

**Meadows Institute COVID-19 Regulatory & Reimbursement Newsletter**  
***Letter to Providers #48: State and Federal Updates – March 19, 2021***

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With federal and state health care policies changing in response to COVID-19, the Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute (Meadows Institute) is issuing *COVID-19 Regulatory & Reimbursement Newsletters* to support providers. In these newsletters, we highlight recent changes and extensions to regulatory and reimbursement rules, as well as newly published or updated guidance and answers to frequently asked questions.

These newsletters, along with additional information on mental health resources during a pandemic, are posted here: <https://mmhpi.org/work/covid19/>. If you would like to have additional organizations added to our distribution list or have follow up questions on the content, please email Rachael McLaughlin at [rmclaughlin@mmhpi.org](mailto:rmclaughlin@mmhpi.org).

## Texas Updates

### Providers Can Request Free COVID-19 Testing Kits

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<b>Date</b>	March 16, 2021
<b>Summary</b>	Assisted Living Facilities (ALF), Home and Community-based Services (HCS), Home and Community Support Services Agencies (HCSSA), Immediate Care Facilities for Individuals with an Intellectual Disability or Related Conditions (ICF/IID) and Nursing Facilities (NF) providers in counties where the COVID-19 positivity rate is more than 10 percent can request free COVID-19 testing kits. The test kits are only to test essential caregivers or HCSSA staff going into an NF or ALF who have direct contact with people receiving hospice services. Providers can request the free BinaxNOW point-of-care antigen COVID-19 test kits by filling out the <a href="#">attestation form</a> . The attestation form includes instructions for requesting the free COVID-19 testing kits for each eligible provider type.
<b>Link</b>	<a href="https://hhs.texas.gov/about-hhs/communications-events/news/2021/03/reminder-providers-can-request-free-covid-19-testing-kits">https://hhs.texas.gov/about-hhs/communications-events/news/2021/03/reminder-providers-can-request-free-covid-19-testing-kits</a>

## Vaccine Updates

### DSHS Announces 1C Priority Group

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<b>Date</b>	March 10, 2021
<b>Summary</b>	The Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) announced the parameters for the 1C priority group, which will be eligible for COVID-19 vaccinations beginning March 15, 2021. Texas is expanding vaccination to people ages 50 - 64 on March 15. More than 93% of the Texas fatalities directly caused by the coronavirus have been in people 50 and older, with those ages 50 - 64 accounting for 20% of all fatalities. About five million Texans are between the ages of 50 and 64; more than one million of them are already vaccinated. More information about the 1C priority group is available <a href="#">here</a> .
<b>Link</b>	<a href="https://www.dshs.state.tx.us/news/releases/2021/20210310.aspx">https://www.dshs.state.tx.us/news/releases/2021/20210310.aspx</a>

### Week 14 Vaccine Allocation

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<b>Date</b>	March 15, 2021
<b>Summary</b>	DSHS posted the final vaccine allocations for week 14 (this week). DSHS has allocated 656,810 doses to at least 445 providers in 178 counties. More than 200,000 additional first doses will be available to pharmacy locations and federally qualified health centers directly from the federal government. The allocation is the third largest Texas has received since vaccination began in December. However, it is less than the record of more than 1 million first doses delivered last week. The decrease follows a large amount of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine coming to the state. Additionally, the federally-supported sites in Arlington, Dallas, and Houston have finished their three-week cycle of first doses and will be administering second doses for the next three weeks.
<b>Link</b>	<a href="https://www.dshs.state.tx.us/coronavirus/immunize/vaccineallocations.aspx">https://www.dshs.state.tx.us/coronavirus/immunize/vaccineallocations.aspx</a>

### Overall Vaccine Data

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<b>Date</b>	March 12, 2021
<b>Summary</b>	Texas has now administered more than 7.6 million doses, an increase of nearly 1.4 million in the last week, according to DSHS. More than five million people have received at least one dose, up more than a million over last week, and more than 2.7 million are fully vaccinated. Among Texas seniors, 55% have received at least one dose and about 33% are fully vaccinated. About one in eight Texans at least 16

years old are now fully vaccinated. In addition to the first doses mentioned above, the state is ordering 578,320 second doses for people first vaccinated a few weeks ago. DSHS automatically orders second doses to arrive at providers, so they will be available when needed for the second dose. People should be able to return to the same provider to receive their second dose within six weeks of getting the first.

**Link** <https://www.dshs.state.tx.us/news/releases/2021/20210312.aspx>

### Mass Vaccination Clinic in Rio Grande Valley

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**Date** March 12, 2021

**Summary** Gov. Abbott and the National Border Patrol Council issued a joint statement in response to the announcement that the Department of Homeland Security will hold a mass vaccination clinic to vaccinate border patrol agents in Texas.

**Link** <https://gov.texas.gov/news/post/governor-abbott-national-border-patrol-council-release-joint-statement-on-dhs-mass-vaccination-clinic-in-the-rio-grande-valley>

### State Vaccine Provider Webinar to Cover Reporting

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**Date** March 15, 2021

**Summary** DSHS continues to host its regular COVID-19 vaccine provider webinars on Tuesdays and Thursdays from noon to 1:30 CT. Providers are encouraged to register for the webinars as the invitations come in. Past webinar recordings and resources are available for viewing. Past topics have included Texas Division of Emergency Management (TDEM) reporting, the state's adult influenza vaccine, and enhancements to the Vaccine Allocation and Ordering System (regarding vaccine transfers). If you are not receiving registration emails, please contact DSHS at [covid19vacmgmt@dshs.texas.gov](mailto:covid19vacmgmt@dshs.texas.gov) to be added to the distribution list.

**Link** <https://www.dshs.texas.gov/immunize/covid19/COVID-19-Vaccine-Provider-Webinars/>

## Federal Updates

### President Signs American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 Into Law

<b>Date</b>	March 11, 2021
<b>Summary</b>	<p>President Biden signed the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 into law. The bill is a \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief package that includes many provisions that directly and indirectly impact healthcare, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• \$8.5 billion to reimburse rural health providers for health-care related expenses and lost revenue associated with COVID-19;</li><li>• \$350 billion in aid to state and local governments for COVID-19 related activities;</li><li>• Directive to Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to ensure Medicaid Disproportionate Share Hospital (DSH) funding levels stay the same during the public health emergency as in the absence of the declaration;</li><li>• Required Medicaid and CHIP coverage of COVID-19 vaccines and treatment at 100% FMAP until one year after the end of the public health emergency;</li><li>• Billions of dollars in funding for COVID-19 vaccines, testing and workforce efforts; and</li><li>• Expanded subsidies and insurance flexibilities to help address the uninsured.</li></ul> <p>The Act also includes a number of provisions that impact mental health and substance use disorder, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ \$1.5 billion for the Mental Health Services Block Grant</li><li>○ \$1.5 billion for the Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block Grant</li><li>○ \$30 million in community-based funding for local substance use disorder services</li><li>○ \$50 million in community-based funding for local behavioral health needs</li><li>○ \$10 million for the National Child Traumatic Stress Network</li><li>○ \$30 million for Project Aware</li><li>○ \$20 million for youth suicide prevention</li><li>○ \$420 million for expansion grants for Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHCs)</li></ul></li><li>• Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ \$20 million for a national evidenced-based education and awareness campaign targeting health care professionals and first responders</li></ul></li></ul>

- Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA)
  - \$80 million for mental health and substance use disorder training for health care professionals, para-professionals, and public safety officers
  - \$40 million for grants for health care providers to promote mental and behavioral health among their health professional workforce
  - \$100 million for Mental and Behavioral Education and Training grants
  - \$80 million for the Pediatric Mental Health Care Access Program

The Act also provides \$122.8 billion to the Department of Education for the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund, available through September 30, 2023. The Secretary of Education will make grants to each state education agency (Texas Education Agency [TEA]). Each state is then required to allocate not less than 90 percent of the grant funds to local educational agencies, including charter schools. Local educational agencies must reserve not less than 20 percent of the funds to address learning loss. The remaining funds can be used for a number of authorized purposes, including “(L) Providing mental health services and supports.” Based on allocations from last year, Texas could expect to receive around 10% of this, or roughly \$12.4 billion.

**Link**

<https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2021/03/12/fact-sheet-american-rescue-plan-reduces-health-care-costs-expands-access-insurance-coverage.html>

## Medicare Reimbursement for COVID-19 Vaccinations Set to Increase

**Date**

March 15, 2021

**Summary**

The Biden Administration is nearly doubling Medicare payment rates to providers administering the COVID-19 vaccine, aiming to increase the number of providers giving shots. The change will take effect immediately, and the rate will jump for two-dose vaccines from around \$23 per shot to \$40 and from \$28 to \$40 for single-dose vaccines. The Administration also announced that it will fully cover all Medicaid and CHIP beneficiaries’ COVID-19 shots, as mandated by the American Rescue Plan that was signed into law last week. See CMS’ [updated guidance](#) for more information.

**Link**

<https://www.cms.gov/newsroom/press-releases/biden-harris-administration-increases-medicare-payment-life-saving-covid-19-vaccine>

## FEMA Advisory on Equitable Vaccine Distribution

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<b>Date</b>	March 9, 2021
<b>Summary</b>	The U.S. Department of Homeland Security Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) announced it had established its Civil Rights Advisory Group to evaluate the policies, practices, strategies, and plans in place to ensure equity in vaccine access and administration. The group created a civil rights <a href="#">checklist</a> to provide guidance and resources to help ensure equitable vaccine access.
<b>Link</b>	<a href="https://www.fema.gov/press-release/20210309/fema-ensures-equitable-distribution-covid-19-vaccines">https://www.fema.gov/press-release/20210309/fema-ensures-equitable-distribution-covid-19-vaccines</a>

## HHS Increases Number of Vaccinators

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<b>Date</b>	March 12, 2021
<b>Summary</b>	The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has used its authority under the Public Readiness and Emergency Preparedness Act (PREP Act) to add additional categories of qualified people authorized to prescribe, dispense, and administer COVID-19 vaccines authorized by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, including dentists, emergency medical technicians (EMTs), midwives, optometrists, paramedics, physician assistants, podiatrists, respiratory therapists, and veterinarians.
<b>Link</b>	<a href="https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2021/03/12/biden-administration-takes-action-through-hhs-increase-number-vaccinators.html">https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2021/03/12/biden-administration-takes-action-through-hhs-increase-number-vaccinators.html</a>

## Vaccine Program Expanded to 950 Community Health Centers

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<b>Date</b>	March 11, 2021
<b>Summary</b>	HHS, through the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) and the CDC, is announcing that an additional 700 HRSA-supported health centers will be invited to join the Health Center COVID-19 Vaccine Program. These health centers will have the opportunity to join the program over the next six weeks, increasing the total number of invited health center participants to 950.
<b>Link</b>	<a href="https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2021/03/11/biden-administration-expand-covid-19-vaccine-program-950-community-health-centers.html">https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2021/03/11/biden-administration-expand-covid-19-vaccine-program-950-community-health-centers.html</a>

## False Positives With Roche SARS-CoV-2/Flu Test

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<b>Date</b>	March 12, 2021
<b>Summary</b>	FDA warned clinical lab staff and providers of the potential for false positive results from Roche Molecular Systems' tests to simultaneously detect and differentiate SARS-CoV-2 and influenza A/B. Users should monitor for unexpected clusters of positive influenza B results, as this may indicate the cobas Liat System has experienced a tube leak, and stop using the system and contact Roche if they suspect certain issues.
<b>Link</b>	<a href="https://www.fda.gov/medical-devices/letters-health-care-providers/potential-false-results-roche-molecular-systems-inc-cobas-sars-cov-2-influenza-test-use-cobas-liat">https://www.fda.gov/medical-devices/letters-health-care-providers/potential-false-results-roche-molecular-systems-inc-cobas-sars-cov-2-influenza-test-use-cobas-liat</a>

## Updated Nursing Home Visitation Guidance

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<b>Date</b>	March 10, 2021
<b>Summary</b>	CMS, in collaboration with CDC, issued <a href="#">updated guidance</a> for nursing homes to expand visitation options during the public health emergency. According to the updated guidance, facilities should allow responsible indoor visitation at all times and for all residents, regardless of vaccination status of the resident, or visitor, unless certain scenarios arise that would limit visitation. CMS released a handout in <a href="#">English</a> and <a href="#">Spanish</a> that explains the expanded visitation options.
<b>Link</b>	<a href="https://www.cms.gov/newsroom/press-releases/cms-updates-nursing-home-guidance-revised-visitation-recommendations">https://www.cms.gov/newsroom/press-releases/cms-updates-nursing-home-guidance-revised-visitation-recommendations</a>

## CDC Updated Guidance and Report

### Health Care Workers

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<b>Date</b>	March 10, 2021
<b>Summary</b>	CDC updated its guidance addressing work restriction considerations for fully vaccinated health care personnel. Fully vaccinated healthcare personnel (HCP) with higher-risk exposures who are asymptomatic do not need to be restricted from work for 14 days following their exposure. The guidance also discusses work restrictions for fully vaccinated HCP populations who have higher-risk exposures.
<b>Link</b>	<a href="https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/infection-control-after-vaccination.html">https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/infection-control-after-vaccination.html</a>



### Vaccines for Teachers, New CDC Information & Toolkit

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<b>Date</b>	March 10, 2021
<b>Summary</b>	To help promote the federal directive to get teachers, school staff, and childcare workers their first vaccine dose by the end of March, CDC recently posted COVID-19 information specific to this population. The site lists who is eligible for vaccination and how to schedule an appointment. The CDC also posted a <a href="#">toolkit</a> to help reach and promote the vaccine to people in these settings.
<b>Link</b>	<a href="https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/recommendations/specific-groups/teachers-childcare.html">https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/recommendations/specific-groups/teachers-childcare.html</a>

### County-Level COVID-19 Vaccination Coverage and Social Vulnerability

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<b>Date</b>	March 17, 2021
<b>Summary</b>	In the first 2.5 months of the U.S. vaccination program, high social vulnerability counties had lower COVID-19 vaccination coverage than did low social vulnerability counties. Although vaccination coverage estimates by county-level social vulnerability varied widely among states, disparities in vaccination coverage were observed in the majority of states. Continued monitoring of vaccination coverage by social vulnerability metrics is critical for developing tailored, local vaccine administration and outreach efforts to reduce COVID-19 vaccination inequities.
<b>Link</b>	<a href="https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7012e1.htm?s_cid=mm7012e1_w">https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7012e1.htm?s_cid=mm7012e1_w</a>