The COVID-19 pandemic has created unprecedented challenges for healthcare providers and health insurers. The following is a selection of federal and state actions as well as news and analysis articles from the Health Policy Tracking Service as published in its bi-weekly Snapshots. The selection includes Regulatory Intelligence and Reuters news coverage. More COVID-19 news and information can be found via the TRRI platform's search facility.

Additional COVID-19 resources are also available on the Thomson Reuters COVID-19 Resource Center. For a regularly updated list of U.S. state updates on insurance-sector regulatory changes related to the COVID-19 epidemic, please click on this link: http://go-ri.tr.com/fuaD4N.

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COVID-19 COVERAGE

COVID-19 LEGISLATIVE AND REGULATORY ACTIONS

STATE ACTIONS

Georgia
It is hereby ordered that any requirement of the laws or regulations of this state, including but not limited to Code Section 31-12-3.1(e), which prohibits the release of individually identifiable vaccination information, is hereby suspended to the extent it prevents the disclosure of COVID-19 vaccination records to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to support the response to COVID-19. Such records may include, but are not limited to, individually identifiable COVID-19 vaccination information. See 2020 GA REG TEXT 571133 (NS).

Massachusetts
Chapter 101 CMR 445.00 establishes the payment rates for certain day programs in response to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) emergency. These services are

1 This COVID-19 Coverage Snapshot was compiled by members of the publisher’s staff.
purchased by the Department of Developmental Services (DDS), the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB), the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC), and MassHealth. See 2020 MA REG TEXT 564587 (NS).

**Michigan**
- **2019 MI H.B. 6492** (NS), introduced December 2, to limit civil and criminal liability for certain individuals and health care facilities who respond to or assist with COVID-19 efforts in this state; and to repeal acts and parts of acts.
- **2019 MI H.B. 6495** (NS), introduced December 2, health facilities: emergency medical services; certain licensing and certification expiration dates for emergency medical services personnel; suspend during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**New York**
- **2019 NY A.B. 11175** (NS), introduced December 4, relates to permitting any New York resident to receive a free coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) vaccination.

**Oregon**
- Due to the COVID-19 state of emergency, the Legislature and the Executive Branch authorized a ten percent rate increase for nursing facilities during April 1, 2020 thru June 30, 2020. The Department is amending OAR chapter 411, division 070 to increase rates to assist with extraordinary business costs associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. The Department has also issued a COVID Emergency Response Incentive Program to protect nursing facility staff from missed work due to COVID-19. see 2020 OR REG TEXT 565416 (NS).
- Under normal circumstances, insurers are more restricted in the allowable reasons for cancelling a policy midterm than a nonrenewal decision. After the emergency order expired, insurers had policies in force that they had legitimate reasons to nonrenew but were not allowed to cancel midterm. This rule would put insurers back in the place they were had the emergency order not been issued, and allow a cancellation for the same reasons the insurer was permitted to nonrenew. See 2020 OR REG TEXT 570993 (NS).

**Washington**
- The health care authority is revising this section to allow for payment of office visits for clients under the alien emergency medical (AEM) program when the visit is specifically for the assessment and treatment of the COVID-19 virus. See 2020 WA REG TEXT 571418 (NS).
- The purpose of the proposed amendment to WAC 246-335-510(3) is to add physician assistants to the list of practitioners authorized to order home health services and to sign plans of care. This change will expand health care facilities' ability to provide appropriate care for individuals who no longer need to be in a hospital or other health care facility, while also allowing health care facility resources to be used more effectively, facilitating the response to the public health emergency created by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. See 2020 WA REG TEXT 571488 (NS).
U.S. Plans for First COVID Vaccines as Pandemic Deaths Surge Again

(Reuters) - Top U.S. health officials announced plans on Tuesday to begin vaccinating Americans against the coronavirus as early as mid-December, as nationwide deaths hit the highest number for a single day in six months.²

Some 20 million people could be inoculated against COVID-19 by the end of 2020 and most Americans will have access to highly effective vaccines by mid-2021, the chief adviser of President Donald Trump’s Operation Warp Speed program said.

“Within 24 hours, maybe at most 36 to 48 hours, from the approval, the vaccine can be in people’s arms,” Moncef Slaoui, a former GlaxoSmithKline executive who is overseeing the vaccine portion of the U.S. program, said at an event conducted by The Washington Post newspaper.

His comments came on the same day that another 2,295 fatalities nationwide were linked to COVID-19, even before California, the most populous U.S. state, reported full results. Officials in several states said numbers were higher in part due to a backlog from the Thanksgiving holiday.

A statement from the public health director for Los Angeles County highlighted the ravages of the surging pandemic. Barbara Ferrer, the public health director, said that while Tuesday was the county’s “worst day thus far” of the pandemic, “...it will likely not remain the worst day of the pandemic in Los Angeles County. That will be tomorrow, and the next day and the next as cases, hospitalizations and deaths increase.”

Health officials pleaded with Americans to stick with coronavirus restrictions even with a vaccine in sight.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is moving to shorten the length of self-quarantine recommended after potential exposure to the coronavirus to 10 days, or seven days with a negative test, a federal spokesperson said on Tuesday. The CDC currently recommends a 14-day quarantine in order to curb the transmission of the virus.

TIMELINE ON A VACCINE
Some 60 million to 70 million doses of COVID-19 vaccine could be available per month beginning in January, after the expected regulatory approval of products from Pfizer Inc and Moderna Inc, Slaoui said.

A Food and Drug Administration panel of outside advisers will meet on Dec. 10 to discuss whether to recommend emergency use authorization of the Pfizer vaccine, developed with German partner BioNTech SE. Moderna’s vaccine candidate is expected to be reviewed a week later.

The timeline described by Slaoui and Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar appeared to assume that the FDA’s authorization of the first vaccine would come within days of the Dec. 10 meeting.

² Julie Steenhuyksen and Doina Chiacu, U.S. plans for first COVID vaccines as pandemic deaths surge again, Reuters (December 1, 2020) at: https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-usa-idUSKBN28B4YV.
But the head of the FDA’s Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research, Dr. Peter Marks, told patient advocacy groups last week that it might take “a few days to a few weeks.”

FDA Commissioner Stephen Hahn, likewise, has said the process could take longer.

The U.S. Transportation Department said on Tuesday it has made preparations to enable the “immediate mass shipment” of COVID-19 vaccines and completed all necessary regulatory measures.

An estimated 21 million healthcare workers and 3 million residents of long-term care facilities should be first in line to receive a vaccine, according to a recommendation voted on by a CDC panel of advisers on Tuesday.

Nursing homes are experiencing the worst outbreak of weekly coronavirus cases since the spring, according to the American Health Care Association and National Center for Assisted Living (AHCA/NCAL).

HOLIDAY TRAVEL SPIKE
State and local officials have returned to imposing restrictions on businesses and activities in response to the latest surge of a pandemic that killed 37,000 people in November.

A record nearly 96,000 COVID-19 patients were reported in U.S. hospitals on Tuesday, according to a Reuters tally.

Hospitalizations and deaths are expected to spike even higher during the holiday travel season, a trend that officials warn could overwhelm already strained healthcare systems.

The monthly death toll from COVID-19 is projected to nearly double in December to a pandemic-high of more than 70,000 and surpass 76,000 in January before ebbing in February, according to a widely cited model from the University of Washington’s Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation.

Pandemic-related restrictions have ravaged the U.S. economy. A bipartisan group of U.S. lawmakers on Tuesday unveiled a $908 billion COVID-19 relief bill aimed at breaking a deadlock over emergency assistance for small businesses, industries and the unemployed.

Biden Transition, U.S. Coronavirus Vaccine Teams to Meet Amid Surge, Distribution Questions
(Reuters) - The chief adviser for U.S. efforts to develop a coronavirus vaccine said on Sunday he planned to meet with President-elect Joe Biden’s team this week to discuss the program before the expected first round of vaccinations this month.³

Moncef Slaoui, chief adviser to the U.S. government’s Operation Warp Speed initiative, said he has not yet met with Biden, who last week criticized the Trump administration’s vaccine distribution plan.

“We really look forward to it because actually things have been really very appropriately planned,” Slaoui said in an interview with CBS’ “Face the Nation.”

Biden said on Friday his team had not seen a detailed outline from the Trump administration to distribute a vaccine to states, which he called an expensive and difficult process.

“There is no detailed plan that we’ve seen, anyway, as to how you get the vaccine out of a container, into an injection syringe, into somebody’s arm,” Biden said.

Slaoui said the government’s plan relies on state health agencies to deliver the vaccine.

“I think the plans are there and I feel confident that once we will explain it, everything in detail. I hope the new transition team will understand that things are well planned,” he told the CBS program.

It was not clear if Biden would attend the meeting himself.

The United States is struggling with a resurgence of the virus, with record infections and a daily death toll that has exceeded 2,000 in recent days. More than 281,000 Americans have died from the COVID-19 disease, according to a Reuters tally.

President Donald Trump’s refusal to acknowledge his loss to Biden in the Nov. 3 presidential election caused a delay in the transition process that allowed White House health advisers to communicate with the new Biden health advisory team.

Biden was due to announce members of his public health team this week.

VACCINE MANUFACTURING DELAY
First-responders, health care workers and nursing home residents will be the first groups to receive the vaccine once the U.S. Food and Drug Administration approves it, which is expected in the next week or two. The FDA’s outside advisers are scheduled to meet on Thursday to review Pfizer’s emergency use application for its vaccine.

FDA approval does not assure smooth sailing. Slaoui told CNN’s “State of the Union” the vaccine manufacturing effort has been more complicated and difficult than expected.

“We probably are six or eight weeks later than an ideal scenario, where we had 100 million doses by the end of this year,” he said. “But we are not far.”

The people most susceptible to coronavirus would start seeing the impact of the vaccine in January or February, Slaoui said on CBS.

“But on a population basis, for our life to start getting back to normal, we’re talking about April or May,” he said.

With the winter holiday season approaching, U.S. health experts have been pleading with Americans to not let up on their coronavirus safety protocols - wearing masks, social distancing and avoiding large gatherings.

Dr. Deborah Birx, who serves on the White House coronavirus task force, told NBC’s “Meet the Press” that public health officials have had to battle incorrect messages from the Trump administration about masks and other mitigation measures.

“I want to be very frank to the American people. The vaccine is critical. But it’s not going to save us from the current surge,” she said. “Only we can save us from this current surge.”