

AFTER-HOURS PHYSICIAN ACCESSIBILITY

The National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA) requires accredited managed care organizations to establish standards for after-hours care and to collect and analyze performance data against the standard. As a result, Highmark Blue Shield has established expectations for all practitioners in the network.

EXPECTATION		
After-hours accessibility	PCPs and specialists must be available by telephone 24 hours a day, seven days a week. A response within 30 minutes is expected.	
HOW HIGHMARK MONITORS AFTER-HOURS ACCESSIBILITY?		
After-hours accessibility monitoring	<p>Each practice meeting any of the following conditions receives a phone call after-hours:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any practice for which a member complaint (relating to after-hours access) has been received • Any practice which appeals a termination decision made by the Highmark Credentialing Committee based on the lack of 24 x 7 coverage. • An annual sample of existing practice site locations. 	
EFFECTIVE WAYS TO MEET AFTER-HOURS ACCESSIBILITY		
Answering Process	Acceptable Response or Message	Comments
Answering service or hospital service	Caller transferred directly to physician	
	Service pages the physician on call (see comment)	A physician or clinical staff person is expected to return the call within 30 minutes
Answering machine	Message must provide caller with a way to reach the physician on call by telephone or pager	<p>Provide clear instructions on how to record a message on a pager (i.e., "you will hear a series of beeps, after the beeps, please enter your phone number including area code by pressing the number keys on your phone, then hang up")</p> <p>A physician or clinical staff person is expected to return the call within 30 minutes</p>
	Instruct caller to leave a message (see comment)	A physician or clinical staff person is expected to return the call within 30 minutes

The accessibility expectations can be found in the Highmark Blue Shield Office Manual. Chapter 4, Unit 1 (PCP and Medical Specialist Accessibility Expectations). Please share this information with all physicians in your practice, your staff, and your answering service.



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