

# COVID-19 TRANSITION TO TRADITIONAL COVERAGE 101

COVID-19 VACCINE  
EDUCATION *and*  
EQUITY PROJECT

## What the End of the Public Health Emergency Means for Access to COVID-19 Vaccines and Oral Antiviral Treatments

The COVID-19 Public Health Emergency (PHE) originally declared by the U.S. Government on January 31st, 2020 will officially expire on May 11th, 2023.<sup>1</sup>

While there are changes to the regulatory framework surrounding COVID-19 health measures, the end of the PHE is the beginning of a longer process of moving toward traditional coverage and payment, likely commencing in the fall.<sup>1</sup>

### What does the end of the public health emergency mean for patient access to COVID-19 vaccines and oral antiviral treatments?

**Vaccines and oral antiviral treatments purchased by the federal government will continue to be available and free of cost for everyone in the U.S. until federally distributed supply is depleted.<sup>2</sup> For vaccines and oral antiviral treatments, this will likely occur in early fall. We also expect a new version of the vaccine to be available in early fall 2023 to target prevailing strains.<sup>1</sup>**

Once the federal supply is depleted and a new version of the COVID-19 vaccine is available, several changes to access to and payment for COVID-19 vaccines and treatments will take effect, depending on an individual's insurance coverage.

### COVID-19 Vaccines

- **Medicare** beneficiaries will be able to access COVID-19 vaccines with no out-of-pocket costs under Part B coverage.<sup>2</sup>
- **Medicaid** and **CHIP** beneficiaries will be able to access all ACIP-recommended\* vaccines (including COVID-19 vaccines) with no out-of-pocket costs.<sup>2</sup>
- **Private insurance** holders, including those with employer-provided health insurance, will be able to access COVID-19 vaccines with no out-of-pocket costs at in-network providers.<sup>2</sup>

- **Children without insurance coverage** will be able to access free COVID-19 vaccines through the federal *Vaccines for Children* (VFC) program, which is implemented through state and local immunization programs across the country.<sup>2</sup>
- **Adults without insurance coverage** will have free access to remaining doses of COVID-19 vaccines until the fall, when we expect the federal supply will be depleted.<sup>1</sup>
  - Uninsured adults may be able to access vaccines at no cost at Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs), Rural Health Clinics (RHCs), and local health departments through a program in the Public Health Service Act called the [Section 317 Immunization Program](#).<sup>2</sup> However, this program is discretionary and would likely require additional funding from Congress to fully supply vaccines to all U.S. adults without insurance.<sup>2</sup>
  - HHS has announced that they plan to create a "Bridge Access" public-private partnership with pharmacy chains and manufacturers that will enable them to continue offering free COVID-19 vaccinations and treatments to the uninsured through pharmacy networks or retail locations.<sup>3</sup> HHS is working with these partners to implement this program and more details are forthcoming.<sup>3</sup>

## COVID-19 Oral Antiviral Treatments

- **Medicare** beneficiaries may have out-of-pocket costs for COVID-19 treatments depending on their Part D or Medicare Advantage plan design.<sup>2</sup>
  - Oral antiviral treatments purchased by the federal government will continue to be available and free of cost for everyone in the U.S. until federally distributed supply is depleted, likely in the early fall.<sup>2</sup>
- **Medicaid** and **CHIP** programs will continue to cover all pharmaceutical treatments with no out-of-pocket costs for the patient until September 2024.<sup>4</sup>
  - Beyond that date, while these treatments will still be covered, out-of-pocket costs and utilization limits will vary by state.<sup>4</sup>
- **Private insurance** coverage of COVID-19 treatments was not specifically affected by the PHE; however, the cost of covering medication will shift to private insurers once government-supplied

treatments run out.<sup>2</sup> Individuals utilizing COVID-19 therapies may be responsible for some out-of-pocket costs depending on their insurance plan.<sup>2</sup>

- **Uninsured individuals** will have access to free treatments while government-purchased supplies last.<sup>2</sup>
  - Those without insurance may be able to obtain reduced price services from safety-net providers, such as community health centers.<sup>2</sup>
  - HHS has announced that they plan to create a public-private partnership with pharmacy chains and manufacturers that will enable them to continue offering free COVID-19 vaccinations and treatments to the uninsured through pharmacy networks or retail locations.<sup>3</sup>

*\* Note: The [Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices \(ACIP\)](#) provides advice and guidance to the Director of the CDC regarding use of vaccines and related agents for control of vaccine-preventable diseases in the civilian population of the United States.*

## REFERENCES

1. Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response, "Commercialization of COVID-19 Medical Countermeasures – Frequently Asked Questions," U.S. Department of Health and Human Services website, reviewed May 9, 2023, available at: <https://aspr.hhs.gov/COVID-19/Pages/FAQ-Commercialization.aspx>
2. Kates J, Cox C, Cubanski J et al. Commercialization of COVID-19 Vaccines, Treatments, and Tests: Implications for Access and Coverage. Kaiser Family Foundation website, published February 13, 2023, available at: <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/commercialization-of-covid-19-vaccines-treatments-and-tests-implications-for-access-and-coverage/>
3. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, "Fact Sheet: HHS Announces 'HHS Bridge Access Program For COVID-19 Vaccines and Treatments' to Maintain Access to COVID-19 Care for the Uninsured," published April 18, 2023, available at: <https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2023/04/18/fact-sheet-hhs-announces-hhs-bridge-access-program-covid-19-vaccines-treatments-maintain-access-covid-19-care-uninsured.html>
4. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, "Fact Sheet: COVID-19 Public Health Emergency Transition Roadmap," published February 9, 2023, available at: <https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2023/02/09/fact-sheet-covid-19-public-health-emergency-transition-roadmap.html>