

## Getting Preventive Care in the Age of COVID-19



The COVID-19 pandemic has put a pause on many previously routine aspects of our lives. For some people that includes routine medical care. But the importance of preventive care isn't taking a break just because COVID-19 is in the headlines. It's critical to remember just how important checkups, vaccinations, preventive screenings and other types of non-emergency medical care are when it comes to staying healthy and controlling costs.

### **How has the coronavirus affected outpatient care?**

When states began issuing closures and lockdown orders, outpatient medical clinics and practices reacted quickly. They started offering telemedicine as an alternative to in-person visits, canceled some routine screenings like mammograms and colonoscopies, and began carefully screening patients for COVID-19 symptoms before allowing them to come in for appointments.

Meanwhile, many patients began forgoing in-person doctor visits because they worried about being exposed to the coronavirus. As a result, the number of visits to outpatient clinics in the US declined nearly 60 percent by early April. It has rebounded somewhat since then, but the number of visits is still roughly one-third lower than before the pandemic.<sup>1</sup>

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It's understandable that people are wary of going to the doctor's office while COVID-19 is still prevalent. But it means that patients need to be extra proactive about their health and make smart choices about when it does and doesn't make sense to do an in-person visit. Otherwise, medical problems that might have been detected early could turn into more serious and costly issues.

We've got a few tips for preventive care during COVID-19, which we hope you'll pass along to your employees.



#### **Show empathy and understanding**

It sounds simple, but one of the most powerful things employers, and benefit managers in particular, can do when it comes to financial stress is simply to acknowledge it. When you set a tone of openness, honesty, and empathy, employees know they're not alone, and that their employer cares. As a result, they're less likely to feel shame or resentment—emotions that can further compound feelings of stress and anxiety.

<sup>1</sup> **The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Outpatient Visits: A Rebound Emerges** - *The Commonwealth Fund*, May 19, 2020



### **Ask your provider about safety measures**

If you feel apprehensive about going to a medical facility, talk with your provider to find out what measures they're taking to keep patients safe. In general, outpatient clinics, hospitals and other facilities are taking rigorous safety measures, like enforcing mask wearing, performing temperature checks, limiting the number of people in waiting rooms at any given time and configuring their space for social distancing. Patients with COVID-19 symptoms, or who think they may have been exposed to the disease, are generally kept isolated from other patients and providers. Learning about the steps your providers are taking to ensure patient and provider safety may put your mind at ease.



### **Stay on top of your preventive screenings and well visits**

If you've missed routine physicals for yourself or your child or have had to cancel or postpone cancer screenings, heart disease screenings and other routine tests, contact your healthcare provider about rescheduling. Your doctor or other provider can help you understand which appointments should or shouldn't be delayed, based on your specific medical history or condition.

#### **MyRewards**

Let Tufts Health Plan reward you for getting your preventive screenings. Earn up to \$500 a year for using high-value providers to get services like colonoscopies, mammograms, MRIs and more.

**Get Rewards**





## **Think twice about postponing immunizations**

The number of routine childhood vaccines administered has declined significantly since the pandemic began.<sup>2</sup> This is worrisome, given that some of the diseases these vaccines prevent, including measles and pertussis, are very contagious and in some cases life-threatening. Flu shots, meanwhile, will be especially important this coming fall and winter. Talk with your health care provider about how to keep yourself and your family up-to-date on your immunizations.



## **Embrace telehealth!**

Video and telephone visits with providers are a safe, convenient alternative to in-office visits for routine health concerns, or to determine whether an in-person visit for testing, imaging, or a physical exam is necessary. For Tufts Health Plan members, out-of-pocket costs for telehealth visits with network providers, including behavioral health, are waived until further notice.

[Learn more about telehealth.](#)



## **Stay in touch with your care managers**

If you have a chronic or serious condition, such as diabetes, heart disease, or a mental health or substance use disorder, and you have a dedicated care manager, be sure to stay in touch with them. They can advise you on preventive measures to help you manage your condition and avoid complications or hospitalization, connect you with resources if you need them, and help you safely get in-person care if you need it.

<sup>2</sup> [Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Routine Pediatric Vaccine Ordering and Administration — United States, 2020](#) - CDC's Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR), May 15, 2020



## **Take care of your own health**

Eating well, exercising and getting good sleep are more important than ever. If you're a Tufts Health Plan member, it's a good time to take advantage of some of the wellness perks and discounts available to you, including weight loss discounts, smoking cessation programs, nutrition coaching, online stress management and yoga, and more.



## **If you need to get tested, get tested.**

If you have flu-like symptoms, including fever, cough, fatigue, muscle or body aches, call your health care provider and find out how to get tested for COVID-19. Drive-through testing sites are available at many locations. It's important to get tested both for your own health and that of others with whom you may have come into contact.<sup>3</sup>

**At Tufts Health Plan, we're committed to helping our members stay healthy and safely connect with the medical care they need. Learn more about how we're helping to support our members' health during the COVID-19 pandemic.**

**[tuftshealthplan.com/covid-19/employer](https://tuftshealthplan.com/covid-19/employer)**

<sup>2</sup> There are no costs to Tufts Health members for COVID-19 testing and in-person treatments for COVID-19. Testing is covered when ordered by your PCP or other treating provider and determined to be medically necessary in accordance with CDC and DPH guidelines. This coverage applies at in-network providers, urgent care centers, emergency rooms and other facilities, and at out-of-network providers in the event a member cannot easily find an in-network provider to provide timely services.