

With the need for physical distancing, there is a heightened focus to gather and prepare essential supplies, including medications. This document lists potential medication access questions that patients may be asking, along with tips and resources to navigate potential barriers.

Updated 5-1-2020

### I don't want to go out unless it is absolutely necessary. What are my options for getting my medications?

Patients have several options to obtain their prescription medications and medical supplies while limiting physical interaction.

- Many local independent and chain pharmacies offer **free home delivery** of prescriptions. Patients should contact their local independent pharmacy for details. For example, [CVS](#) and [Walgreens](#) pharmacies are offering free home delivery at this time, and waiving typical charges.
- **Mail-order companies** like [Pillpack](#) offer free home delivery and certain packaging services.
- BILH employees on the system plan may be able to have prescriptions mailed from **BILH pharmacies**. Please contact your BILH pharmacy for more information.
- Many **insurance companies** offer **prescription delivery via mail-order**, and this may be an option for patients. Patients can often request refills via online portals and apps. Patients should contact their plan for specifics.
- Utilize **drive thru or curbside pickup** at the pharmacy. Some pharmacies are also offering "essential household items" from the window as well.
- For patients who require medication assisted treatment for substance use disorder, some **Opioid Treatment Programs** are allowing 14-28 take home doses of medications such as methadone and suboxone. While this is an option for stable patients, providers may require new patients, patients who are not stable, or patients requiring change in dose to continue coming to the clinic. See [here](#) for tips on engaging with Patients with Chronic Pain or with Substance Use Disorder telephonically.

### How much medication should I get?

The CDC advises at least 7 to 10 day supplies of prescription medications and medical supplies on hand, and encourages patients to ask their dispensing pharmacist for a 30 day "emergency" refill if needed. It is reasonable to take advantage of 90 day supply of refills on prescriptions. Some pharmacies with special packaging services (e.g. blister packs) may limit to 30 day supplies, and patients should check with their specific pharmacy. **Stockpiling is not recommended.**

### Will my insurance cover an early refill? Can I get a 90 day supply of medication even though this is something my insurance plan typically does not allow?

Thankfully, many prescription insurance plans are waiving or relaxing refill policies that normally restrict early refills or do not allow larger quantities. This means patients may be able to get their refills sooner than planned. Patients should contact their plan with questions. See APPENDIX for links to some specific payer information (not exhaustive).

### General tips for all callers:

- Services are rapidly expanding as the situation develops. **Patients or caregivers should contact their pharmacy directly for delivery or mail-order options available.** (This resource includes several examples, but is not exhaustive).
- Patients should be reminded to check with their pharmacy for **adjusted operating hours**.
- **Utilize phone or online options to request refills** and to confirm status. Patients are encouraged to request prescription refills several days ahead of when refills are due to **avoid lingering at the pharmacy**.
- If delivery or mail order is not an option, patients should **utilize drive thru** for pick up whenever possible.
- If drive thru is not available, call the store to inquire if they are able to take payment over the phone and if curbside pick-up (many small businesses are providing this service).
  - Wash or sanitize hands before and after visiting the pharmacy.

### Is a new prescription needed in order to receive a 90 day supply?

- At the dispensing pharmacist's discretion, if the original prescription has enough refills to cover a 90 day supply, most medications can be dispensed for 90 days without a new prescription.
- If not, patients will need to contact their provider offices and request new prescriptions for 90 day supplies to be sent to their preferred pharmacy (as this may be different from their typical pharmacy). Please prepare patients for the likelihood of waiting on the line to get through to someone in their provider office, as workflows are changing and phone lines may be overwhelmed.

### What if my insurance does not agree to early refills or 90-day supplies of my medications?

- Certain medications or supplies may be excluded from early refill eligibility. For example, controlled medications may not be refilled early or for greater quantities.
- Patients should contact insurance providers directly via specific helplines or via patient portals, as call volumes are expected to be high.
- In the event that prescription insurance does not share the cost of a patient's crucial medication, patients can consider paying cash, and utilizing services like [GoodRx](#) coupons.

## What if the pharmacy runs out of my medication, like if there is a shortage or if the medication is on backorder?

In the event of drug shortages, most insurance companies are practicing formulary flexibility, and will cover alternative medications if the patient's original prescription is unavailable. Patients should contact their plan directly with questions, and may need to call their provider office for a prescription for the alternative medication.

## I've heard that it is not safe to take ibuprofen anymore, what is that about? Should I stock up on Tylenol®?

- As of 5/1/2020, there is no compelling evidence to support an association between ibuprofen and negative outcomes in patients with COVID-19.
- There is currently no evidence to suggest that NSAIDs or anti-pyretics should be avoided, unless there is another reason to avoid taking NSAIDs (for example, concomitant blood thinners, kidney disease, high blood pressure, etc.).
- Patients are always encouraged to **check with their providers** if they have specific concerns

## I've heard that I should stop taking my blood pressure medication because it increases my chances of getting COVID-19, or might make COVID-19 worse. What should I do?

- As of 4/29/2020, there is no conclusive evidence related to taking certain blood pressure medications (ACE's and ARBs) and COVID-19 risk.
- Several statements by international cardiology societies (3/17/2020) have advised that patients **should not stop treatment for high blood pressure** unless advised by a physician.
- Patients are always encouraged to **check with their providers** if they have specific concerns

## Is there a medication treatment for COVID-19? I'm hearing about different drugs that might help cure COVID-19.

- As of 5/1/2020, there are currently no medications approved for the treatment of COVID-19.
- Some potential treatment options are under investigation and have shown some promise, but most are lacking data for efficacy and safety. If used in practice, these treatments are typically reserved for critically ill patients under medical care.
- Existing medications that are used to treat other medical conditions are being explored to potentially treat COVID-19. Information is evolving daily.

## I cannot find hand sanitizer anywhere! What do I do?

- Wash your hands often using soap and water for at least 20 seconds, about long enough to sing the "Happy Birthday" song twice (or check out this [NPR article](#) for other songs that fit the bill).
- On 3/15/2020, the Department of Public Health issued an order permitting licensed pharmacies to create and sell hand sanitizer over the counter. This means the general public may visit a participating pharmacy on a walk-in basis and purchase compounded OTC hand sanitizer. The compounded OTC hand sanitizer may even be sold in the front store.
  - To avoid unnecessary trips to the pharmacy, it is recommended to contact the pharmacy to inquire if OTC hand sanitizer is available.
  - If practicing social distancing, patients are encouraged to request hand sanitizer from the drive thru pick-up window or request it be included with an already scheduled prescription delivery.

### Additional References:

- [Massachusetts Department of Public Health](#) (MA DPH)
- [Center for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC)
  - [How to protect yourself](#) (CDC)

## APPENDIX: Specific payer resources addressing changes to prescription coverage

This is not an exhaustive list. Patients are encouraged to contact their plans directly via member services for specific information about covered benefits. Contact information for member services can usually be found on prescription insurance cards.

Plan	Links
MassHealth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <a href="https://www.mass.gov/info-details/masshealth-coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19-providers#pharmacy-facts-">https://www.mass.gov/info-details/masshealth-coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19-providers#pharmacy-facts-</a></li><li>• <a href="https://www.mass.gov/doc/pharmacy-facts-141-march-12-2020-0/download">https://www.mass.gov/doc/pharmacy-facts-141-march-12-2020-0/download</a></li></ul>
Tufts Health Public Plans (MassHealth ACO)	<a href="https://tuftshealthplan.com/member/tufts-health-together-plans/pharmacy/overview">https://tuftshealthplan.com/member/tufts-health-together-plans/pharmacy/overview</a>
BMC Health Net (MassHealth ACO)	<a href="https://www.bmchp.org/Why-BMC-HealthNet-Plan/News/COVID-19-News">https://www.bmchp.org/Why-BMC-HealthNet-Plan/News/COVID-19-News</a>
Medicare Part B	<a href="https://www.cms.gov/files/document/03052020-medicare-covid-19-fact-sheet.pdf">https://www.cms.gov/files/document/03052020-medicare-covid-19-fact-sheet.pdf</a>
Medicare Part D	Patients must contact their specific Medicare Part D plan for specifics <a href="https://www.cms.gov/files/document/hpms-memo-covid-information-plans.pdf">https://www.cms.gov/files/document/hpms-memo-covid-information-plans.pdf</a>
BCBS MA	<a href="https://home.bluecrossma.com/coronavirus">https://home.bluecrossma.com/coronavirus</a>
HPHC	<a href="https://www.harvardpilgrim.org/public/news-detail?nt=HPH_News_C&amp;nid=1471929138048#COVID101">https://www.harvardpilgrim.org/public/news-detail?nt=HPH_News_C&amp;nid=1471929138048#COVID101</a>
Tufts Health Plan	<a href="https://tuftshealthplan.com/member/employer-individual-or-family-plans/member-news/2020/3-20-2020-coronavirus-member-update">https://tuftshealthplan.com/member/employer-individual-or-family-plans/member-news/2020/3-20-2020-coronavirus-member-update</a>