Coronavirus: Provider Updates

Blue Cross is closely monitoring the outbreak of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) and will publish information and updates on this page.

Helpful Links:

- Telehealth Coverage Guidelines
- Telehealth Billing Guide - Updated April 2, 2020
- COVID-19 Coding Guide
- Explained: Telehealth vs. Telemedicine

Latest Updates

April 3, 2020

Guidance on Use of Serologic Antibody Tests for COVID-19

As interest grows in the use of serologic antibody tests for COVID-19, guidance advises that an antibody test is not appropriate to diagnose an acute infection. Serologic antibody testing should not be used as the sole basis for diagnosis and can only aid in the diagnosis of patients in conjunction with a medical review of symptoms and results of other laboratory tests.

Serologic antibody testing specific for COVID-19 can reveal if a patient has been exposed to the virus and had an immune response to the virus; however, it will not reveal if the patient is currently infected.

COVID-19 diagnostic testing by means of a nasopharyngeal swab will provide a determination whether a patient has the SARS-CoV-2 virus present and is capable of spreading the virus to others.

For initial diagnostic testing for COVID-19, the CDC recommends collecting and testing upper respiratory tract specimens (nasopharyngeal swab). The CDC also recommends testing lower respiratory tract specimens, if available. Additionally, CDC guidance indicates that, for patients who develop a productive cough, sputum should be collected and tested for COVID-19.

April 3, 2020

Coronavirus Codes Added to List of Services Carved Out of EAPG Pricing

The Services Carved Out of EAPG Pricing document has been updated with three coronavirus HCPCS codes and their corresponding fees.
March 31, 2020

**Telehealth Billing Reminder: Use Approved Codes to Avoid Rejected Claims**

We have noticed that some claims for telehealth services were filed with CPT codes 98966-98968 or 99441-99443. Although these are valid CPT codes, they are not included in our COVID-19 expanded Telehealth Coverage Guidelines.

If you notice a rejected claim that was originally submitted with one of the above codes, file a new claim with one of the approved codes from our Telehealth Billing Guide and place of service 02 (telehealth).

For more information about coding telehealth claims, join us for our Timely Topics webinar:

**COVID-19 Telehealth Coding & Documentation Tips**

**Thursday, April 9, Noon - 1 p.m. Central Time**

Kim Huey, also known as "Kim the Coder," will provide best practices for coding and documentation related to our expanded telehealth coverage during the COVID-19 outbreak.

March 27, 2020

**Caution About Use of Hydroxychloroquine (Plaquenil) to Treat COVID-19**

With the recent increased interest in the use of hydroxychloroquine (Plaquenil) and chloroquine to treat patients diagnosed with COVID-19, various agencies are advising that research is not available to support the use of these medications for treating the novel coronavirus. Also, because the side effects are well known and potentially serious, the ratio of risk-to-benefits is currently not favorable.

The following resources provide information about use of these medications for COVID-19:

- **Alabama Board of Pharmacy**: Hydroxychloroquine (Plaquenil) and Chloroquine
- **CDC**: Information for Clinicians on Therapeutic Options for COVID-19 Patients
- **American Medical Association**: Coronavirus (COVID-19) Update: Chloroquine /Hydroxychloroquine and Azithromycin
- **American Medical Association, American Pharmacists Association and American Society of Health-System Pharmacists**: Joint Statement About COVID-19 Medications

March 27, 2020

**Updated State Lab Requirements for COVID-19 Testing**
The Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH) recently announced updated COVID-19 testing requirements for specimens processed by the state’s Bureau of Clinical Laboratories (BCL). Continue to check the ADPH website for the latest information about COVID-19 testing.

March 25, 2020

FDA Warns About Fraudulent Test Kits for COVID-19

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recently announced concerns about unauthorized, fraudulent test kits that are being marketed to test for the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) in the home. As of March 20, 2020, the FDA had not authorized any at-home test for COVID-19.

Blue Cross will cover COVID-19 diagnostic tests that are consistent with CDC guidance. To ensure testing accuracy, a specimen must be obtained and appropriately processed for testing by or under the direct supervision of a licensed medical professional.

As the COVID-19 outbreak continues to develop, we are receiving information about an increasing number of healthcare scams related to this emergency situation. We recommend providers evaluate any new services that are recommended for their patients to ensure that they’re legitimate and approved by the federal agencies and covered by Blue Cross.

Updated March 24, 2020

Telehealth Coverage Expansion

We are continuing to update our Telehealth Coverage Guidelines with the following additions:

- Occupational, speech and physical therapies
- Teledentistry services
- Interprofessional hospital consult

Detailed information about these added services as well as those previously announced is available in our Telehealth Billing Guide. As we continue to expand our telehealth coverage, we will update this billing guide to provide additional details.

Our Telehealth Coverage Guidelines are effective starting March 1, 2020, and expire on April 16, 2020. They will be reevaluated for a continuance as needed.

March 24, 2020
Member Cost Sharing Waived for Coronavirus and Telehealth Services

To ensure your patients get the care they need during the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, we are waiving any up-front member cost-sharing (copayments, deductibles, co-insurance) for the following scenarios:

- Claims for in-network services rendered in the physician’s office, emergency room or urgent care that include a COVID-19 diagnosis code(s) as specified in the COVID-19 Coding Guide: Information for Providers and Labs.
- Claims for in-network telehealth services identified under the recently expanded Telehealth Coverage Guidelines regardless of whether there is a diagnosis on the claim directly related to COVID-19.
- Claims submitted by in-network laboratories for processing coronavirus tests.

These waivers are retroactive for dates of service back to March 1, 2020, and effective through April 16, 2020. They will be reevaluated for continuance as needed.

Continue to check AlabamaBlue.com/providers/coronavirus regularly for additional details about the types of services included in these waiver scenarios as well as for any changes in response to the COVID-19 outbreak.

Blue Cross and Blue Shield Plans nationwide are implementing these types of cost-sharing waivers. There could be variations on cost-sharing for telehealth services for some patients who have employer-based coverage or coverage under another Blue Cross and Blue Shield Plan outside of Alabama. Always check eligibility and benefits through ProviderAccess or your practice management system to confirm cost-sharing details.

March 19, 2020

COVID-19 Coding Guide: Information for Providers and Labs

This guide outlines a summary of the coding instruction provided by the CDC, World Health Organization and CMS.

March 11, 2020

Blue Cross Coronavirus Response Plans

We have prepared contingency plans to ensure business operations continue to run smoothly in the event of an outbreak in Alabama. This means providers and their patients who are Blue Cross members will continue to receive the highest quality service possible from us.

Prescription Drug Early-Refill Restrictions Lifted
To help ensure that your patients who are Blue Cross members have an ample supply of their medications in the event of a coronavirus emergency, early-refill restrictions that are standard in our pharmacy management safety edits will be temporarily removed.

According to the Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH), current respiratory outbreaks such as influenza could make it difficult to identify an outbreak of this new coronavirus. Therefore, Blue Cross asks you to encourage your patients to get the flu vaccine if they have not done so. We are also communicating this information to our members.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and ADPH have published guidance for healthcare providers. Blue Cross encourages our providers to follow the published guidelines from the ADPH and CDC for preparedness, symptom evaluation and reporting.

**Additional Resources for Providers**

- ADPH Guidance for Providers
- ADPH Screening Tool
- CDC Checklist
- CDC COVID-19 map
- CDC Notice for Healthcare Provider Offices