November 30, 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 releases preliminary vaccine information to hospitals

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health's (DPH) Office of Preparedness and Emergency Management distributed initial guidance about COVID-19 vaccination. This preliminary guidance details medical and logistical information about the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines and outlines preparatory steps that hospitals should take for vaccine administration. Read more »

State vaccine program enrollment

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) Immunization Division will be sending invitations to participate in/register for the Massachusetts COVID-19 Vaccine Program through the Massachusetts Immunization Information System (MIIS) state vaccine management system. At present, the invitation has been sent to hospitals and community health centers. Should your hospital and CHC members not be able to track down who in their institution received the invite or need another one sent, please have
them contact the Vaccine Unit at dph-vaccine-management@massmail.state.ma.us or (617) 983-6828.

The MMS will include a notice in future communications when invitations to the COVID-19 Vaccine Program are extended to physician practices.

DPH continues to urge testing in pediatric & adolescent patients

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) published a reminder last week to all providers—especially those treating pediatric and adolescent patients—strongly recommending molecular (e.g., PCR) COVID-19 testing for all patients with symptoms compatible with COVID, and in all close contacts to COVID-positive individuals during the infectious period. To protect children and staff attending school and childcare from the introduction of COVID-19, DPH underscored that testing of symptomatic individuals must be the default practice.

Please contact DPH at (617) 983-6800 or the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) at reopeningk12@mass.gov for further questions about policies and protocols for children attending Massachusetts schools.

Practice Management

HHS allocates Regeneron therapeutic to treat patients with mild to moderate COVID-19

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) announced plans to allocate initial doses of Regeneron’s investigational monoclonal antibody therapeutic, casirivimab and imdevimab, which received Emergency Use Authorization from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) on November 21, for treatment of non-hospitalized patients with mild or moderate confirmed cases of COVID-19 at high risk of hospitalization.

The drug is the third COVID-19 therapeutic for which HHS has provided allocation oversight. The first—Veklury (remdesivir)—gained FDA approval and is now widely
available, and earlier this month HHS began allocation oversight of the second—bamlanivimab—from Eli Lilly and Company. Read more »

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**CMS COVID-19 vaccine policies and guidance**

In anticipation of safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines being available in the future, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) issued this toolkit to help health care providers prepare to administer vaccines. Because the initial supply of COVID-19 vaccines will be federally purchased, this toolkit primarily focuses on coverage of vaccine administration. Vaccine doses purchased with U.S. taxpayer dollars will be given to the American people at no cost. Read more »

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**AMA forum: Managing Mental Health During COVID-19**

During a crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, it is common for everyone to experience increased levels of distress and anxiety, particularly as a result of social isolation. Physicians and other frontline health care professionals are particularly vulnerable to negative mental health effects as they strive to balance the duty of caring for patients with concerns about their own well-being and that of family and friends.

In this webinar, Christopher Botts, Care Delivery and Payment Manager at the American Medical Association (AMA), will discuss strategies to manage mental well-being while also caring for patients during the pandemic or any other crisis.

- Date: Wednesday, December 2, 2020
- Time: 1:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m. EST
- Register »

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**CMS special open-door forum: Physician self-referral law**
Please join the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) for a special open-door forum to discuss a final rule released on November 20 to modernize and clarify the regulations that interpret the federal physician self-referral law (often called the “Stark Law”). The final rule supports the CMS “Patients over Paperwork” initiative by reducing unnecessary regulatory burdens on physicians and other health care providers while reinforcing the Stark Law’s goal of protecting patients from unnecessary, less convenient, lower quality, or more expensive services because of a physician’s financial self-interest.

- Date: Wednesday, December 2, 2020
- Time: 2:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m. EST
- Dial-in number: (888) 455-1397
- Participant passcode ID: 2037400

AMA webinar series: COVID-19 vaccine update

Experts convened by the American Medical Association (AMA) will discuss the latest developments on the road to effective COVID-19 vaccines, including a deep dive into the Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) process, specifically how the timeline has been shortened from a matter of years to a matter of months.

- Date: Thursday, December 3, 2020
- Time: 2:00 p.m. EST
- Register »

Forum: COVID-19 Medicare Part B advanced payment, repayment, and recoupment process

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) expanded the accelerated and advance payment program for financial hardship relief during the COVID-19 public health emergency. Accelerated or advanced payments need to be repaid to the Medicare Trust Fund. If health care providers requested and received accelerated or advanced
payments from Medicare due to the COVID-19 public health emergency, this open forum will be an important resource.

- Date: Tuesday, December 8, 2020
- Time: 10:00 a.m. – 11:15 a.m. EST
- Register »