

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



NHPCO COVID-19 Update – 03/13/20

NHPCO has created this update for hospice and palliative care providers to share the most recent news and helpful links regarding this ongoing public health crisis.

NHPCO will send the first few emails out widely to our membership. To ensure you are added to our distribution list, please complete this online form. This is available to members and non-members.

Policy Updates

- **President Trump Declares National Emergency**

At 3:30 Friday afternoon, President Trump held a press conference and declared a national emergency. The details are still unfolding but CMS Administrator Seema Verma announced during the press conference that CMS will “restrict all visitors in nursing facilities except for end of life situations.” There are very few details at this point, so watch for updated information as it is released by the Administration.

- **NHPCO Sends Letter to CMS and to Capitol Hill Requesting Additional Flexibility for Hospice**

On Thursday, March 13, [NHPCO sent a letter to CMS Administrator Seema Verma](#) providing a detailed list of requests for additional flexibility, particularly focused on regulations with time frames that may need to be adjusted during COVID-19. These recommendations have also been shared with legislators on Capitol Hill as they continue to craft legislative solutions to this unfolding public health crisis. We will know more next week about the additional flexibility provided to hospices by CMS.

- **Providing Hospice Care in Nursing Homes During COVID-19**

NHPCO has been inundated with questions and concerns about hospice providers gaining access to nursing facilities, most often reporting that the nursing home has denied access for any hospice staff member other than the nurse or has denied access altogether. NHPCO is pleased that CMS Administrator Seema Verma addressed visitor restrictions in nursing facilities, but explicitly said “except for end of life situations.” NHPCO is pleased that CMS is addressing this concern and will be working on additional detail in the coming days. We hear you!

PLEASE HELP US GATHER DATA ON THIS ISSUE: NHPCO members have been sent a quick survey to assess the prevalence of this issue. Watch for an email from star@nhpco.org where you will find a link to the survey. It will take 2 minutes and gives NHPCO great information on the extent of this evolving problem that we can use to advocate with policymakers and with CMS. Thank you!

Provider Updates

- **Healthcare Worker Face Mask [Update](#)**

CMS memo clarifies the application of CMS policies in light of recent CDC and FDA guidance expanding the types of facemasks healthcare workers may use in situations involving COVID-19 and other respiratory infections.

- To help reduce burden on healthcare facilities at this time, the CMS memo implements [CDC guidance](#) by stating that facemasks, which protect the wearer from splashes and sprays, are an acceptable temporary alternative to respirators, which filter the air, for most medical services until demand for respirators lessens.
- CMS is also alerting state surveyors that they are not required – on a temporary basis – to validate the date of a facility’s last annual test of the fit of N95 masks worn by workers in Medicare- and Medicaid-certified facilities. CMS is temporarily suspending surveyor validation of the test to minimize the discarded masks associated with such testing.
- Additionally, the FDA [approved a CDC request for an emergency use authorization \(EUA\)](#) to allow healthcare workers to use certain industrial respirators during the COVID-19 outbreak in healthcare settings.

- **The Hospice Plan of Care: Importance of Reviewing, Updating, and Documenting Amid Patient Access Issues Caused by COVID-19**

As hospice providers know, it is important for continuity of care that a hospice patient’s plan of care be regularly updated and that hospice personnel visits prescribed by the plan of care be performed and documented. The ability to perform such visits, whether at a facility or at the patient’s home, may be challenged given concerns about preventing and controlling transmission of COVID-19. In light of these challenges of accessing patients amid this unprecedented pandemic, it will be important for hospice providers to:

- Review patients’ plans of care and consider making any updates that may be necessary to account for patient access issues related to COVID-19.
- Ensure all IDT members are thoroughly documenting in the medical record their efforts to adhere to the plans of care, including documenting all attempts to visit patients in person, all refusals to permit hospice personnel access to patients, and all alternative methods (*e.g.*, phone calls) used to perform the patient visits.

- **Hospice Quality Reporting** - CMS is monitoring the impact COVID-19 may have on your practice and participation in the Quality Payment Program (QPP). They encourage provider to subscribe to the [QPP listserv](#) to keep informed about this evolving situation as well as other program updates.
- **[NHPCO Podcast: Coronavirus Update](#)** - Episode 83: Changes and updates are coming in daily regarding COVID-19, but there are practices and protocols providers can have in place that can make a difference. Jon and Jennifer discuss what we know about the Coronavirus and the most important things to keep in mind when caring for your patients. President and CEO, Edo Banach also joins the

conversation to discuss his meeting at the White House with Vice President Pence and the COVID-19 Task Force regarding this pandemic

- **CMS Posts FAQs to Ensure Individuals, Issuers and States have Clear Information on Coverage Benefits for COVID-19**

Today, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services issued Frequently Asked Questions to Ensure Individuals, Issuers and States have Clear Information on Coverage Benefits for COVID-19. This action is part of the broader, ongoing effort by the White House Coronavirus Task Force to ensure that all Americans – particularly those at high-risk of complications from the COVID-19 virus – have access to the health benefits that can help keep them healthy while helping to contain the spread of this disease. The COVID-19 FAQs for EHB can be found here:

<https://www.cms.gov/CCIIO/Resources/Fact-Sheets-and-FAQs/Downloads/EHB-Benchmark-Coverage-of-COVID-19.pdf>

CMS Issues FAQs Related to Payment for Lab Tests

CMS issued FAQs for health care providers regarding Medicare payment for laboratory tests and other services related to the 2019-Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) including guidance on how to bill and receive payment for testing patients at risk of COVID-19 for Part B providers, payment policies for laboratory and diagnostic services, drugs, and vaccines under Medicare Part B, ambulance services, and other medical services delivered by physicians, hospitals, and facilities accepting government resources, and information on billing for telehealth or in-home provider services.

Resources

- COVID-19 Testing
 - [Medicare Part B Coverage and Payment Related to COVID-19 - Testing](#)
 - **COVID-19 MAC Test Pricing** - Today, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) is posting a fact sheet to the CMS.gov website to aid Medicare providers with information relating to the pricing of both the CDC and non-CDC tests. You can find the fact sheet here: <https://www.cms.gov/files/document/mac-covid-19-test-pricing.pdf>
- [Coverage and Benefits Related to COVID-19 Medicaid and CHIP](#)
- [Information Related to COVID-19 Individual and Small Group Market Insurance Coverage](#)