



MassHealth PCA Program Consumer Information: Updates Related to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

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Key Information for MassHealth Members

MassHealth is committed to supporting members to remain in their homes to reduce exposure to and spread of the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19), as well as preserve health system capacity during this public health emergency.

The purpose of this document is to provide members and their families with the most important information related to COVID-19 and outline where ongoing updates can be found.

- Refer to the [MassHealth COVID-19 website](https://www.mass.gov/info-details/masshealth-coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19-applicants-and-members#members-) for more information about all the things MassHealth is doing for applicants and members during this emergency. You can get to the section for members and applicants by clicking here: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/masshealth-coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19-applicants-and-members#members->.
- Refer to the [Massachusetts Department of Public Health \(DPH\) COVID-19 website](#) for information from Governor Baker and state officials about COVID-19 in Massachusetts.
- Stay connected with your primary care provider, and to be connected to services for older adults and people with disabilities, visit the MassOptions website at www.massoptions.org.

Your MassHealth Coverage is Protected! During the COVID-19 national emergency, coverage for all MassHealth members who enrolled on or after March 18, 2020 will be protected until 30 days after the emergency.

Background about Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)

What is COVID-19 and how does it spread?

- COVID-19 is a respiratory virus. Current symptoms have included mild to severe respiratory illness with fever cough, and difficulty breathing.
- According to Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the virus is spread mainly from person-to-person, between people who are in close contact with each other (within about 6 feet).
- Spread is from respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes.

Who should be most cautious?

- Everyone should take precautions to protect themselves and others who may be at higher risk.
- Those considered “high risk” include people over the age of 60, anyone with underlying health conditions such as diabetes, cancer, lung diseases, a weakened immune system or taking medications that weaken the immune system, and pregnant women.

Preparing Yourself and Your Home

Your mental and emotional health during COVID-19

- Emotional reactions to stressful situations such as new viruses and national emergencies are expected. Feeling sad, anxious, overwhelmed, or having trouble sleeping or other symptoms of distress is normal, and there are resources available to you.
- As a MassHealth member, you can receive comprehensive behavioral health care, including services delivered over the phone, via live video, or other telehealth platforms. To find a behavioral health provider in your area, visit the new Network of Care website at www.massachusetts.networkofcare.org. If you or a loved one is struggling with a substance use disorder, you can also call the Department of Public Health’s helpline at (800) 327-5050 or visit www.helplinema.org.
- You can also access remote support through Recovery Learning Communities (RLCs), which provide 1-on-1 peer support and peer groups. To find an RLC near you, visit the Department of Mental Health’s website at www.mass.gov/service-details/recovery-learning-communities
- If you are experiencing a crisis, the National Disaster Distress Helpline is available with 24/7 emotional support and crisis counseling for anyone experiencing distress or other mental health concerns. Calls (1-800-985-5990) and texts (text TalkWithUs to 66746) are answered by trained counselors who will listen to your concerns, explore coping and other available supports, and offer referrals to community resources for follow-up care and support.

Preventing the spread of COVID-19

- **Follow this key guidance from the [Centers for Disease Control \(CDC\)](https://www.cdc.gov)**, which includes:
 - Practice good hygiene all day long: **Wash your hands** often with warm water and soap for at least 20 seconds, or if you can’t wash your hands, use alcohol-based hand sanitizer; **Cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze**, using a

- tissue or the inside of your elbow; and **do not touch your eyes, nose or mouth** without first carefully washing your hands
- Avoid shaking hands with people and touching high-traffic surfaces in public places, such as elevator buttons, door handles and shopping cart handles.
 - **Stay at home unless it is absolutely necessary to go out. Avoid unnecessary outings and travel and avoid getting together with other people, especially in any gatherings** or large crowds
 - **Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces**
 - **Wear a facemask if you must go out.** The Center for Disease Control has information around how to use simple homemade facemasks
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html>

Working with your Personal Care Attendant (PCA)

- **As much as possible, advise and support your PCA in practicing good hygiene while in your home**
- **Limit physical contact with your PCA to only what is needed for care tasks**
- Every day before your PCA comes over:
 - Do a **self-check screening** by asking these questions:
 1. Do you have a fever (higher than 100.3 °F)?
 2. Do you have *newly* developed respiratory symptoms such as cough, shortness of breath, or sore throat?
 3. Have you had close contact with a person diagnosed with COVID-19 in the past 14 days?
 - If you answer '**yes**' to any of these questions, you should contact your primary care provider before allowing your PCA into your home.
 - Ask your PCA to do a self-check screening before coming to your home and ask your PCAs the same questions:
 1. Do you have a fever (higher than 100.3 °F)?
 2. Do you have newly developed respiratory illness such as cough, shortness of breath, or sore throat?
 3. Have you travelled (within the past 14 days) to a [COVID-19-affected geographic areas](#)?
 4. Have you had close contact with a person diagnosed with COVID-19 in the past 14 days?
 - If your PCA answers '**yes**' to any of these questions, do not allow your PCA to come into your home.
 - Advise your PCA to contact their primary care provider.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), such as Facemasks and Gloves

When should you, as a MassHealth member, wear a facemask?

- **If you are sick:** You should wear a facemask when you are around other people (e.g., sharing a room or vehicle) and before you enter a healthcare provider's office. If you are

not able to wear a facemask (for example, because it causes trouble breathing), then you should do your best to cover your coughs and sneezes, and people who are caring for you should wear a facemask if they enter your room.

- **If you are NOT sick:** You do not need to wear a facemask unless you are caring for someone who is sick (and they are not able to wear a facemask). Facemasks may be in short supply and they should be saved for caregivers. For information on how to properly use facemasks, refer to guidance from the CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/2010-133/pdfs/2010-133.pdf>

What if no facemasks are available?

- When no facemasks are available, the CDC has stated the following about homemade masks:
 - In settings where facemasks are not available, health care professionals might use homemade masks (e.g., bandana, scarf) for care of patients with COVID-19 as a last resort. However, homemade masks are not considered PPE, since their capability to protect health care professionals is unknown.
 - Caution should be exercised when considering this option. Homemade masks should cover nose, and mouth as well as extend below chin ideally be used in combination with a face shield that covers the entire front (that extends to the chin or below) and sides of the face.
- The CDC has provided instructions on “[Use of Cloth Face Coverings to Help Slow the Spread of COVID-19](#)”
 - You can also watch the CDC’s video of Surgeon General Dr. Jerome Adams showing how you can make your own face covering: <https://youtu.be/tPx1yqvJgf4>

What should you do if you are feeling sick?

- If you are sick, you should reach out to your primary care provider.
- You can also check your symptoms and connect with the next appropriate health care resources using the Commonwealth’s new online resource to residents called, [Buoy Health Care Tool](#).
 - Users will receive a recommendation regarding the best next steps based on your assigned risk level. Individuals showing possible COVID-19 symptoms or other conditions will have the option to be directly connected to a medical provider via Telehealth within their network.
 - MassHealth has contracted with three Telehealth Network Providers, Doctors on Demand, Maven and Galileo, as an option for members to directly connect with a provider via Telehealth, if they are showing symptoms and risk factors.
 - Buoy Health’s online 24/7 tool is free for all Massachusetts residents and can be found at bouy.com/mass

Information about Personal Care Attendant (PCA) Services

Are PCAs considered essential employees?

- PCA services are essential services - and PCAs are essential employees.
- PCAs do not need to carry any documentation about being an essential employee, but to ensure PCAs can deliver essential services, **MassHealth sent letters to PCAs to show that they are essential workers and PCAs should carry that notice with them.** Your PCA should have received this letter already. If your PCA would like a copy of this letter- please contact your fiscal intermediary.
- Because PCAs are essential employees, **PCAs can access emergency child care centers** and bring their children to daycare centers. If helpful to your PCAs, share this website which includes a search tool for daycare centers providing services to essential employees: https://eeclead.force.com/EEC_ExemptEmergencyChildCare

What if my PCA is sick?

- If your PCA is sick, they should stay home and not enter your home. **Do not schedule them to work if they are sick.**
 - PCAs have access to up to 80 hours of sick as a result of the Families First Coronavirus Act that Congress passed on March 18, based on their work history.
 - This emergency sick time is accessible from April 1, 2020 – December 31, 2020.
 - PCAs will need to fill out a special timesheet to access the expanded 80 hours of sick time. **Go to your Fiscal Intermediaries website to access the timesheet.**
 - In addition to the emergency sick time, PCAs still have access to their normal Paid Time Off (PTO) which allows PCAs to accrue up to 50 hours of PTO.

What should I do if you I'm having trouble getting PCA services during COVID-19?

- **Reach out to your other PCA(s).** If you currently receive PCA services from multiple PCAs and one is unable to work because they're sick, you may reach out to your other PCA(s) to try and fill your open shifts. Note that MassHealth put in place new policies so that PCAs no longer have any limits on working overtime and may work additional hours as needed during this public health emergency.
- **Hire a new PCA from the Mass PCA Directory.** You can view the directory by going online to: <https://www.masspcadirectory.org>. Consumers can search the Directory for a qualified PCA in their town. PCAs post profiles to the site that allow Consumers to look for PCAs based on things like **work experience, special skills and availability**.
 - Two fiscal intermediaries, Northeast Arc and Tempus Unlimited, now have very efficient ways for Consumers and PCAs to complete New Hire Paperwork and submit it using electronic signatures. No faxing or mailing is required and PCAs can be set up very quickly.
 - Northeast Arc: <http://www.nearcfi.org/fiscal-intermediary-forms/>
 - Tempus Unlimited: <https://paperwork.tempusunlimited.org/>
 - Stavros does not have electronic new hire paperwork technology but has expressed commitment to expediting new hire paperwork and troubleshooting errors quickly via mail or in person if appropriate.
- **If you do not have backup PCAs and need services quickly,** call the new MassHealth PCA Help Hotline by calling **MassOptions at (844) 422-6277, Monday through Friday 9AM to 5 PM.**
 - MassHealth launched this **hotline** through MassOptions to connect PCA consumers to a home health agency in the event their PCA is unavailable. To get

- help, members should call the current MassOptions line at (844) 422-6277. Those callers can be transferred to a live person for assistance.
- MassHealth will allow members experiencing a disruption in PCA services due to COVID-19 to **use home health services** from a MassHealth home health agency.
 - **Note:** Home health aides may not be able to perform all the same tasks performed by a PCA; for more skilled services a home health agency may assign a nurse to complete certain tasks normally performed by a consumer's PCA.

Flexibilities under the MassHealth PCA Program in Response to COVID-19

Guidance on PCA overtime

- MassHealth has temporarily **suspended PCA overtime limits** (i.e. weekly hour limits), so you may schedule your PCA to work overtime without prior authorization. Please continue to schedule your PCA's hours with their health and wellbeing in mind.
- If you receive a notice of overbilling, you can ignore it; no action is needed. Even though MassHealth will stop sending letters of overtime noncompliance to you and your PCA(s), you will continue to get notices of overbilling. You do not need to respond to these notices.

Guidance for students who normally receive some PCA hours through their school

- MassHealth is automatically adjusting all prior authorizations for members who currently have hours provided through their schools.
- Adjustments will be made to be consistent with any previously approved hours for vacation times.
- The adjustment time will be effective March 16, 2020 and will last for 90 days. If you have concerns or questions, please contact your PCM.

Guidance for members who normally attend day programs

- If you are authorized for Day Habilitation Services and/or hours at an Adult Day Health (ADH) Center in addition to PCA services, **your PCM will automatically adjust your current PA for PCA services** by adding **additional PCA hours**.
- The adjustment time will be effective from March 16, 2020 for 90 days. No additional action is needed. If you have any questions about this or do not receive a notice, contact your PCM.

Guidance on Prior Authorizations (PAs)

- If your prior authorization expiration date falls in April or May 2020 and you have not yet completed your yearly reevaluation or functional skills training, you do not need to do anything—your PCM will automatically request an extension on your behalf.
- If you want to go forward with your yearly reevaluation or functional skills training, contact your PCM; they may be able to do your assessment using telehealth (including by telephone or live video).

Guidance on Reassessments and Telehealth

- If you or your PCM think you may need to change your PCA hours, you should talk to your PCM.
- Your PCM may do a reassessment and/or an adjustment to your existing **prior authorization (PA) via telehealth** (including telephone and live video) instead of in-person, as determined necessary by your PCM.

Guidance for new consumers

- The MassHealth PCA Program remains open for enrollment during the COVID-19 emergency.
- Your PCM will administer **screening questions via telephone** to assess for COVID-19 symptoms. If you are determined to not to have any symptoms, your PCM may administer your **initial evaluation** according to normal procedure (i.e. in person). If you do have symptoms you should contact your health care provider immediately for further guidance.
- Other orientation activities necessary to start receiving PCA services, including **Intake and Orientation** and all forms of **Functional Skills Training**, can also be conducted via telehealth, including by telephone and live video and as determined necessary by the PCM.