March 1, 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

MMS and other physician leaders call for primary care physicians to be the "centerpiece of vaccine distribution"

Massachusetts Medical Society President Dr. David A. Rosman and leaders of five other physician groups in the state warn that omitting primary care physicians from distribution plans to receive vaccine for their patients “risks the success of the long-term goal to get vaccines to all patients equitably and efficiently.”

In a statement released last week, they noted that "primary care physicians are the most trusted source of medical care, yet paradoxically, most patients cannot get their vaccine through their primary care physician’s office. Ultimately, this lack of access could amplify inequities among marginalized groups, including the elderly, disabled and the vaccine hesitant.”

Additional signators include Dr. Elisa Choi, Governor, Massachusetts Chapter American College of Physicians; Dr. Michele C. Parker, President, Massachusetts Chapter
Practice Management

Administration strengthens requirements that plans and issuers cover COVID-19 diagnostic testing without cost sharing

In accordance with the Executive Order President Biden signed on January 21, 2021, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), together with the Department of Labor and the Department of the Treasury, (collectively, the Departments) issued new guidance removing barriers to COVID-19 diagnostic testing and vaccinations and strengthening requirements that plans and issuers cover diagnostic testing without cost sharing.

This guidance makes clear that private group health plans and issuers generally cannot use medical screening criteria to deny coverage for COVID-19 diagnostic tests for individuals with health coverage who are asymptomatic, and who have no known or suspected exposure to COVID-19.

DOI and MassHealth listening sessions on telehealth provisions

The Massachusetts Division of Insurance (DOI) and MassHealth are scheduling information sessions (see schedule below) to discuss the implementation of telehealth provisions in Chapter 260 of the Acts of 2020 as enacted on January 1, 2021.
During these information sessions, DOI and MassHealth are interested in having conversations with physicians, consumers, insurance carriers, and other interested parties to hear thoughts about guidance that the Division of Insurance and MassHealth might provide through the issuing of bulletins, regulations, or other communications to allow for the implementation of the noted provisions.

The Massachusetts Medical Society (MMS) will be actively engaged in each of these sessions, advocating on behalf of the physician community. If you have specifics consistent with the identified topic areas listed below, please contact Leda Anderson at Landerson@mms.org or Bissan Biary at BBiary@mms.org.

**DOI listening sessions schedule**
- Friday, March 12, 10 a.m. - 11:30; Planned topics: Definitions of primary care, chronic care, behavioral health care and “health care services appropriate to be provided through telehealth”
- Wednesday, March 31, 10 a.m. - 11:30; Planned topics: Reimbursement and billing
- Wednesday, April 14, 10 a.m. - 11:30; Planned topics: Utilization review for telehealth and telehealth standards to be added to managed care accreditation reviews

To join the Zoom meetings click here.

Meeting ID: 290 289 5643

Passcode: 501

Join via telephone:

- +1 646 558 8656 US (New York)
- +1 646 518 9805 US (New York)
FDA issues authorization for Quidel QuickVue At-Home COVID-19 Test

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued an emergency use authorization (EUA) for the Quidel QuickVue At-Home COVID-19 Test, another antigen test where certain individuals can rapidly collect and test their sample at home, without needing to send a sample to a laboratory for analysis.

The QuickVue At-Home COVID-19 Test is authorized for prescription home use with self-collected anterior nasal (nares) swabs from individuals ages 14 and older or individuals ages 8 and older with swabs collected by an adult. The test is authorized for individuals suspected of COVID-19 by their healthcare provider within the first six days of symptom onset.

Interim guidelines for collecting and handling of clinical specimens for COVID-19 testing

Click here to learn more about centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) updates regarding:

- Collecting and handling specimens safely
- Respiratory specimen collection
- Handling bulk-packaged sterile swabs properly for upper-respiratory specimen collection
- Storing and shipping respiratory specimens
- Capillary fingerstick specimen collection
- And additional resources

CDC expert takes deep dive on variants and new mask research
Dr. John Brooks, chief medical officer for the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) COVID-19 Response in Atlanta, discusses the CDC's five-prong approach to track variants, including the B.1.1.7 variant (first detected in the U.K.), the B.1.351 variant (first detected in South Africa) and the P. 1 variant (first detected in Brazil). Dr. Brooks also discusses a recent study on the potential benefits of wearing a cloth mask over a clinical mask, or double masking.