



End of COVID-19 Public Health Emergency

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW



The U.S. government announced that the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency (PHE) will end on May 11th, 2023.

Given that the end of the PHE is likely to impact clients, it is important for client-facing staff to be prepared.

What is a Public Health Emergency?

A PHE declaration is issued by the government when an infectious disease or disorder presents a threat to the public. The declaration allows the government to move money quickly, start new government programs, or change existing government programs to protect the public's health and wellbeing.

The U.S. government has issued two PHE declarations since the COVID-19 pandemic started in December of 2019. These declarations did things like rapidly increase money for vaccine research, provide free vaccines to people in the U.S., and pay for COVID-19-related medical care. The declarations also increased federal food benefits and allowed people to stay enrolled in Medicaid without having to go through the normal re-enrollment process.

Why is the PHE ending?

The government has decided to end the PHE because there have been many advances in preventing and treating COVID-19. **The ending of the emergency does not mean that COVID-19 is no longer a health risk.** COVID-19 continues to impact people's health in serious and sometimes fatal ways. Instead, the end of the PHE means that certain federal supports and rules will change.

What does the end of the Public Health Emergency mean for clients and how can I be prepared?

The ending of the PHE will cause many changes. There are four changes that are important to highlight with clients:



01.

Changes to COVID Vaccine and Testing Coverage

During the PHE, COVID vaccines and tests were free. This included free COVID-19 at-home tests. The federal government will stop paying for vaccines and tests after the emergency ends. Most health insurance plans—including Medicaid—should still cover the costs of vaccines and testing. If someone does not have health insurance, they may be able to get testing and vaccines for free or at a reduced cost at public health or community health clinic if they meet certain requirements including being below a certain income. There also may be a limited supply of free vaccines and tests that are offered occasionally through other government programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

✓ GET VACCINATED WHILE IT IS FREE!

Encourage clients to get their COVID-19 vaccines and or boosters while they are free. Most pharmacies and public health clinics offer COVID vaccines. Many accept walk-in clients.

✓ ORDER TESTS WHILE THEY ARE FREE!

Every U.S. household can order four free at-home COVID-19 test kits. Encourage clients to:

- Order them online at <https://www.covid.gov/tests>. You can also call 1-800-232-0233 (TTY 1-888-720-7489) for assistance in more than 150 languages.
- Get free tests at a local pharmacy. People with medical insurance, including Medicaid, can get free tests through most pharmacies until the PHE ends. Each person in the household can get a certain number of free tests per month. Encourage clients to go to their local pharmacy, give them their insurance card, and ask them if COVID tests are covered under their insurance. If they are, encourage clients to ask them how many they may have per person and then order this amount. Clients can do this each month until May 11, 2023.



02.

Changes to COVID Medical Care Coverage

During the PHE, treatment for the COVID-19 virus was free to everyone regardless of whether they had insurance. After the PHE ends, what costs are covered will depend on insurance coverage. If someone does not have insurance, they may be able to get free or reduced care at some community health clinics if they meet certain requirements like being below a certain income. People who are treated for COVID-19 in the emergency room or hospital may qualify for special medical care coverage programs, but it will depend on the hospital and on eligibility.

RECOMMENDATIONS

✓ HAVE A LANDSCAPE MAP

Make sure your program site has an up-to-date resource list of medical clinics that offer free and sliding scale fee care so you can make appropriate referrals. Be sure to map the 4-W's: Who (name of agency), What (what specific services they provide and to whom/eligibility), Where (address, nearby bus lines), When (days and times they are open).

✓ GET VACCINATED

Encourage clients to protect themselves against serious illness from COVID-19 by being vaccinated and up to date on their booster shots. COVID-19 vaccines are safe and have been proven to greatly reduce serious illness and death from COVID-19.

- [COVID-19 Information for Newcomers](#) – A booklet highlighting the most important information about COVID-19 for newcomers to the US. Available in 14 languages.
- [Get Vaccinated Campaign](#) – Posters, social media messaging, and other materials in 40 languages encouraging COVID-19 vaccination.
- [Get the Facts Campaign](#) – Also available in 40 languages, this campaign includes resources about COVID-19 vaccines and boosters, and important information on vaccines for children and people who are pregnant or breastfeeding.

✓ WEAR A MASK

Even if vaccinated, people should consider wearing a mask while in crowded public spaces or public indoor locations. People who are elderly or who have compromised immune systems should consider wearing a mask when indoors with others.

- [Wearing a Mask](#) – Fact sheet in 39 languages about wearing a mask.

- [Conversation Guide: Wearing a Mask](#) – Answers to common questions about masking that center immigrant and refugee perspectives.

✓ WASH YOUR HANDS

Washing hands frequently and thoroughly helps prevent the spread of germs that cause illness. People should wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds before touching their eyes, nose, or mouth; after touching their mask; after leaving a public place; and after touching objects or surfaces that may be frequently touched by others.

- **Wash Your Hands** – A printout or poster on how to correctly wash your hands in [English](#), [Dari](#), [Pashto](#), and [Urdu](#). Additional [CDC handwashing materials](#) in numerous other languages.
- **Handwashing instructions** – Bilingual handouts on how to wash your hands correctly and when and how to use hand sanitizer in [Arabic](#), [Traditional Chinese](#), [Simplified Chinese](#), [French](#), [Hindi](#), [Nepali](#), [Russian](#), [Somali](#), [Spanish](#), and [Vietnamese](#).





03.

Medicaid Renewal or Re-enrollment

During the PHE people on Medicaid were automatically re-enrolled at the end of their coverage period without having to show that they were still eligible. When the Public Health Emergency ends, states will return to pre-pandemic operations and review eligibility to continue Medicaid benefits. If people on Medicaid do not respond to renewal or reenrollment notices in a timely manner, they may lose their Medicaid coverage and need to make additional efforts to have it reinstated.

RECOMMENDATIONS

✓ UPDATE CONTACT INFORMATION

Encourage clients to make sure their state Medicaid agency has up-to-date contact information including a correct address and phone number. This will help ensure clients do not miss important notices about their coverage including when it is time to renew.

✓ PAY ATTENTION TO THE MAIL

Urge clients to pay attention to any mail or messages they receive from the state agency that manages Medicaid. Staff may want to consider giving clients a printout of the agency's logo so they can look for this logo in the mail.

✓ EDUCATE ON NEXT STEPS

Teach clients about the next steps they can take if they receive a notice or renewal. This includes letting clients know if they can reach out to your agency if they have questions regarding benefit renewal or need support.



04.

Changes to Food Benefits

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is a government program that helps people below a certain income buy food. During the PHE, the U.S. government put more money into SNAP, which meant people on SNAP received more money for food. In February, many states reduced their SNAP benefits to pre-pandemic levels. By the end of March, all U.S. states are expected to reduce SNAP benefits. How much benefits will be reduced will vary, but on average it is expected to be about a \$90 a month reduction *per person*.

RECOMMENDATIONS

✓ CONNECT CLIENTS TO THEIR LOCAL FOOD BANK

Most U.S. cities have food banks that support individuals and families with supplemental food. Make sure your agency has an up-to-date resource list of food banks so staff can make appropriate referrals. Be sure to map the 4-W's: Who (name of agency), What (what services they provide; how often, who is eligible), Where (address, nearby bus lines), When (days and times they are open). Staff can support clients in finding their local food bank by entering their zip code at <https://foodfinder.us/>.

✓ HELP CLIENTS MAKE THEIR SNAP BENEFITS GO FURTHER

25 states offer Double Up Food Bucks, which provide a dollar-for-dollar match to SNAP benefits for fruits and vegetables. Staff can find out if a state is participating at <https://doubleupamerica.org/>. If a state is not participating, the site will show what programs are available in that state. Staff may also do an Internet search by entering their geographic area coupled with terms like "SNAP Match", "WIC," and "FMNP match" (for seniors).

✓ HELP CLIENTS FIND OUT IF THEY QUALIFY FOR ADDITIONAL FOOD PROGRAMS

There are many types of food programs like WIC Nutrition program for Women, Infants and Children, free and reduced-price meals for school children, and senior meal programs. Staff can help clients explore additional nutrition resources by connecting them to their local public benefits agency, calling 2-1-1, or calling the national hunger hotline at 1-866-3-HUNGRY or 1-877-8-HAMBRE.