**Alabama Health Organizations Join Together to Stop the Spread of COVID-19**

The health and safety of Alabamians is our top priority. To that end, the Alabama Department of Public Health, the Alabama Hospital Association, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama, the Medical Association of the State of Alabama and Alabama Medicaid Agency are joining together to help stop the spread of the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19).

"We have been working very closely with numerous organizations across the state as part of our mitigation strategy. We appreciate their involvement and support as we work to protect the health of Alabamians," said Dr. Scott Harris, State Health Officer, Alabama Department of Public Health.

We are now seeing an increase in confirmed cases in Alabama. Even though it’s not the high number of confirmed cases when compared to some other states, we can’t stress enough the importance for the public to take the “stay at home” request made by the Governor seriously. The COVID-19 healthcare crisis is constantly changing so we urge Alabamians to listen to the guidance and follow the instructions given by medical professionals and our government leaders. If you must go out, please practice social distancing. Here’s why:

A person with COVID-19 can be asymptomatic (not experiencing any symptoms), so even if a person is feeling fine they can be a carrier of COVID-19 and be a potential threat to others, especially those at higher risk. People who are at higher risk include those who are 65 and older, those who have compromised immune systems and people with other underlying health conditions, like heart problems or diabetes. COVID-19 can cause serious illness, and even death, especially to those in a higher risk population.

According to the Alabama Hospital Association, the goal of staying at home and practicing social distancing is also to slow down the spread of the disease so we don’t overwhelm our health care system.  Most diseases have a natural curve that starts small, peaks and then goes back down.  If individuals will stay home and not venture out when they’re sick, we hope that we can interrupt the natural flow of the outbreak and be sure our hospitals, physicians and others can continue to care for regular patients as well as those who may need hospitalization due to COVID-19.

“Our hospital leaders and frontline staff have been working tirelessly day and night to address this challenge, and they need our support,” said Dr. Don Williamson, president, Alabama Hospital Association.  “Many communities have asked what they can do to help, and the answer is simple.  We all need to practice social distancing and stay home.”

The Medical Association of the State of Alabama, physicians and the entire medical community are also urging all Alabamians to stay at home. Physical distancing and staying at home are the key to slowing the spread of COVID-19 to give physicians, nurses and everyone on the front lines a fighting chance at having the equipment, time and resources necessary to take on this immense challenge.

“Physicians are on the front lines and will continue to provide first contact, preventive and ongoing essential care during this medical emergency. The Medical Association is dedicated to advocating for access to the highest quality of care for Alabamians, and that remains the case in the face of this pandemic,” said Dr. John S. Meigs, President of the Medical Association of the State of Alabama.

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama has also taken a number of important steps to ensure their members have access to the right care when they need it.

“Now more than ever we want our customers to know we are here for them, and we will remain by their side during this challenging time,” said Tim Vines, President and CEO of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama. “We will continue to work closely with our health organization partners across the state to do everything possible to help stop the spread of COVID-19.”

Blue Cross is waiving prior authorizations for diagnostic tests and covered services that are medically necessary and consistent with CDC guidance for members diagnosed with COVID-19. Access to prescription medications has been increased by waiving early medication refill limits. Telehealth access has also expanded, giving members the option to receive their care remotely to limit their exposure to COVID-19 and other illnesses. Telehealth can be used for acute symptoms, such as those related to COVID-19, but also for patient consultations and evaluations for routine, chronic and behavioral health conditions that, based on the provider’s medical opinion, can be managed over the phone.

Pharmacies statewide are also doing their part in the fight against COVID-19. Most are helping Alabamians with early refills, offering curbside pickup and expanded delivery options including making deliveries to the elderly.

The Alabama Medicaid Agency has taken similar steps to protect the health of recipients, providers, and Medicaid employees during the COVID-19 emergency. Since these unprecedented times require limited interaction, Medicaid temporarily extended the scope of telemedicine services for providers, and they implemented temporary modified work schedules for employees allowing the Agency to continue providing essential services to Medicaid recipients and providers.

“We anticipate no disruption in our day-to-day functions and all district offices will remain open with modified staffing requirements,” said Stephanie Azar, Commissioner of the Alabama Medicaid Agency. “The Agency stands ready to continue serving the most vulnerable residents of our state in perhaps their greatest time of need.”

These are difficult times for all of us, but we are confident we will overcome this healthcare crisis if we all do our part. Stay at home, practice social distancing, wash your hands often, stay informed and follow CDC guidelines. During this unprecedented time, we are rising to the challenge and doing what is best for the health and safety of Alabamians and the communities we serve.

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