March 30, 2020

Dear Member:

You are probably worried about COVID-19. We want you to know that we are taking many steps to make sure that you stay safe and healthy. We are closely watching events in our local communities and continue to update policies and processes as a result of new information. **Please read this entire letter.**

Some groups of people are at higher risk of getting very sick from COVID-19. Adults over the age of 65 and people of any age who have medical conditions such as asthma, heart disease, diabetes, and lung disease may be at higher risk for more serious problems from COVID-19.

To help protect those most at risk of experiencing severe symptoms if they get the disease, we have put together some tips on how to stay safe during this public health emergency.

We must all take COVID-19 seriously and follow the orders given to protect the public’s health. The “Safer at Home” Order given by Governor Tony Evers went into effect on March 25. The order requires people to avoid all trips outside their home unless absolutely necessary. You are still able to go to the grocery store, the pharmacy, the gas station, and some other businesses to get needed food and supplies. You should still seek health care if you need it. It is not a lockdown and you will not need permission to leave your home, but you must follow the order for your safety and the safety of others.

In addition to staying in your home, there are other important actions to protect your health that you should taking right now.

**Be Healthy**

Social Distancing means keeping some space between people to slow the spread of the disease. Staying at least six feet away from other people greatly reduces your chance of catching or spreading COVID-19.

- Avoid group gatherings, sleepovers, playdates, mass transit systems, concerts, or having *non-essential* workers in your house. (Note: It is fine to have health care and support workers in your house as long as they do not have a fever or respiratory illness).
- Be careful when leaving the home for necessary reasons such as picking up medication or going to the grocery store. (Try to go once a week rather than daily, or if possible have items delivered or ready to be picked up curbside).
- Take part in safe activities like going for a walk, calling a friend or relative, watching a movie or show, cleaning out a closet, cooking a meal, reading a good book, or working at home.

**Follow these rules to help you and your loved ones stay healthy and keep from catching COVID-19:**

- Wash hands often during the day and right away when you get home after being out. Make it a habit to avoid touching your face.

[www.dhs.wisconsin.gov](http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov)
• Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue.
• **Clean and disinfect** surfaces that you touch often like doorknobs, light switches, remotes, counters, tabletops, and toilet handles. The CDC has recommendations on their website.
• Keep your regular medications and other supplies well-stocked. The Center for Disease Control recommends that people have access to several weeks of medications.
• Have the healthy people in the household act as if they could infect anyone who is higher risk. For example, they should wash hands often before contact, such as feeding or caring for the person.
• If possible, provide a safe space for higher-risk household members.
• Don’t share items like food, water bottles, or silverware.
• Ensure all utensils and surfaces are cleaned regularly.
• People who live alone should make sure that friends, family and/or healthcare providers will check on them regularly during this emergency and provide help if they get sick.
• Reschedule doctor’s appointments that are not urgent, such as routine check-ups.
• Avoid visits with grandchildren.

**If someone in your house has confirmed COVID-19 or is a patient who is being tested, you should do the following:**

• Give that person their own room if possible, and keep the door closed.
• If possible, the person should use a separate bathroom, and separate towels for bathing and drying their hands.
• If people in the household are sharing a bathroom with the person, clean it every time it is used by wiping down surfaces.
• Create a schedule for bathing, with the sick person using the bathroom first and then cleaning the bathroom before others use it.
• If the person is sick, have only one family member care for them. This person should not be higher risk themselves.
• Any higher risk household members should use the kitchen at a separate time from the person, and eat in separate areas as well.
• Dishwashers or thorough handwashing and drying should be used to clean and dry dishes and silverware.

**If you start to feel sick:**

COVID-19 symptoms may include fever, cough, or shortness of breath, as well as sore throat, headache, fatigue, nausea, diarrhea, and/or vomiting. If you begin to experience these symptoms, you should stay at home and contact your primary doctor. If you do not have a primary doctor or do not know who it is, contact your HMO, MCO, or member services at 800-362-3002. Make sure to tell the person if you have risk factors that make you high risk to COVID-19.

If your symptoms are mild, do not call or walk into an Emergency Department if you think you may have COVID-19. Emergency Departments are overwhelmed at this time and may pose a greater chance of exposing you to COVID-19 and/or other illnesses that could threaten your health.

If you feel that you do need emergency care, you should go to the Emergency Department. If possible, call ahead to let them know you are coming. You will be screened when you enter the Emergency Department, and if you have respiratory symptoms, you may be given a mask to wear.
Be Resilient

If you are feeling sad or distressed about the COVID-19, know that you are not alone and this reaction is perfectly normal. Feeling anxiety and depression is a common reaction in times of uncertainty or when people sense danger. Here are some suggestions to help you cope:

- Take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories, including social media. Hearing about the pandemic constantly can be upsetting.
- Take care of your body. Take deep breaths, stretch, or meditate. Try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals, exercise regularly, get plenty of sleep, and avoid alcohol and recreational drugs.
- Make time to unwind. Try to do some other activities you enjoy.
- Connect with others. Talk with people you trust about your concerns and how you are feeling.
- Call your healthcare provider if stress gets in the way of your daily activities for several days in a row.

Resilient Wisconsin, a new program from the Wisconsin Department of Health Services, will be providing resources and ideas about staying mentally resilient during times like these. Check their website at https://resilient.wisconsin.gov regularly for updated information.

Eat Well

If possible, you should have enough non-perishable food items at home for 1-2 weeks during this time. If you lack extra money to buy longer-term food supplies, there are resources available to help you get the food you need. 2-1-1 is a free information service that can connect you with emergency resources, including food, if you’re in need. Just dial 211 on your phone, give them your zip code, and let them know what your needs are.

FoodShare Wisconsin is Wisconsin’s Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program that helps Wisconsin residents with low incomes buy food. The State of Wisconsin also provides help with food in other programs, such as the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) and Commodity Supplemental Food Program. People who are interested can learn more and apply at: https://access.wisconsin.gov.

We are putting information just for our members related to COVID-19 on our website at https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/covid-19/forwardhealth.htm. Thank you for your continued trust as we work together to fight this pandemic.

Sincerely,

Jim Jones
Medicaid Director