

# Hospice and Palliative Care Resources for the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)



## NHPCO COVID-19 Update – 01/25/21

NHPCO has created this update for hospice and palliative care providers to share recent news and helpful links. Please note, these Updates are published when there is helpful news to share.

**"You must be the change you wish to see in the world." — Mahatma Gandhi**

### Policy Update

#### **HHS Reports that COVID-19 Emergency, And Related Waivers, May Last Through 2021**

The COVID-19 public health emergency is expected to continue through the end of 2021, Acting HHS Secretary Norris Cochran wrote in a Jan. 22 letter to governors, signaling the temporary 6.2% bump in federal Medicaid matching funds and a slew of other Medicare and Medicaid emergency waivers put in place during the pandemic will not end soon. HHS will give states 60 days' notice before the public health emergency ends so they can plan for the end of the higher Medicaid match rates, Cochran said.

A year-long extension of the PHE would leave in place emergency use authorizations for diagnostics, treatments, and vaccines and potentially could lead to new HHS policies to help states respond to the COVID-19 emergency.

**Cochran notes that the extended public health emergency means waivers for Medicare, Medicaid and CHIP will remain in place, along with other waivers.** This includes 1135 waivers and PREP Act waivers, both of which have been used to ease telemedicine during the pandemic, particularly in Medicare.

#### **Biden Administrations Names Acting CMS Administrator**

The Biden administration has named Liz Richter the acting administrator for CMS. Richter has served since 1990 and most recently served as deputy director of the Center for Medicare, according to CMS. Richter began in the Bureau of Policy Development working on inpatient hospital payment policy. She later worked on a variety of Medicare payment issues. In 1998, Richter moved to the Office of Financial Management, where in 2001 she became director of the Financial Services Group. In 2003, she became director of the hospital and ambulatory policy group in the Center for Medicare Management and became deputy director of the Center for Medicare in 2007.

#### **Executive Order on Insurance Coverage for Vaccines**

The Biden Administration issued an [Executive Order](#) to address coverage and payment for non-diagnostic COVID-19 testing and the clarification of insurers' responsibilities. The Executive Order focuses on improving access to and affordability of COVID-19 therapies, including the COVID-19 Uninsured Program run by HRSA to help cover treatment for those without adequate coverage.

#### **Coronavirus Protections – Department of Labor**

As part of President Joe Biden's National Strategy for the COVID-19 Response and Pandemic Preparedness, an [executive order on worker health and safety](#) directs the Occupational Safety and Health Administration to issue updated guidance on COVID-19 worker protections. It also directs OSHA and the Mine Safety and Health Administration to consider issuing emergency temporary standards.

## **Provider Update**

### **New CDC Head Discusses Timeline for Vaccine Rollout**

Speaking on the "Today" show, CDC director Rochelle Walensky, MD, said the administration is determined to meet its promise of 100 vaccinations in 100 million doses in 100 days but probably won't be able to stick to an ambitious vaccine timeline set by the previous administration. Walensky said she does not think the vaccine will be available to the general public by late February or early March, as Alex Azar, the previous Health & Human Services director predicted last month. Read more in an [article on the WebMD website](#) (01/22/21).

### **CDC: Gap Between Vaccine Doses Could Be 6 Weeks**

The [CDC has updated its guidance](#) on how long people can wait between the first and second doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines. If the second dose can't be scheduled in the recommended timeframe — 21 days after the first dose for Pfizer and 28 days for Moderna — people can wait up to 6 weeks, the CDC said in an update published Thursday. "The second dose should be administered as close to the recommended interval as possible," the CDC said. "However, if it is not feasible to adhere to the recommended interval, the second dose of Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines may be scheduled for administration up to 6 weeks (42 days) after the first dose."

### **New COVID-19 Variant May Carry Higher Risk of Death**

The new English variant of COVID-19 may be associated with a higher level of mortality although the British Prime Minister said evidence showed that both vaccines being used in the country are effective against it. Read an [article on the Medscape website](#) (01/22/21).

### **CDC Steps Up COVID-19 Variant Tracking**

CDC Director Rochelle Walensky has said the agency is escalating efforts to monitor new COVID-19 variants, with the goal of keeping therapeutics and vaccines effective against mutations until the country reaches collective immunity. Read, "[CDC steps up COVID-19 variant tracking as cases top 25M](#)" (01/24/21).

### **FDA – Decontamination Systems for N95 Masks**

The FDA is reissuing the [Emergency Use Authorizations \(EUAs\)](#) for decontamination systems that are authorized to decontaminate compatible N95 respirators for use by healthcare personnel (HCP) to prevent exposure to pathogenic biological airborne particulates when there is an insufficient supply of new respirators resulting from the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. Among other things, the reissued EUAs for certain decontamination systems are now only authorized to decontaminate each compatible N95 respirator a maximum of four or fewer times.

## **Resources**

### **CDC COVID-19 Vaccination Toolkits Updated**

Get [audience-specific toolkits](#) for healthcare teams and community administrators.

### **The Johns Hopkins 30-Minute COVID-19 Briefing**

Experts from the Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center (CRC) host a briefing at 12:00pm ET on Fridays for timely, accessible updates on the state of the pandemic and the public health response. Listen to the [January 22 briefing](#).

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