



## CONFERENCE CALL WITH ADPH

Last night, ADPH hosted a conference call for physicians regarding the most recent update on Coronavirus COVID-19 with over 650 listeners. If you could not join the call or would just like to listen again, please look at the links below. It was brought to our attention that at least 25 of you had questions that were not able to be answered at that time. Please email [Mallory Camerio](#) with your question and we will contact the Alabama Department of Public Health to get it answered for you.

### Access archived webcasts and conference calls:

- Tuesday, **March 17**, News Conference
- Monday, **March 16**, Conference Call
- Monday, **March 16**, News Conference
- Friday, **March 13**, News Conference
- Thursday, **March 12**, News Conference
- Tuesday, **March 10**, Press Conference
- Monday, **March 9**, Conference Call
- Monday, **March 2**, Update



## **HIPAA Rules Relaxed for Telehealth**

HHS Office for Civil Rights (OCR) announced that it is exercising its enforcement discretion and, effective immediately, will not impose penalties on physicians using telehealth in the event of noncompliance with the regulatory requirements under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). Physicians who want to use audio or video communication technology to provide telehealth to patients during the COVID-19 nationwide public health emergency can use any non-public facing service that is available to communicate with patients.

This exercise of discretion applies to telehealth provided for any reason, regardless of whether the telehealth service is related to the diagnosis and treatment of health conditions related to COVID-19

A physician in the exercise of their professional judgement may request to examine a patient exhibiting COVID- 19 symptoms, using a video chat application connecting the provider's or patient's phone or desktop computer in order to assess a greater number of patients while limiting the risk of infection of other persons who would be exposed from an in-person consultation. Likewise, a covered health care provider may provide similar telehealth services in the exercise of their professional judgment to assess or treat any other medical condition, even if not related to COVID-19, such as a sprained ankle, dental consultation or psychological evaluation, or other conditions.

Under this Notice, covered health care providers may use popular applications that allow for video chats, including Apple FaceTime, Facebook Messenger video chat, Google Hangouts video, or Skype, to provide telehealth without risk that OCR might seek to impose a penalty for noncompliance with the HIPAA Rules related to the good faith provision of telehealth during the COVID-19 nationwide public health emergency. Providers are encouraged to notify patients that these third-party applications potentially introduce privacy risks, and providers should enable all available encryption and privacy modes when using such applications.

**Additional information can be found [here](#).**

## **Blue Cross Expands Telehealth Coverage**

As we continue to monitor the outbreak of the new coronavirus (COVID-19) in Alabama, we are expanding telehealth to ease access to appropriate medical services for your patients who are Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama members.

**What does the expansion include?**



The expansion of telehealth services is effective March 16, 2020, and allows clinicians to provide medically necessary services that can be appropriately delivered via telephone consultation. These actions will be effective for 30 days, expiring on April 16, 2020. It will be reevaluated for a continuance as needed.

This is applicable for patients who wish to receive their care remotely and limit their exposure.

It can also serve as an initial screening for patients who may need to be tested for the coronavirus.

For guidance on coronavirus testing, please refer to the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention and the Alabama Department of Public Health websites.

Member cost-sharing (copays, deductibles, etc.) will apply according to the member's contract benefits. This applies to all Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama members including Blue Advantage®.

#### **What types of providers can perform telehealth?**

This applies to physicians and their extenders who currently receive Blue Cross reimbursement on the Preferred Medical Doctor (PMD), Physician Extender, Select and Select Extender fee schedules.

Urgent care is also included; however, at this time, we are not including other provider types.

#### **How does this affect behavioral health?**

Behavioral health providers are included in this policy expansion. Some of these providers already perform telemedicine services. Under this policy, all behavioral health providers will be able to perform services telephonically. This will expire on April 16, 2020, but be reevaluated for continuance as needed.

For more information about behavioral health phone consultations, see our telemedicine operational policy. For behavioral health billing and coding guidelines specific to this telehealth expansion, refer to the New Directions Behavioral Health telehealth expansion memo.

New Directions will communicate additional telehealth services information to providers. To support providers who may have patients experiencing distress or anxiety, New Directions is offering a crisis hotline for the public at 1-833-848-1764.

#### **What services can be performed?**

Telehealth is appropriate for consultations and visits for either low complexity, routine or ongoing evaluation and management. This would include acute illnesses or chronic disease management that, based on the provider's medical judgment, can be managed over the phone.

#### **What codes apply?**

Providers should bill established-patient evaluation and management codes up to a level 3 (CPT Codes 99211, 99212 and 99213). Standard documentation applies and additional billing guidelines will be posted on ProviderAccess. Claims should be filed with place of service 02 (telehealth).

A modifier is not required.

Providers should only bill for telephonic consultations when the provider speaks directly with the patient. Providers should not bill Blue Cross for services when, for example, a nurse speaks to the patient, even if the provider was consulted.

If you have questions, call Provider Networks at 1-866-904-4130.

*New Directions Behavioral Health is our business associate and is an independent company that provides diagnostic testing, information and services.*

*CPT codes, descriptions and data copyright ©2019 American Medical Association. All rights reserved. Applicable FARS/DFARS apply.*

## **URGENT UPDATE:**

### **Changes to Testing Approval, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Requirements, and Collection of Specimens**



Changes to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) guidance from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) allow most physicians and other health care providers to be able to collect specimens for their own patients. The use of N95 mask is no longer required for the collection. In order to conserve PPE supply, if a patient presents to your office with respiratory symptoms, immediately place a mask on them and place them in a room. Staff can stand in the door to ask necessary questions to screen the patient. If COVID-19 is suspected and testing is planned, please don PPE before entering the room. See PPE guidance [here](#).

Specimen Collection requirements have also changed and been updated by the CDC. Oropharyngeal (OP) swabs, serum, and respiratory specimens are no longer required. The swab and viral media used are now the same as those used for collecting specimens for flu testing. Instructions for the collection of specimens can be found [here](#). Directions for packaging and shipping of specimens can be found [here](#).

A BCL requisition form must be completed for every specimen even if more than one specimen is obtained from the same patient. The requisition form can be assessed [here](#).

As of March 13, 2020, the Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH) has automated testing approval. The use of this process will allow for approval in minutes. Physicians are asked to discontinue the use of PUIFax immediately. Please [click here](#) and complete the online automated consultation form.

The ADPH in collaboration with the Alabama Board of Medical Examiners (ALBME) would like to remind physicians of their responsibility to care for their patients. A notice was sent out on Saturday by ALBME to all licensed physicians. Part of this notice follows:

#### **Physician responsibility notice from ALBME**

In this time of need, the Board calls on physicians to remember their calling and duty to provide competent and compassionate care to ALL of their patients. All physicians have a duty and ethical obligation to treat an established patient. Failure to do so could constitute patient abandonment and unprofessional conduct under Ala. Code Sec. 34-24-360(2) and Ala. Admin. Code Rule 540-X-9-.07(1) and result in disciplinary action from the Board.

**See the full message [here](#).**

**COVID**  
CORONAVIRUS  
DISEASE  
**19**

## CORONAVIRUS DISEASE 2019 (COVID-19)



**Patients with COVID-19 have reportedly had mild to severe respiratory illness. Symptoms can include**

- Fever
- Cough
- Shortness of breath

**\* Symptoms may appear 2–14 days after exposure.**

**Seek medical advice if you develop symptoms, and have been in close contact with a person known to have COVID-19 or if you live in or have recently been in an area with ongoing spread of COVID-19.**

**[www.cdc.gov/covid19-symptoms](https://www.cdc.gov/covid19-symptoms)**

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### STAY UP TO DATE

**World Health Organization (WHO)**  
**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)**  
**Alabama Department of Public Health**  
**Blue Cross Blue Shield Updates for Providers**

### EDUCATE YOUR PATIENTS

**Information from the CDC**  
**Alabama Department of Public Health**



If you no longer wish to receive these emails, please **[unsubscribe](#)**

