plans to administer the vaccine at no cost to patients during the public health emergency. The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) will cover the vaccine and its administration for any uninsured individuals through the CARES Act Provider Relief Fund. Continue reading »

CMS also released additional information including a fact sheet, COVID-19 vaccine resources, and FAQs on billing for therapeutics.

---

**BCBSMA temporary payment policy update**

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts (BCBSMA) updated its temporary COVID-19 payment policy. This policy outlines how Blue Cross reimburses for COVID-19 related services including testing, telehealth and telephonic services, and drive-through/tent/specimen collection for COVID-19. Read more »

---

**Harvard Pilgrim reminders and resources**

**Prior authorization** — Harvard Pilgrim extended the suspension of prior authorization on elective admissions at acute care facilities and acute inpatient admissions at acute care, skilled nursing, long-term acute care, and rehab facilities for Massachusetts commercial products for dates of service through December 31, 2020. For all other states and Medicare Advantage products, prior authorization was reinstated for dates of service beginning June 30, 2020.

**Cost-sharing** — Cost sharing for telemedicine services resumed for commercial members on October 1, 2020, unless telemedicine is being used for COVID treatment. Cost-sharing for COVID-19 treatment — whether delivered in person or via telemedicine— is covered in full without member cost-sharing through December 31, 2020 for all fully insured commercial, Medicare Advantage, Medicare Supplement, and Medicare Enhance plans.

For more information, please refer to the COVID-19 provider information sheet.
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
- Further promote telehealth in Medicare

Next Office Hours:

- Date: Tuesday, November 3
- Time: 5:00 p.m. – 6 p.m. ET
- Toll-free attendee dial-in: (833) 614-0820
- Passcode: 2394789
- Audio webcast

Follow us on:

Facebook | Twitter | LinkedIn | Instagram

© 2020 Massachusetts Medical Society. All rights reserved.
860 Winter Street, Waltham Woods Corporate Center, Waltham, MA 02451-1411
781-893-4610 | 781-893-3800 | Member Information Hotline: 800-322-2303 x7311

To ensure delivery of all Massachusetts Medical Society communications, please add vitalsignsthisweek@mms.org to your email address book or Safe Sender List. If you are still having problems receiving our communications, see our white-listing page for more details.

| Unsubscribe |