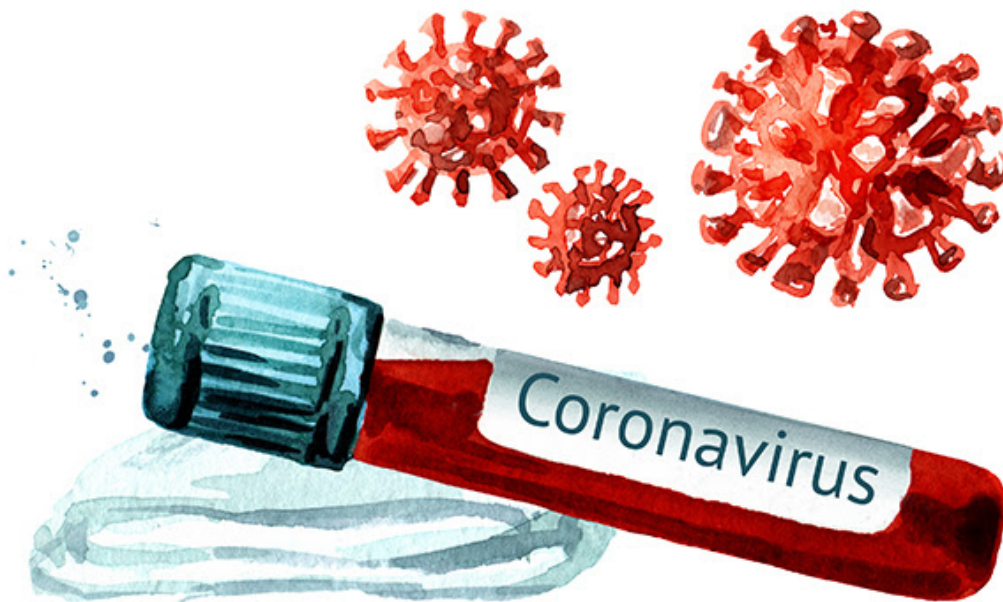




UPDATE to COVID-19 Testing to Include Asymptomatic, High Risk Groups



The Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH) has expanded the criteria for testing at the Bureau of Clinical Laboratories (BCL) to add testing for certain asymptomatic, high-risk groups and individuals.

Tests to be performed by the BCL must meet the following criteria:
The patient is a resident (includes symptomatic and asymptomatic) of a long-term care

facility and the facility has laboratory-confirmed cases in residents or staff, or

- Hospitalized patients with symptoms*
- Healthcare facility workers, workers in congregate living settings, and first responders with symptoms*
- Residents in long-term care facilities or other congregate living settings, including correctional and detention facilities and shelters, with symptoms*
- Persons without symptoms who have underlying medical conditions or disability placing them at a higher risk of complications, residency in a congregate housing setting such as a homeless shelter or long-term care facility, or screening of other asymptomatic individuals based on a case by case review and approval by the state health department or local health jurisdiction.

*Symptoms consist of either cough or shortness of breath (difficulty breathing) or at least two of the following; fever, chills, repeated shaking with chills, muscle pain, headache, vomiting, diarrhea, sore throat, and new loss of taste or smell.

Providers may order testing for persons not meeting the above criteria but are asked to use a commercial or clinical laboratory they have an agreement with. Providers in need of specimen collection kits or viral transport medium should contact the ADPH Center for Emergency Preparedness (CEP) Duty Officer at 334-239-1556.

In order to conduct timely case investigations and contact tracing, providers should report positive results to ADPH using the [Novel Coronavirus Report Form](#). Delays in reporting cause increased risk of continued transmission.

[See the Full Alert Here](#)



Medical Association of the State of Alabama is offering a way for practices to order PPE that they might be having trouble obtaining including: disposable masks, N95 masks and disposable gowns. This service is provided through ActionPPE, who has also worked with medical associations in Arizona, Colorado, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Louisiana, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Utah and West Virginia.

[Find More Information Here.](#)

Medicaid Adds Additional Telehealth Codes

The Alabama Medicaid Agency issued an Alert at the end of last week that announced that they are opening up additional codes that providers can bill for telehealth visits. These codes are New Patient codes and Hospitalization Consult codes.

[Click here to see the Alert and a list of the codes that will now be paid for.](#)

CMS Approves Increased Payments for Audio-Only Telephone Visits



In response to efforts by organized medicine, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) announced last week that they will be increasing payments for audio-only telephone visits between Medicare beneficiaries and their physicians to match payments for similar office and outpatient visits. This would increase payments for these services from a range of about \$14-\$41 to about \$46-\$110, and the payments are retroactive to March 1, 2020.

This is a major victory for medicine that will enable physicians to care for their patients, especially their elderly patients with chronic conditions who may not have access to audio-visual technology or high speed Internet.

In addition to the efforts by organized medicine, the American Medical Association worked to spearhead [this letter](#) to HHS Secretary Azar and CMS Administrator Verma

regarding increasing Medicare payment rates for telephone-based evaluation and management (E/M) codes. The letter sent on April 29 had 37 signers, including Alabama Senator Doug Jones and included the following requests:

- Increase Medicare payment rates for telephone-based evaluation and management (E/M) codes (99441-99443) to bring payments for these codes equal to Medicare's established in person visit codes (99212-99214) that will ensure that patients without advanced video-sharing capabilities are able to get care virtually, while helping to sustain physician practices.
- Immediately provide guidance to Medicare Administrative Contractors (MACs) to ensure that recent CMS guidance and rules are followed appropriately to enable the payment of telephone E/M claims.
- Provide Members of Congress with a briefing on CMS efforts to address this issue by May 8, 2020.

[See a list of services payable under the Medicare Physician Fee Schedule when furnished via telehealth here.](#)

[See the Press Release Here](#)

COVID-19 QUESTIONS? GET ANSWERS & EARN CME.



As providers, physicians and members of the health care team want to do whatever they can to ensure the health and well-being of their patients. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the practice of medicine is facing challenges in delivering the best care amid government mandates and ever-changing public perceptions of the situation. At the Medical Association of the State of Alabama, we want to help by offering online COVID-19 CME courses (free for members).

Courses include:

- **PRIMARY CARE PHYSICIANS IN THE COVID-19 ERA**
- **PPE FOR PHYSICIANS: NEW, USED AND REFRESHED**
- **AN INFECTIOUS DISEASE DOCTOR'S SYMPTOMS OF COVID AND THOUGHTS ABOUT THE PANDEMIC**

Credits

The Medical Foundation of Alabama designates this enduring material for a maximum of .25 AMA PRA Category 1 Credits[®]. Physicians should claim only the credit commensurate with the extent of their participation in the activity.

This activity has been planned and implemented in accordance with the accreditation requirements and policies of the Medical Association of the State of Alabama through the joint providership of the Medical Foundation of Alabama and the Medical Association of the State of Alabama. The Medical Foundation of Alabama is accredited by the Medical Association of the State of Alabama to provide continuing medical education for physicians.

[HTTPS://WWW.ALAMEDICAL.ORG/COVID19](https://www.alamedical.org/covid19)

COVID-19 Physician Impact Survey

The Medical Association is surveying Alabama physicians to gauge the business impact on medical practices across the state. Survey questions are designed to explore patient volumes, practice revenues, impact on medical staff and other issues that affect physicians and their patients.

[Participate in the Survey Here.](#)



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