



Department of Health Care Services
MEMORANDUM

DATE: March 6, 2020

TO: Medi-Cal Managed Care Health Plans

FROM: Department of Health Care Services

SUBJECT: COVID-19 Screening and Testing

As the State of California responds to the COVID-19 situation, the Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) reminds Medi-Cal managed care health plans (MCPs) of existing contractual requirements and state and federal laws that require MCPs to ensure their members are able to access medically necessary services in a timely manner.¹ These provisions include:

- Covering all medically necessary emergency care without prior authorization, whether that care is provided by an in-network or out-of-network provider.
- Complying with utilization review timeframes for approving requests for urgent and non-urgent covered services. MCPs are required to waive prior authorization requests for services, including screening and testing, related to COVID-19.
- Ensuring the MCP's provider networks are adequate to handle an increase in the need for services, including offering access to out-of-network services where appropriate and required, as more COVID-19 cases emerge in California.
- Ensuring members are not liable for balance bills from providers, including balance bills related to testing of COVID-19.
- Ensuring MCPs have 24-hour access to an MCP representative with the authority to authorize services, and ensuring that DHCS has contact information for that person. This contact information must be provided to the MCP's DHCS Contract Manager (CM) upon request of DHCS.
- Offering members and providers the option to utilize telehealth services to deliver care when medically appropriate, as a means to limit members' exposure to others who may be infected with COVID-19.
- Approving transportation requests in a timely manner if a member, who may be infected with COVID-19, needs to be seen in person and requests transportation.

¹ Similar provisions are outlined in the Department of Managed Health Care (DMHC) All Plan Letter 20-006, which applies to MCPs licensed by DMHC.

Proactive Steps

DHCS encourages MCPs to act proactively to ensure members can access all medically necessary screening and testing of COVID-19. To this end:

- MCPs should work with their contracted providers to use telehealth services to deliver care when medically appropriate, as a means to limit members' exposure to others who may be infected with COVID-19, and to increase provider capacity.
- In the event of a shortage of any particular prescription drug, MCPs should waive prior authorization and/or step therapy requirements if the member's prescribing provider recommends the member take a different drug to treat the member's condition.

DHCS continues to closely monitor this situation and will issue further reminders and guidance as appropriate. MCPs should send any questions to their DHCS Managed Care Operations Division Contract Manager.
