



## HHS Extends Deadline to Apply for Federal Provider Relief Funds



In response to physicians expressing their concern about the impending deadline and the implication for various regulatory waivers implemented because of the pandemic, Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar extended for an additional 90 days the current COVID-19 public health emergency, which was set to expire on July 25.

In June, HHS announced the opening of the application period and plans to distribute allocated funds to eligible providers that participate in state Medicaid and CHIP programs who had not yet received a payment from the \$50 billion General Distribution.

As of July 15, 2020, 121 qualifying Medicaid and CHIP eligible providers in Alabama have applied for the Medicaid and CHIP Provider Relief Fund distribution. Of these, 78 Medicaid and CHIP providers have been paid from this distribution.

HHS created the following resources for providers and provider organizations which answer questions and assist those eligible through the application process:

- [Fact Sheet](#) (explaining the application process)
- [Recorded webinar](#)
- [Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- [Application](#)
- [Instructions](#)
- [Enhanced Provider Relief Fund Payment Portal](#)

*The American Medical Association (AMA) has made HHS aware of an issue where physicians who primarily care for patients with Medicaid and CHIP coverage received a small amount of money from the automatic Medicare allotment in April because they treated one or two patients with ESRD. They are ineligible to apply for this round of funding even if they rejected and returned the money. HHS has indicated they are working on a policy to address this issue.*

[See the full announcement from HHS](#)

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## New CDC Guidelines for the Duration of Isolation and Precautions for Adults with COVID-19



Available data shows that persons with mild to moderate COVID-19 remain infectious no longer than 10 days after symptom onset. As a result, CDC has updated the guidelines for the duration of isolation and precautions for adults with COVID-19; equivalent data for children and infants is not currently available.

- Most persons with COVID-19 illness can generally discontinue isolation and other precautions 10 days after symptom onset and resolution of fever for at least 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication and improvement of other symptoms.
- Asymptomatic persons can discontinue isolation and other precautions 10 days after the date of their first positive RT-PCR test for SARS-CoV-2 RNA.
- A limited number of persons with severe illness may produce replication-competent virus beyond 10 days that may result in the need to extend isolation and precautions for up to 20 days after symptom onset; infection control experts should be consulted with in this case.
- With nationwide delays in obtaining results for SARS-CoV-2 diagnostic testing, it is imperative that patients who have symptoms consistent with COVID-19 understand that they must isolate at home while waiting for their diagnostic test results.

[See all of the new guidelines here](#)

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## Important Decision from the Alabama Supreme Court

The Medical Association recently filed an amicus or “friend of the Court” brief with the Alabama Supreme Court in support of a physician and his P.C. in the case of *Ex parte Fruedenberger*. The Supreme Court case was an extremely important one for health care providers across the state as it tested the validity of a HIPAA Order denying defense counsel the right to have “ex parte” or informal and private meetings with a plaintiff/patient’s treating physicians. In previous lower court decisions, the plaintiff’s counsel was allowed to have such communication but the defendant’s counsel was not.

The Court ruled in favor of the Defendants and in keeping with the position of the Medical Association, held that: (1) the trial court’s order was incorrectly entered and an abuse of discretion, (2) long-standing Alabama law allows defense counsel the right to conduct ex parte meetings with treating health care providers, and (3) nothing in HIPAA preempts that law or prohibits ex parte meetings. The Court acknowledged trial courts have the discretion to restrict discovery, including ex parte meetings, on a case-by-case basis if there are “special or exceptional” circumstances to justify the restrictions, but importantly ruled that, without such a showing, there is not justification to restrict defense counsel’s right to informally interview a plaintiff/patient’s treating health care providers.

Of note, the well-written main opinion was authored by Justice Will Sellers, and all other justices joined or concurred except Chief Justice Tom Parker, who was the only justice dissenting from the main opinion.

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# Medicaid COVID-19 Emergency Expiration Date Extended to August 31st



All previously published expiration dates related to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) emergency are once again extended by the Alabama Medicaid Agency (Medicaid). The new expiration date is the earlier of August 31, 2020, the conclusion of the COVID-19 National emergency, or any expiration date noticed by the Alabama Medicaid Agency through a subsequent ALERT.

A listing of previous Provider Alerts and notices related to the health emergency is [available here](#) by selecting the Agency's COVID-19 page in the bottom section.

[See the full alert here](#)

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## BCBS Telehealth Extension



Due to COVID-19, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama expanded telehealth services until December 31, 2020. BCBS will continue to evaluate to determine whether a further extension is needed.

For complete information, refer to the [Telehealth Billing Guide](#). This guide details the eligible providers and services included in the telehealth coverage expansion for each of these categories:

- Blue Advantage® - Telehealth services will continue through the Public Health Emergency set to expire July 25, 2020, unless otherwise extended by the U.S. Department of Health and Human

Services.

- Blue Cross
- Facility/Hospital
- Federal Employee Program (FEP)

**Only the codes listed in the [Telehealth Billing Guide](#) should be submitted for these expanded telehealth services.**

Please note that for most Blue Cross members, the cost-sharing waiver for telehealth services filed with a non-COVID-19-related diagnosis code will end July 31, 2020.

Always check eligibility and benefits through ProviderAccess or your practice management system to confirm coverage and cost-sharing details for your patients.

For behavioral health billing and coding guidelines specific to this telehealth expansion, refer to the [New Directions Behavioral Health telehealth expansion memo](#).

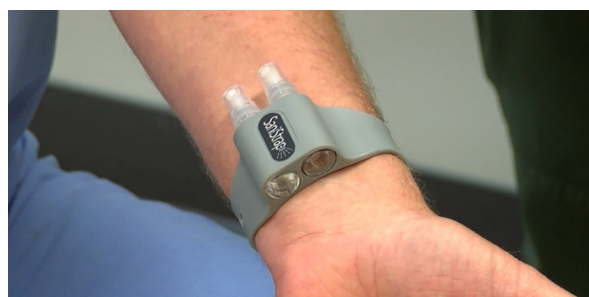
[See more Information Here](#)



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The banner features a blue background. On the left, the Medical Association of the State of Alabama logo is displayed above the text "COVID-19" in red and "EARN FREE CME" in large yellow letters. Below this, it says "FIND MORE INFORMATION ON COURSES HERE" in white. On the right, there is an illustration of a person sitting at a desk with a computer, looking at a screen. In the background, there are stylized virus particles.

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