

June 19: COVID-19 Clinical Update

Clinical Insights Panel, Asymptomatic Testing and the COVID-19 Political Climate

Today's COVID-19 Clinical Update includes details about revised criteria to test asymptomatic patients and the closing of several testing sites, a reminder about next week's Clinical Insights Panel, and blood supply conservation measures. Also, Rob Christie provides an update on congressional action to help healthcare providers manage the COVID-19 pandemic.

CLINICAL INSIGHTS PANEL

The next Clinical Insights Panel for all physicians is scheduled **on Tuesday, June 23 from 7 to 8 am**. You are encouraged to submit questions prior to the session by emailing covid-19md@nm.org. This session is approved for CME credit.

Topics and panelists for next week's panel include:

- COVID-19 in African American communities: Clyde W. Yancy, MD, MSc
- COVID-19 and patients who require transplantation: Juan Carlos Caicedo, MD
- Multi-system inflammatory disease in children with COVID-19: Anne H. Rowley, MD
- COVID-19 and pregnancy: Emily S. Miller, MD

To participate, [join the Microsoft Teams meeting](#) when it's time. To claim CME credit in Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine Cloud CME, text the activity code provided during the session to 312.957.8301. View [instructions](#) to claim CME credit.

ASYMPTOMATIC TESTING HAS STARTED

As of Tuesday, June 16, Northwestern Medicine adjusted testing criteria to allow testing for asymptomatic patients per their physician's discretion. Patients may get tested if:

- They require it for travel or for their employer
- They were exposed to a confirmed positive COVID-19 patient

View the [Testing Guidelines Dashboard](#) for information. Ambulatory physicians can place an order for the SARS-CoV-2 test in Epic, and follow established workflows for sample collection.

For additional questions related to testing, refer to Testing Resources on [Physician Forum](#) (*no login required*) and [NMI](#) (*login required*) for the most up-to-date information.

Some virology testing sites closing

Temporary Emergency Department extension locations for COVID-19 testing will close over the next few weeks. Virology testing will no longer be performed at Kishwaukee Hospital, Huntley Hospital or Central DuPage Hospital ED extensions. Please refer to [Testing Locations and Hours](#) for the latest location information.

NM ENACTS BLOOD SUPPLY PROTECTION MEASURES

Local and national blood supplies are low, as blood centers continue to face challenges recruiting donors and arranging blood drives during the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, blood is needed now more than ever as health care facilities reactivate medical and surgical care.

Versiti Illinois, NM's primary blood supplier, has asked for a reduction in NM's inventory to 75% of normal levels. To protect supplies, please follow transfusion guidelines [here](#). NM transfusion services are closely monitoring the situation and are communicating regularly with Versiti.

NM medical leadership will provide guidance if additional conservation measures are needed. If you are eligible to donate blood, visit [Versiti](#) to register. Information about upcoming employee-only blood drives is available on [NMI](#).

CONGRESS ACTS TO PROVIDE COVID-19 RELIEF

The COVID-19 pandemic has imposed a triple-whammy on hospitals, physicians and other providers, many of which are absorbing huge unanticipated costs.

- Hospitals and health systems have had to rapidly convert space and purchase equipment to enhance surge capacity, and buy PPE as well as medical and testing equipment for staff and community-based healthcare partners.
- At the same time, providers have seen revenues drop due to the postponement or cancellation of elective surgeries and other non-emergency procedures.
- Further compounding the situation is the fact that as the economy reopens, patients remain hesitant to seek care out of fear of exposure to COVID-19.

CARES Act and Provider Relief Fund

Congress has responded by enacting four largely bipartisan COVID-19 relief bills. Through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Security (CARES) Act, lawmakers have created the Provider Relief Fund, which contains \$175 billion to help hospitals, physicians and other healthcare providers cover some of the increased costs and lost revenues resulting from the pandemic. The legislation has also expanded access to the Accelerated and Advanced payment (or loan) programs to help ensure that Medicare providers have cash flow during the pandemic.

Providers have also been given flexibility to help them react to quickly changing circumstances due to the pandemic, including:

- The ability to deliver care via telehealth and be reimbursed as a traditional in-person visit
- Temporary waivers from many medical licensing laws, prior authorization requirements and Medicare's three-day prior hospitalization rule before coverage begins for skilled nursing care
- Ability to order home health and other post-acute care services for Medicare patients

More relief is needed to help providers maintain patient access to timely care. Estimates show that Illinois hospitals are collectively losing \$1.4 billion monthly during the pandemic. Inpatient service volumes across Illinois have declined by at least 50%, and outpatient care volumes have

fallen by as much as 70%. Group medical practices collectively report a 60% decline in patient volumes and a 50% reduction in revenues since the start of the public health emergency.

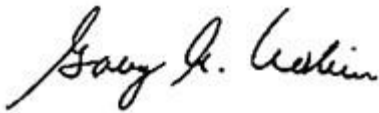
Given the above, Congress is expected to consider passing a fifth COVID-19 relief package. The House of Representatives has already taken the first step by passing the \$3 trillion Health and Economic Recovery Omnibus Emergency Solutions (HEROES) Act, which includes additional funding for the Provider Relief Fund, support for front-line healthcare workers and funding to allow individuals to retain their existing healthcare coverage.

For its part, the Senate is taking a more deliberative approach. Some lawmakers want to wait and review whether the funds released so far are having the intended impact. Others are concerned about the overall impact of the previous four bills on the already record and growing federal budget deficit. Meanwhile, the Trump administration is seeking a smaller bill that contains more financial relief for small businesses and spends about \$1 trillion less than the version passed by the House.

The bottom line: Congress will eventually proceed with another COVID-19 relief bill, most likely in mid-July. Providers' top priorities for the next bill will include:

- More funding for the Provider Relief Fund
- Fixing the repayment terms under the Accelerated and Advanced payment loan programs (including lowering the program's exorbitant 10% interest rate)
- Enhanced liability protections
- Additional funding to support the state Medicaid program

Thank you for your extraordinary dedication and collaboration in providing exceptional care to our patients, and for supporting one another during this unprecedented crisis.



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