

SPECIAL eBULLETIN

FOR PROFESSIONAL AND FACILITY PROVIDERS

JUNE 17, 2020

PRESCRIBING MEDICATIONS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC GUIDELINES FOR HYDROXYCHLOROQUINE AND CHLOROQUINE

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented unprecedented challenges in the health care industry. This bulletin is in response to a review conducted by Highmark of the prescribing patterns of the following medications currently identified as potential treatments or prophylaxis for COVID-19:

Plaquenil (hydroxychloroquine) | chloroquine

To safeguard the health, safety, and welfare of our members, as well as ensure that these medications remain available to the people who need them, it is important that you continue to adhere to Highmark's pharmacy policies as well as FDA and manufacturer's prescribing guidelines.

The approved diagnoses for Plaquenil (hydroxychloroquine) and chloroquine include malaria, malaria prophylaxis, rheumatoid arthritis, lupus erythematosus, or extraintestinal amebiasis. Highmark's review of paid prescription claims for these medications since January 1, 2020, showed evidence of prescriptions to members without supporting documentation of an approved diagnosis for the medications. Please refer to Highmark Pharmacy Policy J-248, effective March, 28, 2020, to review the appropriate prescribing of these medications.

Highmark's claim review of these medications also revealed evidence of providers self-prescribing or prescribing to family members. There are several published opinions and education by the [American Medical Association Code of Medical Ethics](#) that providers should be mindful of when treating oneself or a family member.

Along with prescribing these medications for approved indications, medical necessity is also required. For example:

- Highmark Medical Policy Z-67 defines Experimental/Investigational services as "a treatment, procedure, facility, equipment, drug, service, or supply ("intervention") that has been determined not to be medically effective for the condition being treated."

If the intent of the prescription written for Plaquenil (hydroxychloroquine) or chloroquine was for prophylactic treatment of COVID-19, it would be considered Experimental/Investigational as there is currently no clinical documentation or trial or FDA approved indication to support the use of these drugs to treat COVID-19.



- Highmark Medical Policy Z-11 defines Medically Necessary or Medical Necessity for health care services or supplies that a provider, exercising prudent clinical judgment, would provide to a patient for the purpose of preventing, evaluating, diagnosing, or treating an illness, injury, disease, or its symptoms, and that are:
 - In accordance with generally accepted standards of medical practice;
 - Clinically appropriate, in terms of type, frequency, extent, site, and duration, and considered effective for the patient's illness, injury, or disease; and
 - Not primarily for the convenience of the patient or the provider, and not more costly than an alternative service or sequence of services at least as likely to produce equivalent therapeutic or diagnostic results as to the diagnosis or treatment of that patient's illness, injury, or disease.

If the intent of a prescription written for Plaquenil (hydroxychloroquine) or chloroquine was for prophylactic treatment of COVID-19, such use is currently not in accordance with generally accepted standards of medical practice nor is it considered effective for the treatment of COVID-19; therefore, it is not considered medically necessary for the treatment of COVID-19.

Highmark reserves the right to continue to monitor prescribing behavior of our network participating providers to ensure member safety and adherence to medical and pharmacy policy guidelines.

ACCESSING PHARMACY AND MEDICAL POLICIES

Highmark's pharmacy and medical policies can be accessed from the Provider Resource Center.

- For pharmacy policies, select **PHARMACY PROGRAM/FORMULARIES** from the main menu.
- For medical policies, select **CLAIMS, PAYMENT & REIMBURSEMENT**.