

Minnesota insurance companies agree to waive COVID-19 costs

Thursday, April 2: Gov. Tim Walz announced that Minnesota's health plans have agreed to waive cost-sharing for the treatment of COVID-19. This move comes in response to the governor's health and commerce commissioners of sending a letter on Friday, March 13, urging health plans to remove barriers to coverage during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Minnesotans with commercial insurance – including individuals, small businesses, and some large businesses – are now eligible for the following benefits:

- No cost-sharing charges for COVID testing.
- Minnesotans who are hospitalized will have no cost-sharing charges for in-network hospitalization.
- Minnesotans will have expanded access to telemedicine services. This will help people to stay home and access care.

“This move will help ensure no Minnesotan has to sacrifice paying rent or buying groceries to cover a hospital bill from COVID-19,” said Walz. “I’m grateful Minnesota’s health plans are putting the health and safety of our fellow Minnesotans first during this pandemic.”

“Every Minnesotan deserves access to the health care they need, particularly when it comes to COVID-19,” said lieutenant governor Peggy Flanagan. “I am proud of our administration’s hard work in getting this done for Minnesotans.”

“This is an important step toward the protection of Minnesotans,” said commerce commissioner Steve Kelley. “Uncertainty over what is covered by our health insurance, from tests to treatments, should not cause more fear or anxiety to those who need and seek help.”

Over the past month, the two commissioners have been working with Minnesota’s health plans to be sure health coverage protects Minnesotans during the pandemic. In a Friday, March 13, letter to health insurers in Minnesota, the commissioners outlined seven areas where health plans could support the state’s response to the COVID crisis.

“Today, the health plans are announcing that they are agreeing to key responses that should provide some peace of mind to Minnesotans, most significantly eliminating cost sharing for COVID-19 hospitalizations,” said Kelley.

“Access to health care is very important at any time, but during the COVID-19 pandemic it is absolutely essential for people to have access to affordable, high-quality care to stay healthy or recover from illness,” said Minnesota Department of Health commissioner Jan Malcolm.

Minnesota’s non-profit health plans that have committed to this framework are: Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota; HealthPartners; Hennepin Health; Medica; PreferredOne; and UCare.

Many Minnesotans that receive their coverage through their employer have self-insured plans. State departments do not have regulatory authority over these plans but are encouraging employers to work with their plan administrators to implement similar measures.

Great River Regional Library offering eBooks, eAudiobooks

Tuesday, March 31: The Great River Regional Library System’s buildings may be closed, but it has many options for library services from the comfort of your home.

With your library card, you can access its digital world of eBooks and eAudiobooks. All you need is a computer or a tablet/phone. On www.griver.org, there are multiple platforms to search. Libby/Overdrive and Axis360 have a wide variety of eBooks and Audiobooks. eBooksMN also has many eBooks for download (with no library card required). Tumblebooks has youth narrated picture books, graphic novels, and even puzzles and games. If there is a title that GRRL doesn’t own, please visit the “Suggest a Title” page to submit your recommendation.

Do you want to have more fun reading? Try Beanstack, our online reading tracker. It will keep track of your reading, give book recommendations, and you can earn online badges to help make your reading a habit. You can use either the Beanstack Tracker app or go to www.griverbeanstack.org.

GRRL’s “Ask a Librarian” chat service can be accessed 24/7 to answer your reference or technology questions and more. Our “Databases A-Z” page is a great place to find other useful resources. Find help with a research project, test prep materials, learn a new language with Pronunciator, learn more about your family tree with HeritageQuest, and much more!

The Great River Regional Library also has pages dedicated to kids and teens, including homework help and games! These resources can be especially helpful to families as students return to school through distance learning.

If you don’t already have a library card, and you live in the GRRL’s service area, you may apply for an eCard online. With your eCard, you can access digital materials (eBooks, eAudiobooks, online databases, and more). Library staff will email you within two business days with an online-only barcode.

If you have a library card, but it’s expired, you can easily renew it on our website.

Visit www.griver.org to find all this info and resources.

Emergency grants available now for child care providers

Wednesday, April 1: The application process for emergency grants for child care providers is open. This funding was passed by the legislature as part of their COVID-19 Response Supplemental Budget. It was signed into law by Gov. Tim Walz on Saturday, March 28.

“Child care providers are providing an essential emergency response to our communities,” said Walz. “These grants will be critical in ensuring that child care continues to be available to first responders, health care workers, and so many other folks responding to the COVID-19 emergency.”

There are approximately 420,000 children under the age of 12 who live in a household of an essential worker within a critical sector. Of these, the state estimates that during this peacetime emergency, about 270,000 children will need care and approximately 120,000 are likely to need and use licensed child care settings. These grants will provide about \$10 million per month over the next few months to support basic infrastructure needed to keep child care capacity available.

Child Care Aware of Minnesota will administer and distribute these funds for emergency child care services. Grant applications can be found at: www.childcareawaremn.org/providers/emergency-child-care-grants.

Six Minnesota Initiative Foundations last week answered a call from the governor and launched an emergency child care grant program to provide support for Greater Minnesota licensed child care providers serving families of essential workers needed to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Think Small had already launched an effort to issue grants to family child care programs in the metro area.

“Call to Mind” makes guide for mental health available

Thursday, April 2: In response to the widespread change induced by COVID-19 in our daily lives, American Public Media has launched “Call to Mind,” an initiative to foster new conversations about mental health and a site dedicated to mental wellness resources. The site – www.calltomindnow.org – includes extensive resources and blog posts from trusted public health and mental health organizations including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the World Health Organization, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, Mental Health America, and others.

These tips and recommendations have been compiled with the goal of reaching individuals where they’re at with ways to cope and manage their mental well-being in this uncertain time. This is a toolkit for everyone: media outlets covering coronavirus and compiling resources for audiences, organizations looking to support their employees, and individuals seeking tools to aid their mental wellness.

Topics covered in www.calltomindnow.org include:

- Self-care during the pandemic;
- Coping with stress and anxiety during COVID-19;
- Dealing with loneliness and isolation;
- Talking with kids about COVID-19;
- Digital distractions;
- Living with your mental illness;
- How to get help;
- Resources if you are in a crisis.

“So many of us have had our lives upturned by the presence of COVID-19 in our communities. It’s important to prioritize physical health, but this pandemic’s effect on our mental health cannot be ignored,” said Babette Apland, managing director of Call to Mind. “This new source of stress, compiled with isolation, can lead to anxiety and loneliness for many of us, and can exacerbate illness for people already dealing with a mental health condition,” continued Apland. “The goal with our site is to have one place with trusted information on ways to cope and how to seek help if you need it.”

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Motorcycle training courses cancelled through June 1

Tuesday, March 31: The Minnesota Motorcycle Safety Center is canceling all motorcycle training courses through June 1 at all Minnesota state training sites statewide due to COVID-19 concerns. Riders who have registered for these courses will be contacted by the training site for refund or rescheduling information. Once motorcycle training courses resume, class sizes will be limited to eight students, instead of 12, to keep the total number of people on the range at any time to 10. Two instructors will teach each course. Minnesota Motorcycle Safety Center instructors will sanitize motorcycles after each course.