
FISCAL UPDATE Article

Fiscal Services Division

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DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES — COVID-19 RESPONSE: MARCH 2020

The Department of Human Services (DHS) has taken the following steps to prepare for and mitigate the impact of COVID-19. The information is current as of March 24, 2020.

Medicaid, Hawki, and the Iowa Health and Wellness Plan (IHAWP). The DHS has submitted the following federal Section 1115 and Section 1915(c) waivers to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to allow the following:

- Waive copayments and premiums for IHAWP, Medicaid for Employed People with Disabilities (MEPD), Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), Hawki, and Dental Wellness Plan members.
- Pause all disenrollments for the Medicaid Program and allow continuous eligibility for adults. Allow CHIP-enrolled children who age out of the program to be enrolled in IHAWP.
- Equip hospitals to determine presumptive eligibility for categorically eligible members.
- Provide home-delivered meals for nonwaiver members who are homebound.
- Provide home-delivered meals for waiver members in cases where the waiver does not have meals as an allowable service.
- Allow additional flexibility for home and community-based services (HCBS) providers to continue to meet members' needs throughout the duration of the disaster proclamation.

The DHS has also requested a federal waiver to Section 1135 of the Social Security Act for the following regulatory requirements:

Intermediate Care Facilities for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities:

- Direct care residential living unit staff: Permit modifications to direct care staff numbers if required because of reduced staff availability due to the national emergency.
- Continuous active treatment program: Allow for the health and safety needs of residents to be met if sufficient staff are unavailable to implement continuous active treatment due to the national emergency.
- Preventive care and dental services: Allow for flexibility if the timeliness requirements cannot be met due to the national emergency.
- Housing of similar ages, developmental levels, and social needs: Allow for movement and housing based on availability of sufficient staffing and potential health issues of clients.

Nursing Facility Preadmission Screening:

- Preadmission screening of applicants for admissions to nursing facilities: Temporarily suspend preadmission screening and annual resident review, which will allow a nursing home to continue admission of an individual who has not had assessment completed if there is a workforce disruption or hospitals reduce or limit outside contact in their facilities.

Hospitals:

- 24-hour nursing requirement: Permit a nurse to cover more than one ward in the event of staffing shortages caused by the national emergency.

The DHS is requesting that all waivers be effective March 13, 2020, in alignment with the President's national emergency proclamation.

Child Care. The DHS is encouraging providers to remain open. [Guidance](#) was developed in consultation with the Department of Public Health for child care programs to provide critical support for working parents in essential parts of the workforce. The guidance included the following recommendations.

- Encourage parents who are telecommuting to keep their children at home.
- Follow current health practice guidelines of covering coughs, washing hands, and keeping sick children at home.
- Remove plush toys, wash blankets daily, and maintain regular deep cleaning practices in addition to daily cleaning.
- Screen temperatures of children upon arrival.
- Report available slots to Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) daily.

Using the reported available slot information from providers, the DHS, with assistance from the Office of the Chief Information Officer, has launched an interactive map that provides daily updates on [available childcare slots](#). Families seeking additional information about child care should contact [CCR&R](#) through its website or phone 855.244.5301.

Food Assistance. Iowa is currently one of four states participating in a pilot project to allow online grocery shopping with an Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card. Currently the pilot project only allows for online shopping at Walmart and Amazon, but the Department is requesting an exemption from its federal partners to allow online grocery shopping from any grocery store that wishes to participate.

Workforce. The DHS has implemented telework options for some employees; however, due to the direct support nature of the Department's services, many employees remain in the field or at a facility. The DHS has implemented risk screening for employees and their families to determine if some staff should be reassigned to other work. All staff at the DHS facilities have been deemed essential. The social workers in child welfare are working to maintain relationships between birth families and their children who are in foster care while practicing social distancing. However, many public places that have facilitated these meetings, like restaurants and libraries, are currently closed. Additionally, some counties have shut down their courthouses and other county-owned properties and denied access to DHS field staff.

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