



## COVID-19 update

Keeping you informed

California entered the next phase of the vaccine rollout on March 15, and the Biden Administration announced a much-anticipated update to the Federal Testing Mandate in late February.

### **California enters next vaccination phase**

As of March 15, Californians age 16-64 who are deemed to be at the very highest risk for morbidity and mortality from COVID-19 as a direct result of one or more severe health conditions are eligible for vaccination [[see list of conditions](#)].

Blue Shield is reaching out to members with qualifying health conditions based on claims history. Providers are also conducting outreach. Members may consult with their physician if they believe they are eligible to be vaccinated in this phase. While vaccine administrators other than providers (e.g., public health departments) should only require individuals to attest that they meet eligibility guidelines, the letter may serve as confirmation of their eligibility.

Individuals eligible for the vaccine in this latest phase should register and book an appointment through [My Turn](#), as should eligible populations in phases 1A and 1B who have not already received the vaccine. This digital tool will centralize management, reporting, and data that will empower the state to provide accurate information to book appointments and distribute vaccines to all Californians as quickly as possible. You can find helpful [My Turn FAQs here](#).

The phased approach for vaccination eligibility does present additional complexity for employers' return to workplace planning. Our [B2B COVID-19 site](#) has resources that may assist in planning, including articles addressing [vaccination policies](#) and [vaccine hesitancy](#).

We recognize that the vaccination process may cause anxiety for many reasons. We're getting closer to the end of this pandemic, but we are not there yet. As we move through the phases together, we encourage you to maintain safety protocols: wear a mask, maintain distance, and wash your hands often.

Finally, for anyone who may be hesitant, Blue Shield encourages everyone to [get the shot](#).

### **Updated federal guidance for COVID-19 testing**

The Department of Labor recently announced updates to the existing COVID-19 testing mandate under the FFCRA/CARES Act. This federal guidance loosens testing criteria to allow for more expansive COVID-19 diagnostic testing for all members with no cost-share. Previously, providers were required to individually evaluate patients to determine whether COVID-19 diagnostic testing is "medically appropriate" for testing to be covered with \$0 member cost-share. This included testing for those who were symptomatic, had an upcoming medical procedure, or had known or suspected exposure.

Members can now get tested with \$0 cost-share as long as a licensed or authorized provider is involved in providing or ordering the COVID-19 test. Coverage of testing is not limited to patients with symptoms or exposure. This includes tests conducted at pharmacies and state and local government testing sites. Tests ordered by telemedicine providers will also be covered at \$0 cost-share, however it is important to note that Teladoc providers are unable to order COVID-19 tests at this time.

The federal guidance reaffirms that health plans are not required to cover testing for public health surveillance or employment (return to work) purposes.

All changes are effective February 26, 2021, and any claims received will be retroactively processed in accordance with the federal mandate. Blue Shield will be administering claims according to this guidance for self-funded plan sponsors as well.

Testing policies are reflected in [this one-page document](#). You may also reference the updated federal testing [guidance](#) for more details.

Stay up to date with COVID-19 resources for employers at <https://covid-b2b.blueshieldca.com>.

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Blue Shield of California | 601 12th Street | Oakland, CA 94607

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