

June 22, 2020

SUBJECT: IMPORTANT INFORMATION REGARDING SERVICES DURING THE COVID-19 PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS

Dear Beneficiary:

The Alameda County Behavioral Health (ACBH) supports local, state, and national efforts to fight the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) as it continues to spread throughout the nation and our community. Providing safe care has always been a priority at ACBH, and never more so than during these past few months. As we begin the process of gradually restoring in-person services, we are diligent in our efforts to ensure the safety of our beneficiaries, staff and providers.

This letter contains important information regarding your county behavioral health services. Please read this information carefully and contact ACBH or your local behavioral health provider if you have any questions or concerns.

Decision-Making Regarding Behavioral Health Services

Behavioral health services can be provided in multiple ways. Services can be delivered in person, by telephone or by telehealth (videoconferencing online). As you know, traveling to many public locations may increase the risk of exposure to the coronavirus, including coming in to an office for in-person services. This risk may increase if you travel by public transportation, taxi, or ridesharing service.

Please know that although you may be able to seek and receive in-person services currently, if the COVID-19 situation changes such that there is severe or increased risk to your health, you may be advised to meet by telephone or telehealth for everyone's safety and well-being. If you have concerns about meeting through telehealth, or if you do not have necessary equipment (for example a telephone), please speak with your provider first and try to address any issues. If you decide at any time that you would feel safer staying with, or returning to telephone or telehealth services, our providers will make all efforts to respect that decision, as long as it is possible and clinically appropriate.

Steps You Can Take to Minimize Exposure

When obtaining services in person, you can take certain precautions which will help keep both you and everyone around you safer from exposure, sickness, and possible death. If you cannot follow these suggestions, a telephone or telehealth appointment may be better for you.

In-Person Appointment: Please only keep your in-person appointment if you are feeling well (without symptoms of illness). If you have a fever or other symptoms of illness, please either cancel the appointment or call your provider so that you may plan to meet by telephone or telehealth. If you wish to cancel this appointment for health reasons, your service providers will certainly understand and will work with you to identify other options.





Waiting Room: As long as it is safe to do so, consider arriving shortly before your appointment time. This way the number of people in our local outpatient clinics or offices will be limited. If you are unable to do so safely, please work with your provider to identify ways to limit your need to wait for your appointment for longer than necessary in public waiting rooms or other settings.

Wash Hands: Please wash your hands or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer when you enter the building. Washing your hands can help stop the spread of the coronavirus. Please try not to touch your face or eyes with your hands. If you do, immediately wash or sanitize your hands.

Face Covering (Mask): While we continue to experience the impacts of COVID-19, future health orders may also require that you wear a facial covering/mask in public areas including our clinics and offices. You may also notice staff wearing mask as well as gloves or other personal protective equipment (PPE). Wearing a facial covering and using PPE, if appropriate, can help to reduce the spread of the Coronavirus. Minors under the age of 12 are not required to wear a mask.

Social Distancing: Local social or physical distancing requirements mean that you and other visitors will be required to keep a safe distance (a minimum of six feet of separation) between yourself and others. This is important in both the waiting room and treatment rooms. For example, please do not move chairs or sit where there are signs asking you not to sit. In addition, there will be no physical contact (e.g., no handshakes) with staff or other clients. Despite these limitations, our system will continue to work with our providers to consider ways to help you and others feel welcome.

Minor: If you are bringing your child to the appointment, please ensure that your child follows all of these safety precautions and distancing protocols.

Please let your provider or any member of the behavioral health team know if these changes are causing you any discomfort or distress, so that we can support you. These steps have been taken to keep everyone as safe as possible during these challenging times.

Taking Steps Between Appointments to Minimize Your Exposure to COVID-19

Please remember that you are at a higher risk of exposure to COVID-19 if you have a job that exposes you to other people who are infected, or if you have other responsibilities or complete activities that put you in close contact with others (beyond your family). Also understand that if you live with others (especially those over 65 years old or those with chronic medical problems), your exposure could put them at risk.

You should consider your risk of exposure and your risk of exposing others as you decide how to best receive treatment at this time (in person vs. telephone or telehealth). If a resident of your home tests positive for the infection, please let your medical providers know. Letting your behavioral health team know also helps our system to know that you might benefit from COVID-19 related supports and it allows them to keep others healthy while you recover.





Steps That We Are Taking to Minimize Exposure

Our first priority continues to be the safety and well-being of our beneficiaries, staff and providers. Our programs have taken steps to reduce the risk of spreading the Coronavirus within offices and, per County Health Officer guidelines, have posted the required notices at each locations. Understand that our team members have also agreed to stay home if they have symptoms or if they are sick. We value your health, and the health and wellness of our community; and are certain that your behavioral health provider can make alternate arrangements for services as appropriate.

We will continue to monitor the situation on a national, regional, and local basis to remain current on all developments concerning the pandemic and recommended best practices. We will update you as circumstances evolve. If you have questions about COVID-19, please feel free to discuss them with your medical provider or visit <http://www.acphd.org/2019-ncov.aspx> for more information. If you have questions about your behavioral health treatment, please discuss it with your behavioral health provider.

Thank you for reading this letter and the important information that it contains. Together, we can all take appropriate steps to reduce the risk of exposure to the virus and help you; your family, each other, and our community remain healthy and safe.

Be well,

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Chief Medical Officer

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ACBH Director

