

COVID-19 Report to Members ~ June 22, 2020

Please note our Reports are sent on Mondays and Thursdays, unless there's breaking news.



Reimbursement & Policy

Governor supports telehealth advances and rule reductions

Today, Governor Little signed an executive order to preserve Idaho's unprecedented advances in telehealth that were made to ensure continued access to care during the pandemic.

"Our loosening of healthcare rules since March helped to increase the use of telehealth services, made licensing easier, and strengthened the capacity of our healthcare workforce – all necessary to help our citizens during the global pandemic. We proved we could do it without compromising safety. Now it's time to make those healthcare advances permanent moving forward," Governor Little said.

Shortly after Idaho's first confirmed coronavirus case in March, Governor Little directed all state agencies to examine their rules, placing specific emphasis on increasing the state's healthcare provider capacity and reducing barriers to healthcare access for Idaho citizens.

The result was more than 150 rules were temporarily waived. Today's Executive Order 2020-13 takes steps to make the rule waivers permanent by instructing the agencies to finalize the rule changes for presentation to the Idaho Legislature in January of 2021.

"By suspending certain rules during the pandemic – such as allowing the use of Zoom, Facetime and other applications and making it easier for providers to offer telehealth services – we've been able to address the critical shortage of medical providers in every county in the state. This serves to make healthcare more accessible and affordable for Idaho families and businesses," Governor Little added.

In telehealth, Idaho went from 3,000 sessions during March through May last year to 117,000 sessions during the same time period this year – a 40-fold increase. Private insurers also took steps to increase the accessibility of telehealth services and have seen substantial increases in utilization.

To make these temporary actions permanent, the agencies involved will have to propose changes to Idaho code which would go through the legislative process next year or promulgate rules which can be enacted by the agencies but must be adopted by the Legislature during the next session. Agencies were given July deadlines to address both statute and rule changes.

CMS pushes for value-based care

Today, CMS issued a [renewed call](#) for a "national commitment to value-based care" and shared a [data snapshot](#) of the impacts the pandemic has had on the Medicare and dual-eligible populations. In analyzing COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations from Medicare beneficiaries from January 1 through May 16, CMS noted:

- 325,000 beneficiaries had a COVID-19 diagnosis, which equals 518 cases per 100,000 beneficiaries.
- Of those cases, nearly 110,000 were hospitalized, approximately 175 hospitalization per 100,000 beneficiaries.
- In examining dually eligible Medicare and Medicaid beneficiaries, the data show 1,406 cases per 100,000 dually eligible, which is more than four times higher than the rate for Medicare-only beneficiaries.

CMS noted that while it is critical to adopt a value-based system with an emphasis on keeping beneficiaries healthy, addressing these disparities, which reflect a wide range of social determinants of health, will take a multi-sector approach involving government, community organizations, and private industry.

Resources & Equipment

Testing media quality issue surfaces

Today, the Idaho Office of Emergency Management announced that hospitals and other testing locations should not use FILLAKIT LLC phosphate buffered saline (PBS) transport media.

"FEMA/HHS has recently become aware of potential quality issues with FILLAKIT LLC phosphate buffered saline (PBS) transport media that was provided to states and territories for COVID-19 sample collection," said the statement. "Out of an abundance of caution, we recommend this media not be used at this time. We are currently in the process of analyzing the quality of the media in question and will be in touch with jurisdictions early this next week to discuss media requirements. NOTE: Please do not discard this media, but do not use for additional sample collection until further notice."

Virtual Meetings, Education & Updates

Governor's next press conference

On Thursday, Governor Little will talk about Idaho's next steps almost two week after entering Stage 4. Earlier today Central District Health announced that because of "daily significant increases" in positive COVID-19 cases, Ada County will move back to Stage 3 effective at 12:01am Wednesday. The rest of the state will remain in Stage 4.

[Governor's Press Conference](#)
Thursday, June 25 – 12p MT / 11a PAC

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