

NEWS BRIEF

Provided by: Puget Sound Benefit Services

HHS Extends COVID-19 Public Health Emergency Until April 2023

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) recently extended the COVID-19 public health emergency (PHE) through April 11, 2023. The HHS has renewed the PHE every 90 days since Jan. 31, 2020. This most recent extension is the 12th PHE extension. The HHS' announcement comes as the United States experiences a double-digit increase in hospitalization from recent Omicron variants.

The PHE extension allows group health plans and insurers to continue relying on federally instituted pandemic-era flexibilities, such as covering COVID-19 vaccines, tests and treatments; expanding telehealth services; and extending health coverage for Medicaid beneficiaries.

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“The decision to terminate [the] COVID [public health emergency] will be made by the HHS secretary based on the best available data and science. Any suggestion that a specific end date has been established is untrue.”

- HHS administration official

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In 2022, the U.S. Congress passed the Advancing Telehealth Beyond COVID-19 Act, which extends Medicaid telehealth flexibilities until Dec. 31, 2024.

Prior to the law's enactment, these flexibilities were set to end 151 days after the PHE expires.

Additionally, Congress extended waivers and flexibilities for acute hospital care at home through 2024. However, in December 2022, Congress passed a spending bill that separated the PHE from Medicaid determinations, which could leave approximately 18 million people without health coverage once the PHE expires.

What's Next?

Employers need to continue complying with the PHE extension requirements. However, as this PHE extension could be the final one, employers may consider planning how best to phase out pandemic-era flexibilities once the PHE expires. The HHS stated it would provide 60 days' notice before terminating the PHE. Employers should continue to monitor the HHS for information related to further PHE extensions.

We will keep you apprised of any notable updates. For more health care resources, contact Puget Sound Benefit Services today.

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