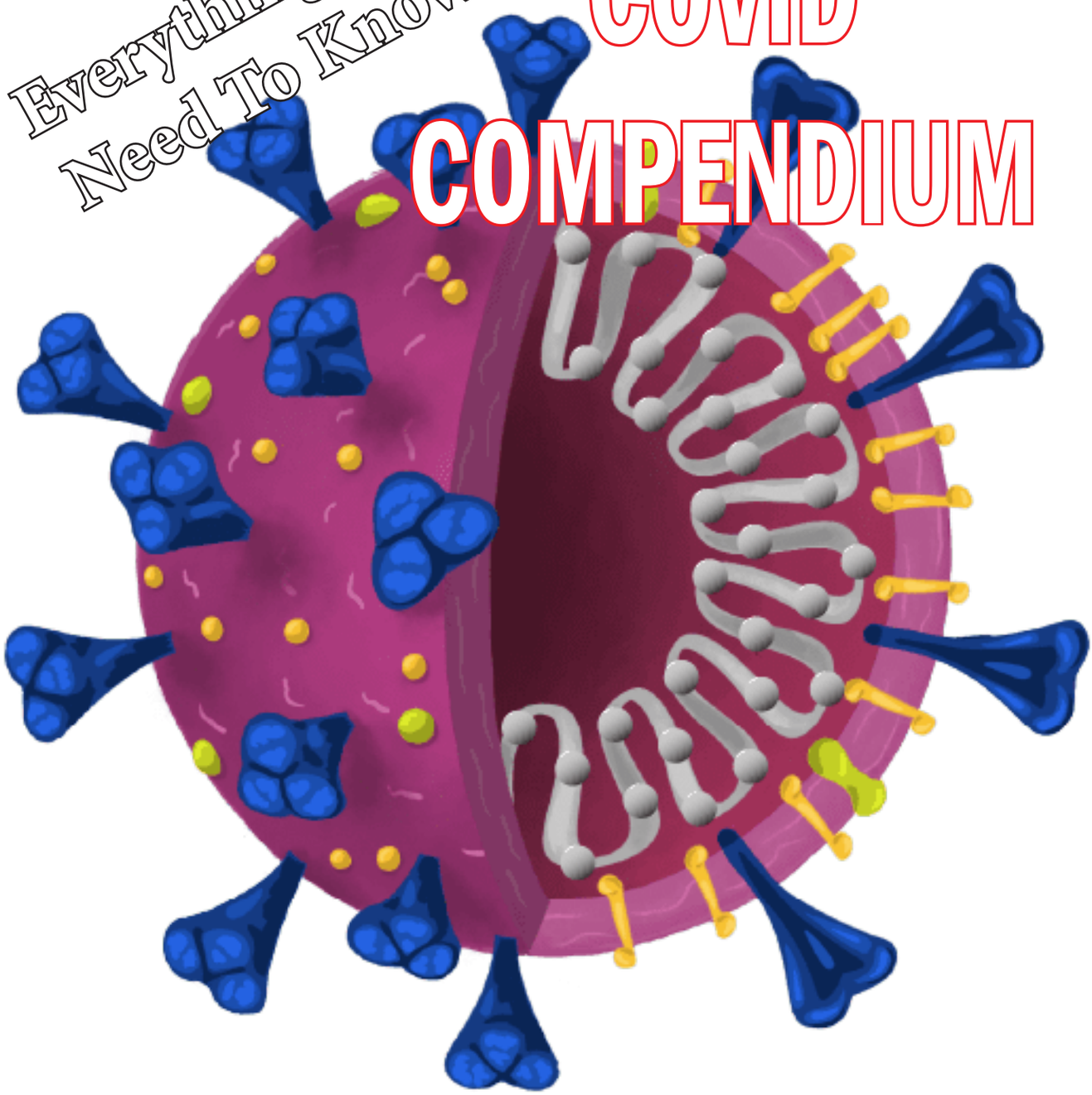
A Special Supplement to the Fairbury Journal-News

A FREE Publication

HealthBEAT MAGAZINE

Everything You Need To Know

COVID COMPENDIUM



COVID 101

What is COVID?

COVID-19 is a disease caused by a virus called SARS-CoV-2. Most people with COVID-19 have mild symptoms, but some people can become severely ill. Although most people with COVID-19 get better within weeks of illness, some people experience post-COVID conditions. Post-COVID conditions are a wide range of new, returning, or ongoing health problems people can experience more than four weeks after first being infected with the virus that causes COVID-19. Older people and those who have certain underlying medical conditions are more likely to get severely ill from COVID-19. Vaccines against COVID-19 are safe and effective.

How is COVID spread?

COVID-19 spreads when an infected person breathes out droplets and very small particles that contain the virus. These droplets and particles can be breathed in by other people or land on their eyes, noses, or mouth. In some circumstances, they may contaminate surfaces they touch. People who are closer than 6 feet from the infected person are most likely to get infected.

COVID-19 is spread in three main ways:

Breathing in air when close to an infected person who is exhaling small droplets and particles that contain the virus.

Having these small droplets and particles that contain virus land on the eyes, nose, or mouth, especially through splashes and sprays like a cough or sneeze.

Touching eyes, nose, or mouth with hands that have the virus on them.

For more information about how COVID-19 spreads, visit the How COVID-19 Spreads page to learn how COVID-19 spreads and how to protect yourself.

How can I protect against COVID?

To maximize protection from the virus that causes COVID-19 and prevent possibly spreading it to others, wear a mask indoors in public if you are in an area of substantial or high transmission.

Wearing a mask is most important if you have a weakened immune system or if, because of your age or an underlying medical condition, you are at increased risk for severe disease, or if someone in your household has a weakened immune system, is at increased risk for severe disease, or is unvaccinated. If this applies to you or your household, you might choose to wear a mask regardless of the level of transmission in your area.

These are the best ways to protect your unvaccinated family members, including children who cannot get vaccinated yet:

• Get vaccinated yourself. COVID-19 vaccines reduce the risk of people getting COVID-19 and can also reduce the risk of spreading it.

• Be sure to get everyone in your family who is 5 years or older vaccinated against COVID-19.

• Wear a mask.

To maximize protection from the virus that causes COVID-19 and prevent possibly spreading it to others, have everyone in your family, even those who are vaccinated, wear a mask indoors in public if you are in an area of substantial or high transmission.

You might choose to have everyone in your family, even those who are vaccinated, wear a mask indoors in public regardless of the level of transmission in your area.

Unvaccinated family members, including children ages 2 years and older, should wear a mask in all indoor public settings.

To set an example, you also might choose to wear a mask.

Do NOT put a mask on children younger than 2 years old.

Outdoor activities are safer than indoor ones. If you are indoors, choose a location that is well ventilated, for example a room with open windows, and know when to wear a mask.

Avoid activities that make it hard to stay 6 feet away from others.

If your family member is younger than 2 years old or cannot wear a mask, limit visits with people who are not vaccinated or whose vaccination status is unknown and keep distance between your child and other people in public.

How do you know if you are fully vaccinated?

• In general, people are considered fully vaccinated:

• 2 weeks after their second dose in a 2-dose series, such as the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines, or

• 2 weeks after a single-dose vaccine, such as Johnson & Johnson's Janssen vaccine

• If you don't meet these requirements, regardless of your age, you are NOT fully vaccinated. Keep taking all precautions until you are fully vaccinated.

If you have a condition or are taking medications that weaken your immune system, you may not be fully protected even if you are fully vaccinated and have received an additional dose.

You should continue to take all precautions recommended for unvaccinated people until advised otherwise by your healthcare provider.

source: CDC.gov

Understanding COVID Treatment Options

(StatePoint) As COVID-19 restrictions are lifted, people are taking fewer precautions and the virus continues to spread in communities across the country. While getting vaccinated is the best way to prevent COVID-19, it's also important to understand the potential treatment options available if you do get sick, particularly if you're at high-risk for developing serious illness and complications.

As part of its mission to help prevent infection and severe illness from COVID-19, the American Lung Association has partnered with Regeneron Pharmaceuticals and GlaxoSmithKline to raise awareness about available treatment options. Here's what to know:

Timing is Important

If you experience symptoms of COVID-19, it's critical to get tested right away. If you're a high-risk individual and test positive for COVID-19, speak to your healthcare provider about available treatment options that may help prevent severe illness and reduce the risk of hospitalization. Treatments, which include monoclonal antibodies (MABs), need to start as soon as possible and within 10 days of symptom onset to help prevent possible progression of severe illness.

Monoclonal Antibodies

MABs products that are authorized for emergency use by the Food and Drug Administration are used for patients who test positive for COVID-19, who are over 12 years old, are experiencing mild to moderate COVID-19 symptoms and who are at high risk of hospitalization. MABs are laboratory-made proteins that work by attaching to the replicating virus within an infected individual, which may enable the immune system to better recognize and stop the infection, preventing further illness from occurring. MAB treatment is given as an intravenous (IV) infusion or injection at a doctor's office or outpatient center.

MAB Eligibility

It's important to know whether you're a higher-risk individual and eligible for MAB treatment. You're considered high-risk if you're aged 65 and older, have a chronic lung disease (including asthma, COPD, interstitial lung disease, cystic fibrosis or pulmonary hypertension) and if you have certain medical conditions. These conditions include being pregnant, overweight, or immunocompromised, as well as heart disease, diabetes, chronic kidney disease, sickle cell disease and neurodevelopmental disorders.

Treatments are widely available, and advocates say that efforts should be made to ensure that the communities most affected by COVID-19 have equitable access, this includes racial and ethnic minority groups, including Black, Latino/Hispanic and American Indian/Alaska Native communities.

If you do receive MABs, you should delay COVID-19 vaccination by at least 90 days.

For more information about COVID-19 and available treatments, visit lung.org.

Treatment options for COVID-19 are a step in the right direction to helping end this pandemic, say doctors, however it's always preferable to prevent a disease than to treat it. Getting fully vaccinated against COVID-19 can help keep you from getting sick or spreading the infection to others.

Vaccine Myths Busted

(StatePoint) COVID-19 vaccines are overwhelmingly safe and highly effective at reducing the risk of severe disease, hospitalizations and death. Unfortunately, misinformation and pervasive myths continue to sow doubt, leaving many unprotected.

Roughly 99% of deaths linked to COVID-19 in the latest wave -- and the vast majority of cases involving severe symptoms that require hospitalization -- were among patients who weren't fully vaccinated, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"With high levels of community spread of COVID-19, we're once again fighting a two-front war: against the virus and against rampant misinformation," says American Medical Association president, Gerald E. Harmon, M.D.

Here are some of the top myths physicians are hearing and what you need to know:

--Can COVID-19 vaccines impact fertility? Risks to fertility or the ability to become pregnant after receiving a COVID-19 vaccine were disproven through clinical trials and real-world data points. While pregnant women weren't specifically targeted for vaccine trials, several participants became pregnant without issue during the trial duration and there's been no demonstrated real-world impact on fertility. Moreover, COVID-19 itself carries significant risks for pregnant women, including higher risks of preterm labor and stillbirth, and higher risks of hypertension and pneumonia for pregnant women. There's also no evidence showing that COVID-19 vaccines affect male fertility.

--Can vaccinated people "shed" spike proteins, affecting those close to them? Vaccine shedding can only occur when a vaccine contains a weakened version of the virus. None of the COVID-19 vaccines authorized for use in the United States contain a live virus, so it's not biologically possible for a vaccinated person to affect an unvaccinated person by proxy or by "shedding" spike proteins.

--I've already had COVID-19. Do I need the vaccine? Yes, the data shows that unvaccinated individuals are more than twice as likely to be reinfected with COVID-19 than those who were fully vaccinated after initially contracting the virus. Getting the vaccine is the best way to protect yourself and those around you.

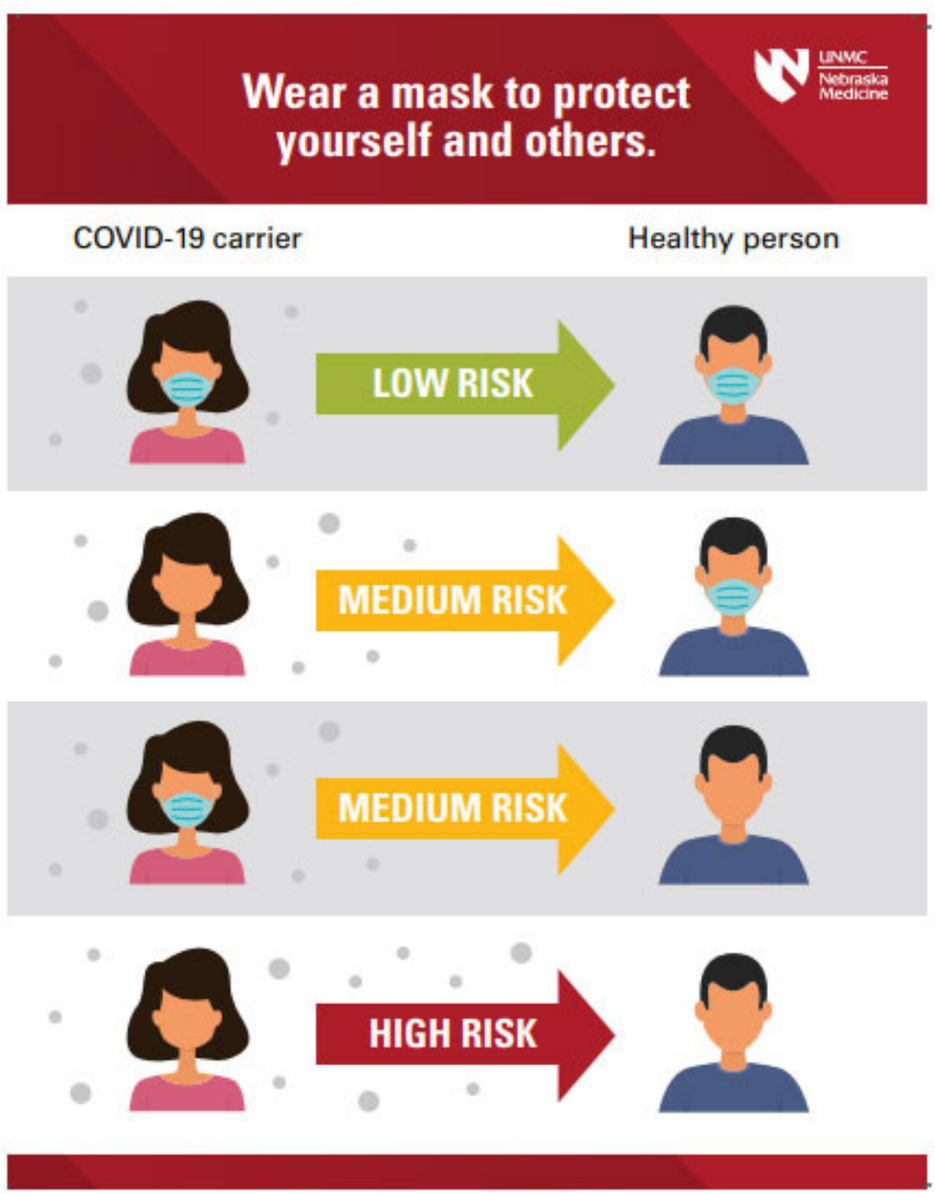
--Why do I need the vaccine if breakthrough infections are possible? Some fully vaccinated people will still get sick because no vaccine is 100% effective. However, data show that vaccination may make COVID-19 symptoms less severe. The vaccines have also been shown to provide substantial protection against death and hospitalization in cases of breakthrough infection.

--I'm young and healthy. Do I really need the vaccine? Many young, previously healthy people have gotten seriously ill or died from COVID-19, and those numbers are increasing with new, more transmissible variants. There's no way to predict how you'll respond to infection. Additionally, vaccines help prevent you from carrying the virus and transmitting it to others. Reducing the number of unvaccinated people will mitigate transmission of the virus.

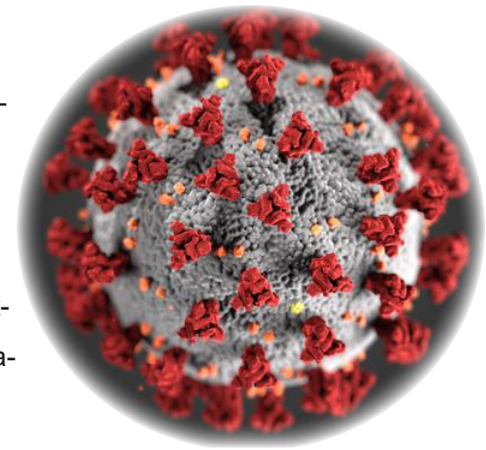
--I have allergies. Should I be worried about a reaction to the vaccine? There have been very rare (2.5-5 people per million) reports of severe (anaphylactic) allergic reactions to COVID-19 vaccines. Having severe allergic reactions to certain foods, bee stings or oral medications doesn't mean you will have an allergic reaction to a COVID-19 vaccine. The vaccination sites are prepared to evaluate and handle these situations on individual bases.

More fact-based vaccine information can be found by visiting cdc.gov or getvaccineanswers.org.

"The evidence around vaccinations is abundantly clear; they're safe, effective and will help protect you and your loved ones from severe COVID and death," says Dr. Harmon. "If you have questions about the vaccine, its safety, or effectiveness, please speak to your physician. We are here for you, eager to answer your questions, and get you protected from this virus."



Understanding Variants



On November 26, 2021, the World Health Organization (WHO) classified a new variant, B.1.1.529, as a Variant of Concern and named it Omicron and on November 30, 2021, the United States also classified it as a Variant of Concern. CDC has been actively monitoring and preparing for this variant, and we will continue to work diligently with other U.S. and global public health and industry partners to learn more. Despite the detection of Omicron, Delta remains the predominant strain in the United States. The recent emergence of the Omicron variant (B.1.1.529) further emphasizes the importance of vaccination, boosters, and general prevention strategies needed to protect against COVID-19. Everyone 5 and older should get vaccinated and boosters are recommended for everyone 18 years and older.

For more information on the Omicron variant visit https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/variants/index.html.

Top Things You Need To Know About Variants

New variants of the COVID virus are expected to occur. Taking measures to reduce the spread of infection, including getting a COVID-19 vaccine, are the best ways to slow the emergence of new variants.

Vaccines reduce the risk of severe illness, hospitalization and death from COVID-19.

COVID-19 booster doses are recommended for individuals who are 18 years or older.

source: CDC.gov

Additional Health Precautions

Protecting Yourself Against the Flu Helps Fight COVID-19 Too

With students across the country returning to the classroom and adults returning to the workplace and gathering in person, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) predicts that the second flu season of the COVID-19 pandemic will be significantly more active than last year.

But, the good news is that there are three simple steps everyone can take to help protect themselves, their loved ones and communities:

1. Get the Flu Shot: Make sure to get the flu shot, and get it as early as possible. Most health care providers advise getting your flu vaccine in early fall.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), early results show that only about half (50% – 55%) of U.S. adults received the flu vaccine last year. And, the rate of vaccination among children dropped from 62% in 2019-2020 to 58% in 2020-2021, which could be attributed to remote learning and greater isolation than in previous years.

Everyone in the household should get the flu vaccine—especially working adults, seniors and children in school or daycare. With COVID-19 variants making people sicker than previously seen, getting the vaccine and protecting yourself from the flu can keep your immune system healthy. Some studies have even found that individuals who contracted COVID-19 but received the flu shot were less likely to require treatment from an emergency department or intensive care unit.

"The best thing you can do to help yourself, your family, and your community is to get both the flu shot and COVID-19 vaccine, as well as a COVID-19 booster if you are eligible and to practice healthy hygiene habits," says Dr. Steve Miller, chief clinical officer, Cigna Corp. "The only way out of the pandemic is by working together and taking steps to protect ourselves and each other."

Also, if you fall within the CDC's recommendations for COVID-19 boosters, you should consider getting both at the same time as a convenient way to protect yourself and others from flu and COVID this season.

The benefits of increased immunization provided by both the flu and COVID-19 vaccinations can also help ease the burden on an already overloaded health care system. Around the country, there have been heartbreaking reports of full intensive care units having to turn away sick patients. Protecting yourself against the flu is one way you can help to relieve health care providers and frontline workers.

2. Practice Healthy Hygiene: Continue to practice healthy hygiene habits like washing your hands regularly and wearing a mask when appropriate. This means wearing a mask while shopping indoors, or attending an indoor event with a crowd of people.

3. Stay Home When Sick: Stay home and avoid contact with others if you aren't feeling well. Many of the symptoms of COVID-19 and flu look alike—including fever, cough, muscle aches and sore throat—and knowing the difference can only be done through testing. Get tested if you develop any of these symptoms to rule out COVID-19, since its symptoms can often become more serious.

Kids And COVID

While parents may have delayed their children's vaccinations and preventive care due to the COVID-19 outbreak, medical offices and clinics are taking extra steps to see children safely during this time.

Call to schedule an appointment today. And if your child is 12 years or older and hasn't received their COVID-19 vaccine yet, talk to their doctor about getting it as soon as possible. If your children don't currently have health insurance, it is not too late to get them covered!

Nationwide, millions of school-aged children and teens qualify — and are enrolled — in free or low-cost health coverage through Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP).

These health programs can provide vital access to care, including well-child visits and vaccinations, to keep students focused on learning and give parents the peace of mind that comes with knowing their children are covered inside and outside the classroom.

The start of the school year is a good opportunity to catch up on important well-child visits and ensure children are up-to-date on their immunizations.

Vaccinations, such as those for seasonal influenza, measles and mumps, are particularly important this year, and are covered for children by Medicaid and CHIP. Not only can routine vaccinations, as well as the COVID-19 vaccination, protect children from getting sick and developing serious complications, they can also protect others who may be vulnerable to serious illness, such as babies and other young children, older people, and people with pre-existing health conditions.

Studies have shown that academic performance and health insurance go hand in hand.

Children who have health coverage miss fewer classes and perform better in school than those who are uninsured. But health coverage doesn't just benefit students. Fewer missed days of school also mean fewer missed days of work for parents. With health coverage, children can get the routine and emergency care, immunizations, check-ups, eye exams, dental visits and mental health services they may need to fully participate in school and remain engaged in class. Health coverage also provides access to important care if children get sick or injured.

Medicaid and CHIP provide free or low-cost coverage for eligible children and teens up to age 19. Eligibility is dependent on household size and income and varies by state. States have different income eligibility rules, but in most states, children with family income up to $50,000 per year (for a family of four) may qualify for Medicaid or CHIP. In many states, family income can be even higher and children can still qualify. Young people up to 21 may be eligible for Medicaid. And if your family is currently receiving the monthly child tax credit, this does not affect your ability to qualify for Medicaid and CHIP. Additionally, the Department of Homeland Security will not consider applying for or receiving Medicaid or CHIP when making a "public charge" determination (with one exception for individuals who are institutionalized for long-term care (such as nursing facility residents or residents of mental health institutions) and are receiving Medicaid coverage for their institutional services). This means that having Medicaid or CHIP will not affect someone's chances of becoming a Lawful Permanent Resident or U.S. citizen. Enrollment in Medicaid and CHIP is open all year, and, once your child is enrolled, health coverage must be renewed annually.

You can apply online, over the phone, by mail or in-person with your state's Medicaid or CHIP agency or visit the "Find Coverage for Your Family" section on InsureKidsNow.gov. For more information, call 1-877-KIDS-NOW (1-877-543-7669).

Information provided by the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services.

COVID Financial Crisis

(StatePoint) Millions of Americans who have faced income loss and illness as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic are struggling to meet basic expenses, including rent. Recent statistics show that more than 15 million people nationwide live in households that are behind on their rental payments. As federal rental protection ends, these individuals and families are at risk of eviction, according to the Aspen Institute.

Struggling to pay rent? Fitzgerald offers four actions to take:

1. Talk to your landlord. If you can't pay rent on time, see if your landlord can work out a payment plan, accept a partial payment or push the due date back a few days.

2. Seek emergency assistance. Those unable to pay rent or utilities may be able to access rental assistance through the U.S. Department of Treasury's Emergency Rental Assistance Program. To find assistance in your area, visit home.treasury.gov and search "rental assistance."

3. Get legal help. If you're worried about eviction, talk with a lawyer experienced in eviction processes in your state. Many organizations offer free or low-cost legal counsel to fight eviction. To find links to trusted legal assistance in your area, visit americanbar.org and search for "free legal help."

4. Contact a housing counselor. Housing counselors don't just work with homeowners. They can help renters in need of assistance, too. During the pandemic, housing counselors have helped renters access emergency rental assistance, understand options for rental relief and eviction protection, as well as have advised on debt management and other money matters. Find a housing counselor by visiting hud.gov/findacounselor.

"The economic fallout from the pandemic is causing housing instability for far too many renters, including people of color disproportionately affected by this crisis," says Eileen Fitzgerald, head of housing affordability philanthropy with Wells Fargo

Help for Renters

As part of its efforts to help people stay in their homes, Wells Fargo is supporting initiatives nationwide that mitigate evictions.

Earlier in 2021, Wells Fargo gave a $4 million grant to The National Foundation for Credit Counseling and the Housing Partnership Network to launch the Renter Advantage program. Renter Advantage enables credit counselors and nonprofit rental property owners to work directly with renters to preserve their housing status and stabilize their financial situation. Through the program, credit counselors provide renters in need of assistance with trusted guidance, including enrolling them in plans to address sustainable rent repayment, debt management and improving long-term financial health.

Legal representation can make all the difference. A Harvard study shows that two-thirds of tenants with legal representation are more likely to avoid an eviction judgment and remain in their home. Harvard researchers also found an estimated 90% of landlords have legal representation, while only 10% of tenants do, putting tenants at a significant disadvantage. This is why Wells Fargo has provided more than $8 million in grants to legal assistance organizations helping keep people housed.

People of color, particularly Black and Hispanic tenants, represent 80% of people at risk of eviction, according to the Aspen Institute. Wells Fargo grants are helping close the housing equity gap.

"As the pandemic continues to take its toll on Americans' physical and economic health, connecting people at risk of eviction with resources and options is critical," says Fitzgerald. "Having a safe, affordable place to call home helps lay the foundation for wellness, dignity, and economic opportunity."

DHHS COVID-19 Information Line

402-552-6645

8am–8pm CST

7 days a week

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