THE HEALTH CONNECTION

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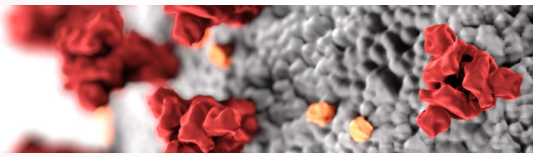
Spring 2020 Volume 21 No.2

APWU Health Plan COVID-19 Coverage Enhancements



The APWU Health Plan will continue to evaluate benefit enhancements as a result of COVID-19. For the most up-to-date information visit our website at:

www.apwuhp.com/coronavirus-outbreak-update/

The Health Plan will:

- **New!** Cover health care provider office visits, urgent care center visits and emergency room visits that result in an order for or administration of a diagnostic test for COVID-19 at **no cost*** to the member**
- Cover COVID-19 testing at **no cost*** to the member when testing is prescribed by a clinical professional
- Cover telehealth visits at **no cost*** to member when visits are performed through the Health Plan's telehealth providers:
  - Visits through Amwell are available at www.amwell.com at **no cost*** to member
- Cover telehealth visits to network providers at **no cost*** to member when related to COVID-19
- Waive inpatient prior authorization requirements related to COVID-19
- Reminder: Members are encouraged to use mail order for maintenance medications which provides a 90-day refill and the delivery is free

*All deductible, coinsurance and copays will be waived

**Your provider should be aware of this Families First Coronavirus Response Act and CDC guideline. If you are charged a copay or coinsurance at the time of your visit, you will be reimbursed by the Health Plan

CORONAVIRUS
Before and During a Pandemic

As the coronavirus disease continues to spread, making sense of the vast amount of information out there can be stressful and overwhelming.

Here are some simple tips to help you prevent the spread of the virus and stay healthy.

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a disease caused by a new coronavirus that had not been seen in people before December 2019. Symptoms of COVID-19 include fever, cough, and trouble breathing. In severe cases, the virus can cause pneumonia and make it hard to breathe without help.

The coronavirus is spread through close contact between people and through droplets in the air when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Scientists believe the virus may live on surfaces for a few hours or up to several days. We can spread it by touching doorknobs, railings, and other items.

Before a Pandemic

- Store a two-week supply of water and food.
- Periodically check your regular prescription drugs to ensure a continuous supply in your home.
- Have any non-prescription drugs and other health supplies on hand, including pain relievers, stomach remedies, cough and cold medicines, fluids with electrolytes and vitamins.
- Get copies and maintain electronic versions of health records from doctors, hospitals, pharmacies, and other sources and store them, for personal reference.
- Talk with family members and loved ones about how they would be cared for if they got ill, or what will be needed to care for them in your home.

During a Pandemic

Limit the spread of germs and prevent infection:

- Avoid close contact with people who are unwell.
- When you are ill, keep your distance from others to protect them from getting ill too.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. It may prevent those around you from becoming unwell.
- Washing your hands often will help protect you from germs.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
- Practice other good health habits. Get plenty of sleep, be physically active, manage your stress, drink plenty of fluids and eat nutritious food.

Links:
https://www.ready.gov/pandemic

beacon health options

SOCIAL DISTANCING:

QUARANTINE AND ISOLATION

What is social distancing?
Social distancing, also called "physical distancing," means keeping space between yourself and other people outside of your home. To practice social or physical distancing:

- Stay at least 6 feet (2 meters) from other people
- Do not gather in groups
- Stay out of crowded places and avoid mass gatherings

Keeping your distance by limiting face-to-face contact with others is the best way to reduce the spread of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19).



Tips for social distancing

- Follow guidance from authorities where you live
- If you need to shop for food or medicine at the grocery store or pharmacy, stay at least 6 feet away from others
- Use mail-order for medications, if possible
- Consider a grocery delivery service
- Cover your mouth and nose with a cloth face cover when around others, including when you have to go out in public, for example to the grocery store
- Stay at least 6 feet between yourself and others, even when you wear a face covering
- Avoid large and small gatherings in private places and public spaces, such as a friend's house, parks, restaurants, shops, or any other place. This advice applies to people of any age, including teens and younger adults. Children should not have in-person playdates while school is out.
- Work from home when possible
- If possible, avoid using any kind of public transportation, ridesharing, or taxis
- If you are a student or parent, talk to your school about options for digital/distance learning

Stay connected while staying away. It is very important to stay in touch with friends and family that don't live in your home. Call, video chat, or stay connected using social media. Everyone reacts differently to stressful situations and having to socially distance yourself from someone you love can be difficult.

What is the difference between quarantine and isolation?



Quarantine
Quarantine is used to keep someone who might have been exposed to COVID-19 away from others. Someone in self-quarantine stays separated from others, and they limit movement outside of their home or current place. A person may have been exposed to the virus without knowing it (for example, when traveling or out in the community), or they could have the virus without feeling symptoms. Quarantine helps limit further spread of COVID-19.

Isolation
Isolation is used to separate sick people from healthy people. People who are in isolation should stay home. In the home, anyone sick should separate themselves from others by staying in a specific "sick" bedroom or space and using a different bathroom (if possible).

See a health care provider without leaving work or home

Virtual visits are a great option when you need to see a doctor about a minor medical concern without leaving work or home. With a virtual visit, you can see and talk to a doctor from your phone, tablet, or computer—24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

In addition to providing a consultation and diagnosis, doctors can send a prescription to your local pharmacy.



Choose virtual visits when you need nonemergency care
Doctors can treat nonemergency conditions, including allergies, the flu, colds, strep throat, eye infections, diarrhea, pink eye, sinus infections, bronchitis, UTIs, behavioral health issues, and much more.

Visit Amwell online at amwell.com or call them at 1-855-818-DOCS. For behavioral health issues, visit MDLIVE online at mdlive.com or call 1-888-430-4827.



Childhood Vaccine Safety:

What parents should know about immunizations

Vaccinations help protect children from deadly diseases. They also keep other children safe by reducing the spread of diseases among children. As a parent, it's important to know that childhood vaccines work. In fact, most vaccines are 90 to 99 percent effective in preventing disease. And, vaccines are safe. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) only licenses vaccines that meet high standards for effectiveness and safety.

How vaccines work

A vaccine contains the same germs that cause the disease in question. The germs have been killed or weakened to the point that they don't make a child sick. Germs can be viruses, such as measles, or bacteria, such as pneumococcus. After getting a vaccine, a child's immune system builds up protective antibodies against the disease. If the child is exposed to the disease in the future, the vaccine prevents the child from contracting the disease. Unlike medicines that treat diseases, vaccines prevent diseases.



Recommended immunization schedules

Your child's schedule of recommended immunizations may vary depending on where you live, your child's health, and the type of vaccines available. Many vaccines are given together to reduce the number of shots a child receives. Talk to your child's pediatrician about the right vaccinations and schedule for your child.

Are vaccines really safe?

Some parents may be concerned about the safety of vaccines, but vaccines help save lives and protect against the spread of diseases. Choosing not to immunize your children raises their risk of catching a potentially dangerous or deadly disease. And, it may put others who come in contact with your children at risk. Some vaccines may cause mild reactions, including a fever, soreness, or swelling at the site of the injection, but serious side effects are rare. Immunizations are one of the best ways to protect kids against contagious diseases. If you have any questions or concerns about vaccine safety, talk to your child's pediatrician. Getting scientific facts from a medical professional you trust can help you make more informed decisions.

Links:
https://www.healthychildren.org/English/safety-prevention/immunizations/Pages/Vaccine-Safety-The-Facts.aspx

https://www.stanfordchildrens.org/en/topic/default?id=why-childhood-immunizations-are-important-1-4510

Natural remedies for back pain relief

Back pain is all too common. Whether you're dealing with an aching lower back, spasms, or nerve pain that shoots down your legs, too many patients receive unnecessary treatment. Fortunately, there are many ways to treat back pain at home that don't require expensive scans, prescription painkillers, or surgery.

1. Eat an anti-inflammatory diet

Inflammation can cause back pain or make your symptoms worse. Foods that fight inflammation include fresh fruits and vegetables, fatty fish like salmon, leafy greens, and nuts and seeds.

2. Get enough calcium

Calcium builds strong bones and can help prevent osteoporosis. Yogurt, cheese, milk, soybeans, and tofu are all good sources of this essential mineral.

3. Maintain a healthy weight

Carrying extra weight can strain your back and joints. Ask your doctor to recommend healthy ways to lose weight.

4. Wear sensible shoes

Some high-heeled shoes can be bad for your back. Using inserts can help alleviate the strain on your hips and spine.

5. Move more

When you're in pain, you may be tempted to rest. In most cases, however, you're more likely to find relief if you continue to work and stay active.

6. Practice yoga

Engaging your abdominal muscles with yoga poses can strengthen your core and significantly reduce back pain.

7. Quit smoking

Over time, smoking prevents tissues in your body from getting oxygen, which can cause your back muscles to weaken. Ask your doctor about what you can do to quit smoking.

8. Get enough sleep

If you have trouble sleeping because of back pain, your doctor can recommend lifestyle changes or other treatments to help you get the rest you need.

Link:https://utswmed.org/medblog/alternative-back-pain-treatment/

Are you at risk for prediabetes?



Before people develop type 2 diabetes, they almost always have prediabetes, a condition where sugar levels are higher than normal but not high enough to be diagnosed as diabetes. According to the American Diabetes Association, 88 million Americans age 18 and older have prediabetes. You can have prediabetes for years without symptoms, so it often goes undetected. In fact, 90 percent of those with the condition don't know they have it.

Know your risk factors for prediabetes
You have a higher chance of developing prediabetes if you are 45 or older, overweight, physically inactive, or are Black, Hispanic/Latinx, American Indian, Asian American, or Pacific Islander.

Your risk also rises if you:

- Have a parent, brother, or sister with diabetes
- Have high blood pressure
- Have low HDL cholesterol
- Have high triglycerides

Take steps to prevent type 2 diabetes
People with prediabetes may be able to prevent it from progressing to type 2 diabetes by maintaining a healthy weight and being more physically active. Making small changes in your diet can help, too.

Eat healthy carbs to lower your risk of diabetes
Knowing how many and what kind of carbohydrates to eat is important for lowering your risk of diabetes. Carbohydrates—or carbs—include starches, sugars, and fiber. Foods high in starch include some vegetables (potatoes, peas, and corn), dried beans and lentils (pinto beans and kidney beans), and grains (bread, pasta, and crackers).

There are two types of sugar in foods: naturally occurring sugars (found in milk and fruit) and added sugars. Consuming natural sugars is part of a healthy diet, but be wary of sugars added to packaged foods during processing. Foods and beverages high in added sugars include soft drinks, fruit drinks, candy, cakes, cookies, pies, ice cream, and waffles. Fiber comes from plant-based foods, like beans and legumes, fruits and vegetables, nuts, and whole grains.

When you're trying to eat a healthy diet, choose nutrient-rich carbs that are high in fiber and low in added sugars, sodium, and unhealthy fats.

Eat more:

- Whole vegetables — green beans, tomatoes, cucumbers, broccoli, and lettuce
- Fruits — blueberries, strawberries, apples, and cantaloupe
- Whole grains — brown rice, whole wheat bread, whole grain pasta, and oatmeal
- Starchy vegetables — green peas, sweet potatoes, corn, pumpkin, and plantains
- Beans and lentils — black beans, kidney beans, chickpeas, and green lentils

Eat/drink less:

- Sugary drinks — soda, sweet tea, and juice drinks
- Refined grains — white bread, white rice, and sugary cereal
- Sweets and snack foods — cake, cookies, candy, and chips

Small changes can make a big difference
If you have prediabetes, eating well and living a healthy lifestyle can help lower your blood sugar levels to a healthy range. You don't have to overhaul your entire diet at once. Just take it one meal at a time.

Link:
http://www.diabetes.org/diabetes-basics/statistics/?loc=db-slabnav

https://www.diabetes.org/nutrition

What you need to know about statins

Statin therapy is a powerful treatment for high cholesterol that has saved the lives of many patients with a high risk of heart attack or stroke. As with any medication, statins may have side effects, including headaches, nausea, and muscle aches, but for the vast majority of high-risk patients, the benefits outweigh the risks.

Reasons your doctor may prescribe a statin
In addition to lowering cholesterol, statins can safely prevent heart disease in some adults age 40 to 75.

These medications also fight inflammation and may reduce the chance of a heart attack. Depending on your cholesterol levels and your risk factors for a heart attack or stroke, your doctor may prescribe a statin if you:

- Are at risk for developing cardiovascular disease
- Having cardiovascular disease related to hardening of the arteries (atherosclerosis)
- Have high cholesterol or high blood pressure
- Smoke
- Had a heart attack or a stroke
- Have very high LDL (bad) cholesterol
- Have diabetes

Why it's important to stay on statins
Most people who take statins need to stay on the drugs for the long term. If your cholesterol goes down, it's important to continue taking the medication because if you stop taking it, your cholesterol levels may rise again. Always talk to your doctor before making any changes to your medications.

Link:
https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/high-blood-cholesterol/in-depth/statins/art-20045772

10 foods that lower blood pressure

High blood pressure affects millions of Americans, but many of us don't know we have it. That's because high blood pressure—also known as hypertension—often has no symptoms. The condition makes your heart work harder than it should and can cause serious problems, including heart disease, stroke, and kidney failure. Following a healthy diet that limits the amount of sodium you consume can help keep your blood pressure under control. This doesn't mean you have to restrict yourself to bland meals. In fact, there are all kinds of appetizing foods that can help lower your blood pressure.

DASH to lower your blood pressure
Following the DASH eating plan can help lower your blood pressure. DASH—short for Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension—is a wholesome, high-fiber diet that focuses on healthy foods you'll find at the grocery store. The key is to eat more fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat dairy products, and nuts. Say yes to poultry, seafood, and fatty fish like salmon, while cutting back on red meat, processed foods, tropical oils, and sweets.

Foods that fight high blood pressure

1. Avocados
You can stuff avocados with almost anything (diced chicken breasts, tomatoes, low-fat cheese) and bake them in the oven.

2. Tilapia
Sauté it on the stove or bake it in the oven. Tilapia taco Tuesdays could become your new dinnertime tradition.

3. White beans
Choose no-salt-added canned beans and add them to a salad.

4. Kiwifruit
For an easy, healthy snack, slice a kiwi in half and eat it with a spoon straight from the skin.

5. Pork tenderloin
Season it with garlic, basil, oregano, thyme, parsley, and sage.

6. Quinoa
Add this gluten-free seed to side dishes, soups, and salads.

7. Kale
Baby kale is a great base for a garden salad.

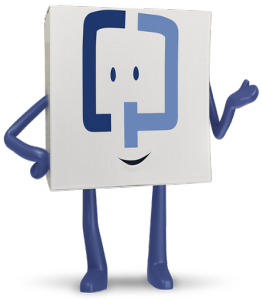
8. Sweet potatoes
For a healthy twist, try adding a baked sweet potato to your smoothie.

9. Peaches
Homemade peach salsa is sure to be a hit at your next dinner party.

10. Red bell peppers
The possibilities are endless: fajitas, stir-fries, soups, salads, pastas, curries.

Link: https://dashdiet.org/what-is-the-dash-diet.html

Colorectal cancer screening:
Is Cologuard® right for you?



Colorectal cancer is usually preventable. But it's the second-leading cause of cancer-related deaths among adults in the U.S., partly because one in three people who should get screened don't. Colorectal cancer usually begins as a small growth, a polyp, in the colon or rectum. Over time, polyps can become cancerous, but they don't always cause symptoms. You can have polyps without knowing it. Preventive screenings can detect polyps and prevent colorectal cancer from ever starting.

Most adults should get screened for colorectal cancer starting at age 50
Colorectal cancer screenings are part of recommended preventive care for men and women, starting at age 50 and continuing until age 75. Screening is so important because colorectal cancer is easier to treat when it's found early, before symptoms develop.

Choose the screening that's right for you
The colonoscopy is a widely used exam that detects abnormalities in the large intestine and rectum. It's considered the most thorough, effective screening for colorectal cancer, but you may be able to take a less invasive at-home test called Cologuard instead of getting a colonoscopy, as long as you meet a few requirements.

Is Cologuard right for you?
Cologuard is a new at-home colorectal cancer screening that the FDA recently approved. Available by prescription, it's ideal for people who are looking for an alternative to a colonoscopy, which requires bowel preparation, sedation, and time off from work. Cologuard doesn't require any special diets, bowel prep, or laxatives. The patient simply collects a stool sample at home and mails it to a lab for analysis. Cologuard is not right for everyone. And, some people will need to follow it up with a colonoscopy.

In order to qualify for Cologuard, you must:

- Be age 50 to 85 years
- Have no symptoms of colon cancer
- Have no history of IBD, Crohn's disease, or ulcerative colitis
- Have no personal or family history of pre-cancerous polyps or colon cancer
- Have no family history of genetic syndromes linked with colorectal cancer

Lower your risk for colorectal cancer with preventive screenings
Whether or not Cologuard is right for you, be sure to ask your doctor about getting tested for colorectal cancer. This important screening could save your life.

Link:
https://www.cancer.org/latest-news/stool-dna-testing-for-colon-cancer.html

https://www.mayoclinic.org/medical-professionals/digestive-diseases/news/cologuard-primed-to-change-landscape-of-crc-screening/mac-20429632

Pregnancy and Breastfeeding during COVID-19

We do not currently know if pregnant people have a greater chance of getting sick from COVID-19 than the general public nor whether they are more likely to have serious illness as a result. Based on available information, pregnant people seem to have the same risk as adults who are not pregnant.

However, we do know that:

- Pregnant people have changes in their bodies that may increase their risk of some infections
- Pregnant people have had a higher risk of severe illness when infected with viruses from the same family as COVID-19 and other viral respiratory infections, such as influenza

Pregnant people should protect themselves from COVID-19

- Avoid people who are sick or who have been exposed to the virus
- Clean your hands often using soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces daily

Risks to the pregnancy and to the baby

- Pregnant people have had a higher risk of severe illness when infected with viruses from the same family as COVID-19 and other viral respiratory infections, such as influenza
- It is always important for pregnant people to protect themselves from illnesses

Mother-to-child transmission

- Mother-to-child transmission of coronavirus during pregnancy is unlikely, but after birth a newborn is susceptible to person-to-person spread
- A very small number of babies have tested positive for the virus shortly after birth. However, it is unknown if these babies got the virus before or after birth





- The virus has not been detected in amniotic fluid, breast milk, or other maternal samples

Breastfeeding if you have COVID-19

- Breast milk provides protection against many illnesses and is the best source of nutrition for most infants
- You, along with your family and healthcare providers, should decide whether and how to start or continue breastfeeding
- In limited studies, COVID-19 has not been detected in breast milk; however, we do not know for sure whether mothers with COVID-19 can spread the virus via breast milk
- If you are sick and choose to direct breastfeed:
  - Wear a facemask and wash your hands before each feeding
- If you are sick and choose to express breast milk:
  - Express breast milk to establish and maintain milk supply
  - A dedicated breast pump should be provided
  - Wash hands before touching any pump or bottle parts and before expressing breast milk
  - Follow recommendations for proper pump cleaning after each use, cleaning all parts that come into contact with breast milk
  - If possible, consider having someone who is well feed the expressed breast milk to the infant

Link: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/pregnancy-breastfeeding.html

TIPS ON USING OPIOIDS SAFELY

Doctors use prescription opioids to treat pain after surgery or injury or for health conditions like cancer. Common opioids include oxycodone (OxyContin®), hydrocodone (Vicodin®), morphine, methadone, and fentanyl, a synthetic pain reliever.

Prescription opioids have serious side effects
Prescription opioids can have a number of side effects, even when taken as directed. Over time, some people develop tolerance for an opioid, so they need to take more of the medication for the same pain relief. Physical dependence is another side effect and includes symptoms of withdrawal when someone stops taking the medication. The most serious problem of all is that using prescription opioids can lead to addiction, abuse, and overdose.

Causes of the opioid epidemic
Recent years have seen a dramatic increase in the use of prescription opioids to treat chronic back pain and osteoarthritis, despite the serious risks. It's all too common to hear stories about people taking opioid medications after fracturing a bone or having a dental procedure. Excess medication can be dangerous to your health and increase the risk of addiction. It also provides easy access for those who want to abuse opioids. Despite prescribing guidelines and clinical research, overprescribing continues to fuel an epidemic that grows worse each day.



Tips for patients using opioids for pain relief
Before taking an opioid, ask your doctor about how the medication may affect you, and educate yourself on how to take it safely:

1. Consider the potential risks
If your doctor is prescribing an opioid for the first time, ask about the potential risks of taking it, especially if you have a history of addiction.

2. Take as directed
Opioids are easy to misuse, so it's important to follow directions for taking them. If you take other medications or drink alcohol, ask your doctor about possible interactions. And, learn how to properly dispose of unused medications so others in your household don't use them.

3. Plan ahead for surgery
People who take opioids for chronic pain should discuss this with their surgeon and anesthesiologist before having surgery.

4. Limit your use of opioids
If your doctor prescribes an opioid after you have surgery, take the medication only as long as necessary for pain relief.

5. Ask about combination therapy
Opioids don't always control pain. Ask your doctor if a different treatment might be right for you. You may be able to manage your pain by combining medication with other methods of pain relief.

6. Explore non-drug therapies
Talk to a pain specialist about what options for pain control might be best for you. Non-drug therapies include meditation, acupuncture, physical rehabilitation, lifestyle changes, and nerve blocks.

Links:
https://www.cdc.gov/drugoverdose/opioids/prescribed.html

https://www.asahq.org/about-asa/newsroom/news-releases/2016/03/five-tips-for-pain-management-with-opioids

THE HEALTH CONNECTION

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Follow-up care is important after visiting the emergency department for mental health or substance abuse

The APWU Health Plan High Option covers mental health and substance abuse care. For services received in a network emergency department, members pay 15 percent of the cost of the care. Please refer to your plan documents for more details about your specific coverage.

Being discharged from the emergency department after receiving mental health or substance abuse treatment is one of the most important processes in patient care. This can be a vulnerable time for some patients.

See your doctor within 30 days of being discharged
To ensure a safe transition of care, members who receive treatment in the emergency department or hospital for mental health or substance abuse must have a follow-up appointment with their primary care doctor within 30 days.



Need help finding a doctor?

APWU Health Plan is here to help. Visit us at www.apwuhp.com.