

May 5, 2021

PROVIDER ALERT

To: **Health Plan of San Joaquin (HPSJ) Providers and Pharmacists**
From: Health Plan of San Joaquin
Subject: **UPDATE-
DHCS Guidance - COVID-19 Vaccines & Vaccination Administration**
Business: Medi-Cal Managed Care

The California Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) has now issued updated guidance for all Medi-Cal managed care health care plans regarding both COVID-19 vaccine coverage and vaccination administration. As a valued member of the Health Plan of San Joaquin (HPSJ) Provider Network, we want you to be aware of this important information in the attached **All Plan Letter, APL 20-022 (REVISED April 30, 2021)**.

NOTE: The original DHCS guidance, was included in a January 7, 2021 HPSJ Provider Alert (<https://www.hpsj.com/dhcs-guidance-covid-19-vaccines-vaccination-administration/>).

Encouraging outreach to members and patients to help them get their vaccine

- COVID-19 vaccines are now available to HPSJ members 16 and older. HPSJ is continuing to be responsible for medically necessary care, including needed transportation.
- Providers are encouraged to communicate with members to have them make an appointment for their vaccine and take the opportunity to check-in with the member for medical and/or preventative care issues (page 6 of the attached).
- Members who are have barriers with transportation can call HPSJ for assistance.

We hope you will find this ongoing guidance from DHCS of value.

If you or your staff have any questions, please contact Provider Services at 209.942.6340.

We also continue to maintain this COVID-19 information section of our website to help support our members, in English and in Spanish – <https://www.hpsj.com/coronavirus/> and <https://miembros.hpsj.com/coronavirus/>.

ATTACHED: All Plan Letter, APL 20-022 (REVISED April 30, 2021) – 7 pages



WILL LIGHTBOURNE
DIRECTOR

State of California—Health and Human Services Agency
Department of Health Care Services



GAVIN NEWSOM
GOVERNOR

DATE: April 30, 2021

ALL PLAN LETTER 20-022 (REVISED)

TO: ALL MEDI-CAL MANAGED CARE HEALTH PLANS

SUBJECT: COVID-19 VACCINE ADMINISTRATION

PURPOSE: The purpose of this All Plan Letter (APL) is to provide Medi-Cal managed care health plans (MCPs) with information and guidance regarding COVID-19 vaccine coverage and administration in the Medi-Cal program. Revised text is found in *italics*.

BACKGROUND:

With the recent federal approval of COVID-19 vaccines, the Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) is seeking federal approval to help support delivery of the vaccines to all Medi-Cal beneficiaries. The vaccines will be provided at no cost to all beneficiaries.

DHCS will be following California's COVID-19 vaccination plan, which was approved by the California Department of Public Health (CDPH). This vaccination plan calls for implementation in several phases: pre-vaccine; limited doses available; larger number of doses available; and sufficient supply of doses available for the entire population.¹

California is leveraging its existing immunization framework and emergency response infrastructure to coordinate efforts between state, local, and territorial authorities to administer the vaccines. Throughout this effort, DHCS will be sharing appropriate information with providers, MCP partners, other key stakeholders, and Medi-Cal beneficiaries.

Consistent with the approach being taken by Medicare through Medicare Advantage Plans, DHCS will carve out the COVID-19 vaccines and associated administration fees from the Medi-Cal managed care delivery system and will reimburse providers under Medi-Cal fee-for-service (FFS) for medical, pharmacy, and outpatient claims. This approach will ease program administration, eliminate challenges with out-of-network provider reimbursements, and keep vaccine administration fee rates consistent for providers regardless of delivery system.

¹ For further information on the state's vaccination planning efforts please visit:
<https://covid19.ca.gov/vaccines/>

As the federal government will pay for the vaccines, there will be no Medi-Cal provider reimbursement for the COVID-19 vaccines themselves. However, providers will be able to bill Medi-Cal FFS for the COVID-19 vaccine administration fees.

DHCS is seeking federal approval to pay pharmacy claims at the Medicare administration rate, which is different than Medi-Cal's current pharmacy administration fee. Subject to federal approval, Medi-Cal will reimburse the associated COVID-19 vaccine administration fees at the allowable Medicare rate for all claims (medical, pharmacy and outpatient) based on the number of required doses, regardless of vaccine manufacturer.

DHCS is also seeking federal approvals to pay Federally Qualified Health Centers, Rural Health Centers, and Tribal 638 clinics for the vaccine administration fees outside of their current Prospective Payment System or All Inclusive Rate.

DHCS continues to closely monitor and respond to COVID-19, and is providing information, including Medi-Cal Newsflashes, on the COVID-19 Medi-Cal response webpage to all providers as a reminder of recommended safety procedures and protocols from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and CDPH to help prevent spread of COVID-19. DHCS will be issuing initial and future policy guidance on COVID-19 vaccine administration and reimbursement, as necessary. Policy and reimbursement guidance will also be updated, as necessary, upon receipt of additional guidance from the Centers of Medicare & Medicaid Services and/or approvals of requested federal waivers. MCPs and providers are encouraged to continually check this COVID-19 Medi-Cal response webpage for information and regular updates to the Medi-Cal response to COVID-19.²

DHCS will also be providing call center scripts for DHCS operated call centers, the Medi-Nurse Advice Line and MCP and county partners so all are providing consistent messaging regarding the COVID-19 vaccine roll-out in Medi-Cal.

Additional Information

Pharmacies, retail clinics, providers, and any other sites of care must sign an agreement with the U.S. government to receive free supplies of the COVID-19 vaccines.

Under the agreement, all providers must vaccinate individuals regardless of existing health coverage or the type of coverage. Providers are prohibited from balance billing or otherwise charging vaccine recipients.

² The COVID-19 Medi-Cal Response webpage can be accessed at the following link:
https://files.medi-cal.ca.gov/pubsdoco/COVID19_response.aspx

Blue Shield of California, the State of California's Third-Party Administrator, will be working closely with onboarding partners to identify prospective COVID-19 vaccine providers. All current and prospective COVID-19 vaccine providers must hold the appropriate credentials and licensing in the jurisdiction where vaccination will take place, meet federal and state requirements, and have the capacity to properly maintain and administer the COVID-19 vaccine.³

Vaccine recipients must be provided with emergency use authorization fact sheets about the vaccines and vaccination cards identifying the brand of vaccine administered and the date of their second vaccination (if applicable).

Providers must administer the vaccines in accordance with the CDC and Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices requirements, and they must meet storage and recordkeeping requirements, including recording the administration of the vaccines to patients in their own systems within 24 hours and to public health data systems within 72 hours.

Providers will be expected to bill Medi-Cal FFS for COVID-19 vaccine administration using the claim forms and electronic media used today, unless otherwise noted. Billing specifics for the different provider communities and program areas will be released in Medi-Cal Newsflashes. Providers are encouraged to continually check the COVID-19 Medi-Cal response webpage for information and regular updates to the Medi-Cal response to COVID-19.

POLICY:

Although both the COVID-19 vaccines and associated administration fees will be carved out of the Medi-Cal managed care delivery system to Medi-Cal FFS, MCPs are reminded that they remain contractually responsible for providing case management and care coordination for their members regardless of whether or not they are financially responsible for the payment of services.

MCPs are encouraged to identify opportunities to use their existing communication pathways to support dissemination of CDPH COVID-19 public health education materials and provider education resources. MCPs should utilize their existing data sources to help identify members who qualify to receive the COVID-19 vaccine in accordance with CDPH guidelines, and attempt outreach to qualifying members and their providers to encourage receipt of the COVID-19 vaccines. MCPs are responsible

³ For more provider information about the California COVID-19 Vaccine Program, including enrollment requirements, please see California COVID-19 Vaccination Program Provider Frequently Asked Questions at the following link:
<https://eziz.org/assets/docs/COVID19/Vax58ProviderFAQs.pdf>

for coordinating medically necessary care. Care coordination may involve, but is not limited to, assisting members with accessing COVID-19 vaccine administration locations, including non-emergency medical transportation and non-medical transportation as needed, and helping members receive the required number of doses for the COVID-19 vaccines in a timely fashion.

As mentioned above, DHCS will be issuing guidance on COVID-19 vaccine administration and reimbursement policies and will be providing call center scripts for MCP use, on a rolling basis. MCPs must ensure they convey relevant and current information on the COVID-19 vaccines to members, including the use of any customer call center scripts or other communications authorized for use by DHCS. MCPs should encourage providers to communicate with members about vaccination availability as such information is made available.

MCPs must also ensure that their Subcontractors and Network Providers are following guidance issued by DHCS related to the administration of the COVID-19 vaccines.⁴ MCPs are encouraged to disseminate information about the administration of the COVID-19 vaccines to their Subcontractors and Network Providers and provide any available resources and information as it becomes available from the CDC, DHCS, CDPH, and other state departments. MCPs are encouraged to continually check the COVID-19 Medi-Cal response webpage for information and regular updates to the Medi-Cal response to COVID-19.

COVID-19 Vaccine Administration

CDPH provides guidance on vaccine priorities and allocations.⁵ Currently, vaccines may be given to *every Californian age 16 and older*. *DHCS would like to emphasize that health care providers should still use their clinical judgement to prioritize and vaccinate individuals who are deemed to be at the very highest risk for morbidity and mortality from COVID-19 as a direct result of one or more severe health conditions, or if as a result of a developmental or other severe high-risk disability, one or more of the following applies:*

- The individual is likely to develop severe life-threatening illness or *succumb to death* from COVID-19 infection; or

⁴ For more information on Subcontractors and Network Providers, including the definition and requirements applicable, see APL 19-001, and any subsequent APLs on this topic. APLs are available at: <https://www.dhcs.ca.gov/formsandpubs/Pages/AllPlanLetters.aspx>

⁵ The CDPH COVID-19 Vaccine Allocation Guidelines can be accessed at the following link: <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/VaccineAllocationGuidelines.aspx>

- Acquiring COVID-19 will limit the individual's ability to receive ongoing care or services vital to their well-being and survival; or
- Providing adequate and timely COVID-19 related care will be particularly challenging as a result of the individual's disability.⁶

Individuals meeting the eligibility criteria above include those with a range of significant physical or behavioral disabilities. Examples include: (a) individuals with serious mental illness or serious substance use disorder; and (b) all enrolled consumers of Regional Centers, Independent Living Centers, In-Home Supportive Services, Community-Based Adult Services/Adult Day Health Centers, Medi-Cal HIV/AIDS Waiver, Medi-Cal Home and Community-Based Alternatives Waiver, Medi-Cal Assisted Living Waiver, Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly, California Children's Services Program (if the child is 16-21 years old), and California Genetically Handicapped Persons Program.⁷

Health care providers and licensed behavioral health clinicians should use their best judgment in identifying and prioritizing those who meet the eligibility requirements.

To protect confidentiality, verification documentation of the diagnosis or type of disability is not required, but instead anyone meeting the eligibility requirements will be asked to sign a self-attestation that they meet the criteria for high-risk medical conditions or disabilities.

An update to the MyTurn appointment request system will add a check box that will ask if an individual needs transportation to a vaccine appointment, or is homebound because they are unable to leave home due to limited mobility or fragile health and need a vaccine in their home.⁸ If the individual checks this box, they will be notified that they will receive a call to schedule their vaccine appointment.

A customer service representative (representative) from the California COVID-19 Vaccination Services Information Line call center (call center) will contact the individual. If the individual needs transportation and has Medi-Cal, and is enrolled in an MCP, the

⁶ For details on the populations prioritized for vaccines, please see the CDPH provider bulletin at the following link: <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/Provider-Bulletin-2-12-21.aspx>

⁷ For more information on COVID-19 vaccine eligibility for people with high-risk medical conditions or disabilities, please see the CDPH health care information notice at the following link: <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/CDPH%20Document%20Library/COVID-19/Health-Care-Information-Notice-3-11-21.pdf#search=health%20care%20information%20notice%20march%2011%2C%202021>

⁸ The MyTurn appointment request system can be accessed at the following link: <https://myturn.ca.gov/>

call center representative will schedule their vaccine appointment and connect them to their MCP for transportation coordination.

If the individual is homebound, the call center representative will provide the individual's information to the Local Health Department (LHD). The LHD will then arrange for a medical team to visit the individual at home to vaccinate the individual and any family members.

MCPs should take steps to identify members who may be homebound and contact those members to determine if they have already been vaccinated against COVID-19 and, if not, whether they want to be vaccinated. For those members who have not been vaccinated and want to be, the MCP should ascertain whether the member wants an in-home vaccination. After the MCP identifies those homebound members who want an in-home vaccination, the MCPs are to refer the member to the MyTurn appointment request system and instruct the member to check the box to indicate they need an in-home vaccination. Assistance for members is also available through the California COVID-19 Hotline at 1-833-422-4255. For those members who do not want an in-home vaccination, MCPs are to assist in coordination of vaccine services and transportation as needed.

Therefore, MCPs must work with Subcontractors and Network Providers to vaccinate members who are ages 16 *and older*. If the provider is not a vaccinator, MCPs should coordinate with Subcontractors and Network Providers to identify, prioritize, and reach out to qualified members about their vaccination eligibility to help save the lives of those who are at high-risk of death or severe complications from COVID-19.

MCPs continue to be responsible for coordinating medically necessary care, including needed transportation, as well as all other requirements as mentioned above. *Additionally, MCPs are encouraged to communicate to vaccine providers who are also the member's medical care provider to use the vaccination appointment as an opportunity to check in with members and take care of medical and/or preventive care issues.*

MCPs are to report counts of COVID-19 vaccine-related transportation grievances through the Managed Care Operations Division's (MCO) daily COVID-19 reporting process.

MCPs are responsible for ensuring that their Subcontractors and Network Providers comply with all applicable state and federal laws and regulations, contract requirements, and other DHCS guidance, including APLs and Policy Letters. These requirements must be communicated by each MCP to all Subcontractors and Network Providers.

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If you have any questions regarding this APL, please contact your MCOD Contract Manager.

Sincerely,

Original Signed by Nathan Nau

Nathan Nau, Chief
Managed Care Quality and Monitoring Division