February 17, 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

Massachusetts residents over 65 and those with two health conditions eligible for COVID-19 vaccines on February 18

Effective tomorrow, February 18, people age 65 or older and individuals with two or more specific medical conditions, and residents and staff of public and private low-income and affordable senior housing are eligible to receive a COVID-19 vaccine and can begin booking vaccine appointments on Thursday, February 18.

With this announcement, almost 1 million individuals are newly eligible for vaccine.

Due to extremely high demand for appointments and limited vaccine supply, it could take more than a month for all eligible individuals to secure an available appointment, unless federal supply significantly increases. Recently, Massachusetts has been receiving approximately 110,000 first doses per week from the federal government. Residents are encouraged to keep checking the website as appointments are added on a rolling basis.
The state today issued a letter to primary care providers regarding the status of vaccine access for their patients.

The Massachusetts Medical Society will continue to advocate for physicians to receive vaccine for their patients as the state's supply increases.

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**Practice Management**

**What partners need to know now about health insurance coverage during the pandemic**

As COVID-19 vaccines begin rolling out across the country, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) is taking action to protect the health and safety of our nation’s patients and providers and keeping you updated on the latest COVID-19 resources from the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and CMS. With information coming from many different sources, CMS has compiled resources and materials to help share important and relevant information on the COVID-19 vaccine with patients. Please find these and more resources on the [COVID-19 partner resources page](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html) and the [HHS COVID education campaign page](https://www.hhs.gov/).  

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**Feb 22-24: National forum on COVID-19 vaccine**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is organizing a virtual national forum that will bring together practitioners from national, state, tribal, local and territorial levels who are engaged in vaccinating communities across the nation. [Learn more](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccination/ccc-national-forum.html) or [register](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccination/ccc-national-forum.html).

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**List of COVID-19 resources for organizations working with persons who use drugs or have substance use disorder**
Click [here for compiled resources](#) and information regarding COVID-19 for organizations working with patients who use drugs or have substance use disorders.

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**COVID-19 Economic Injury Disaster Loans**

The Small Business Administration (SBA) is still accepting COVID-19 Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) applications as the deadline to [apply](#) has been extended to Dec. 31, 2021. EIDL funding is used to pay fixed debts, payroll and expenses, accounts payable and other bills that can’t be paid because of the disaster’s impact. This financial resource has allowed millions of small business owners across America to retain employees, continue operating and support their communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. As a reminder, the loan portion of the COVID-19 EIDL program continues to have funds available at very affordable and flexible terms, with an automatic deferment of one year before monthly payments begin. Every eligible small business and non-profit is encouraged to [click here](#) to get more information.

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**Medicare Part B payment for vaccines and certain monoclonal antibodies during the public health emergency**

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) has released a [set of toolkits](#) for providers, states and insurers to help the health care system prepare and assist in swiftly administering these products once they become available. These resources are designed to increase the number of providers who can administer the products and ensure adequate reimbursement for administration in Medicare, while making it clear to private insurers and Medicaid programs their responsibility to cover these products at no charge to beneficiaries. This webpage provides the payment allowances and other related information for these products.

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**MMS Advocacy in the Media**
Doctors decry Massachusetts plan changing vaccination focus (Boston.com)

Dr. David Rosman, president of the Massachusetts Medical Society, told The Boston Globe he feared the state had chosen “efficiency at the cost of equity.” He said some communities of color are more likely to trust their physicians. “People have a trusting relationship with their doctor, and when their doctor says, ‘This is safe and as soon as my family is eligible I will get it for them,’ then patients are more willing,” he said.

Read more here.

Hospitals fume as governor shifts vaccine strategy (WBUR)

When vaccine supply increases and the state allows hospitals to resume booking new patients, the Massachusetts Medical Society will continue to urge Governor Baker to send vials to independent physician practices, not just hospital-based doctors, so that they can vaccinate their patients as well. The Baker administration says hospitals have been the largest recipient of vaccine doses in Massachusetts to date.

Read more here.