



Healthy and Connected Member Newsletter - July 25, 2024

Healthy and Connected is the South Carolina Department of Health and Human Services' (SCDHHS) member e-newsletter. Healthy and Connected features tips and tools to help you and your loved ones connect to resources and live healthier lives.

The Benefits of Breastfeeding



Did you know there are easy, free ways to lower certain health risks in infants and new mothers? Breastfeeding can lower the risk for infections and sickness for the mother and child. August is National Breastfeeding Month. Children who were breastfed have less risk of being overweight or having diabetes or asthma. Moms who breastfeed have a lower risk of diabetes, heart disease and breast cancer.

To learn more about the benefits of breastfeeding, visit the South Carolina Department of Public Health's (DPH's) [website](#).

The Mother's Milk Bank of South Carolina is another effort to meet the needs of moms and babies. The milk bank gives access to donated, pasteurized breastmilk for babies who need it. This milk goes to low-birth weight infants in hospitals across the state. This can save thousands of lives and dollars. To find out more about the [milk bank](#), visit [musckids.org](#).

Prevent the Spread of Syphilis

Syphilis is an infection caused by bacteria that most often passes through sexual contact. It usually starts as a sore at the spot where bacteria entered the body. A rash may appear a few weeks later. It normally will look red or brown, does not itch and could be hard to see. The rash tends to appear around the chest, back, stomach and pelvis. It could also be on the palms and soles of the feet. People can have symptoms like sores in the mouth or genital area, hair loss, muscle aches, fever, sore throat and weight loss. Sometimes, people who get syphilis could show no signs of it.

After someone is infected, the bacteria can stay in the body for years without any symptoms. But the infection could become active again. If the disease goes untreated, it can cause problems like damage to the brain, nerves, eyes, heart and liver.

Pregnant people with syphilis can pass the disease to their babies. This is called congenital syphilis. It can lead to a miscarriage. If the baby is delivered, it can cause severe problems like deafness, vision impairment, developmental delays or infant death. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services declared syphilis a [public health priority](#) in April. According to DPH, the rates for this type of syphilis have increased by 400% in our state from 2014 to 2022.

All people of childbearing age and their partners should be tested for syphilis for their own health and the health of their future children. Healthy Connections Medicaid members are eligible for syphilis screenings. Learn more about the disease from the [Mayo Clinic](#).

The Importance of Screening at Birth

Shortly after a baby is born, it is important for them to have a [newborn screening](#) (NBS). September is Newborn Screening Awareness Month. Early detection for all types of health conditions can be lifesaving. It can also help the child reach their full potential.

There are [three different parts](#) to an NBS.



The first is a blood spot screening. This is sometimes called a “heel stick.” It uses a few drops of blood from a baby’s heel to check for many types of conditions. It is typically

done 24-28 hours after the baby is born. Results from the blood spot screening are usually ready in about five to seven days.

A pulse oximetry screening determines if a newborn could have certain heart conditions. They are called critical congenital heart disease (CCHD). Children with CCHD can have a range of heart problems that can happen if the heart did not form correctly.

Lastly, the hearing screening can tell if a newborn could be deaf or hard of hearing. Even though babies don't normally start talking until they are about a year old, language starts to develop at birth. They learn speech by hearing others talk around them. This test can take place any time after the baby is 12 hours old.

NBS can be slightly different for each state. South Carolina's tests for [56 different conditions](#). This includes heart defects, sickle cell disease, cystic fibrosis and more.

Prioritizing Our Kids' Health

Parents want their children to grow up healthy and strong. The choices parents make in how they feed their children and how much exercise they get are key factors in their growth and development. September is Childhood Obesity Awareness Month. [The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC) has a few ways parents can make sure their children are as healthy as they can be.

- Make sure they get enough sleep. Children and teens need more sleep than adults. It is recommended for kids ages six to 12 to get between nine to 12 hours of sleep a night. Sleeping too little is linked with obesity. This is partly due to lack of sleep causing many people to eat more and be less active.
 - Reduce their screen time. Having too much of it can cause poor sleep, weight gain and even mental health problems. Having less time watching a screen can make time for more activities with friends and family.
 - Help them create healthy eating habits. Parents can show kids how to eat healthy by including plenty of veggies, fruits and lean meats. They can also encourage the whole family to drink water instead of sugary drinks.
 - Limit salt, added sugar and saturated fat. The less often these types of food are eaten, the more they will feel like a treat when they are. Everyday snacks like carrots with hummus, an apple with a spoonful of peanut butter or grapes with a half cup of plain, low-fat yogurt are healthier choices.
 - Help them stay active. [Physical activity](#) has many benefits like strengthening bones and muscles, decreasing blood pressure and reducing the risk of chronic diseases.
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Doing Our Part to Help Prevent Suicide



The rates of suicide have continued to increase across the nation and in our state. DPH's most recent [report](#) shows South Carolina ranks 29th in the nation in suicide rates. It has increased in the Palmetto State by 9.8% over the past 10 years. It is the 12th-leading cause of death in South Carolina. September is National Suicide Prevention Month.

While stress in life is normal, suicidal thoughts or actions are not a standard response to stress. If someone you know may be showing warning signs, the [National Institute of Mental Health](#) recommends five steps you can take to help someone in emotional pain.

1. Ask them, "Are you thinking about killing yourself?" This is not an easy question to ask. But studies show that asking someone at-risk doesn't increase suicide or suicidal thoughts.
2. Keep them safe. Reduce their access to lethal items or places. Asking them if they have a plan and removing or disabling the lethal means can make a difference.
3. Be there. Listen carefully to them. Learn what they are thinking and/or feeling. Research suggests talking to them about suicide may reduce their suicidal thoughts.
4. Help them connect. Remember and save the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline number, which is just 988. You can also help them connect with a trusted friend, family member, pastor or mental health professional.
5. Stay connected. Keep in touch with the person after a crisis or after being released from care. It can help. Studies have shown the number of suicide deaths goes down when someone checks on the person.

Healthy Connections Medicaid covers a broad array of behavioral health services for people facing mental health challenges.

Updates to Medicaid Benefits

Your health is important to us. Healthy Connections Medicaid made some changes and new benefits to help. These changes apply to Medicaid members enrolled in a managed care plan. They also apply to those who are not.

On July 1, 2024, the South Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (SCDHHS) changed to a single preferred drug list (PDL). A PDL is a list of outpatient drugs and pharmacy products that recommends health care providers prescribe one product over another. Doctors and pharmacists check the PDL to see the drugs Medicaid covers. This helps make sure the drugs members use are safe and effective.

Moving to one PDL will not impact Medicaid members if they are not enrolled with a managed care plan. Members who will be impacted by this change will receive a letter from their plan.

This will mean all Medicaid members will use the same PDL. It means if you switch managed care plans in the future, both plans will have the same PDL. It may also mean Medicaid members who are taking a drug that is not on the single PDL will need to switch to one on it.

SCDHHS has worked with its managed care plans to create a continuity of care period. This means members can use their current drugs while the state moves to a single PDL. Medicaid members who have a prescription dated on or before June 30, 2024, can keep accessing their prescribed drugs for up to six months or through Dec. 31, 2024. This is regardless of whether it is included on the single PDL. It will give Medicaid members time to work with their doctors to figure out their best course of treatment. Members will get more info from their managed care plan about their choices. They will also learn how to work with their health care provider.

In addition to the change to a single PDL, we have added coverage or made changes to other policies this year too. Here is a summary of recent changes to Healthy Connections Medicaid benefits.

- Coverage of more autism spectrum disorder (ASD) services. Healthy Connections Medicaid added coverage of four new services used to treat ASD. This includes additional assessment and treatment coverage. This policy change means the full array of ASD services is now covered for members.
 - Services are now covered without copays. All Healthy Connections Medicaid services are covered without copays. This change applies to services received on and after July 1, 2024.
 - Extension of continuous glucose monitoring. We have extended coverage of continuous glucose monitoring to all full-benefit Healthy Connections Medicaid members with Type 1 and 2 diabetes. Before this change, the service was covered
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for children with diabetes, women with gestational diabetes and adults with Type 1 diabetes only.

- Increased access to peer support services. Peer support services help people in their recovery from mental health and/or substance abuse disorders. This is done by sharing similar lived experiences and recovery. Healthy Connections Medicaid recently changed its policy to allow more behavioral health providers to enroll to offer these services.
- Coverage of Oncotype DX® Breast Cancer Assay. This lab service checks how likely a cancer is to grow. This new service is covered for adult full-benefit Healthy Connections Medicaid members who have recently been diagnosed with breast cancer.
- Addition of a new device to treat mild obstructive sleep apnea (OSA). A new device to treat mild OSA is now covered for full-benefit Healthy Connections Medicaid members ages 18 years and older. Eligible members must have a diagnosis of mild OSA.

How to Keep Your Cholesterol in Check

Cholesterol is a waxy substance that circulates in your blood. Your body needs it to build cells and make vitamins. But having too much of it can be bad for your health. Your liver makes all the cholesterol you need. The rest of it comes from



animal-based food you eat like meats and dairy products. Those same foods can also be high in fats, which can increase the cholesterol in your body. This can become unhealthy.

Having high cholesterol can put you at a higher risk for heart disease and stroke. That's why it's important to get your levels checked. September is Cholesterol Education Month. Adult Healthy Connections Medicaid members are covered for a physical at least once every two years. During this time, your doctor may check your cholesterol levels.

Until you get checked by a doctor, there are [a few lifestyle changes](#) you can make to help improve your cholesterol levels.

1. Eat heart-healthy foods. This can include food with omega-3 fatty acids like salmon, walnuts and flaxseed. Up the amount of soluble fiber you eat. This is in foods like oatmeal, kidney beans, Brussels sprouts, apples and pears.
2. Increase your physical activity. Exercising can lower cholesterol. Adding physical activity, even just for a short amount of time at different moments throughout the day can be impactful. Try activities like taking a brisk daily walk during your lunch hour, riding a bike or playing a sport.
3. Quit smoking. Within 20 minutes of quitting, your blood pressure and heart rate recover from the spike from smoking. After three months of quitting, your blood circulation and lung function improve. Within a year of quitting, your risk of heart disease is half that of a smoker.
4. Lose weight. Having even a few extra pounds can add to high cholesterol. Making small changes like switching sugary drinks to water or eating snacks low in fat can make a difference. Try taking the stairs instead of the elevator or increasing standing activities like cooking or yard work.
5. Stop drinking alcohol or drink it in moderation. If you do drink alcohol, do it only in small amounts. For healthy adults, that means up to one drink a day for women of all ages and men over 65 years old. It means up to two drinks for men younger than 65.

Help for Sickle Cell Disease

Sickle cell disease (SCD) is a group of inherited red blood cell disorders. SCD makes red blood cells hard and sticky. Normal red blood cells are round and easy to move. This change causes those red blood cells to get stuck in blood vessels and stop the flow. It can also cause the sickle cells to die early, which means less red blood cells in the body. This can lead to pain and damage. SCD is common in African Americans. According to the CDC, about one in 365 African American babies are born with it. SCD is a lifelong illness. It is genetic and can't be prevented. It can be treated though.

September is Sickle Cell Awareness Month. If you or someone you know has SCD, the state has some services to help patients, caregivers and healthcare providers. These include the South Carolina SCD Registry, newborn screening and DPH's Sickle Cell program.

The [registry](#) was launched by DPH in May 2023. It was created to help health officials better understand the people who have SCD in the state. Babies are also checked for SCD at birth as part of the state's newborn screening test. Early detection is key to making sure someone with SCD gets the right care to help them live a healthy life. The newborn screening is a covered service for Healthy Connections Medicaid members. Treatment for SCD is also covered by Medicaid. DPH's Sickle Cell program provides information to the public on SCD and related topics. Through the program, eligible people with SCD can get extra help. This may include care planning and payment support for medical services, supplies, equipment and medications. To see how to qualify or to learn more, visit [DPH's website](#).

Updating Your Mailing Address

Have you moved? If so, you should update your contact info now. If we don't have the right contact info, you could miss important updates. You can change your address, phone number and email address using one of the ways below.

1. Online at apply.scdhhs.gov.
2. By phone at (888) 549-0820. The Healthy Connections Medicaid Member Contact Center is open Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.
3. In person at your [local eligibility office](#). They are open Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.

To change your info, you will need your Medicaid card or Social Security number, date of birth, phone number and new address.

It is important to open and read mail from Healthy Connections Medicaid or your managed care plan. Mail with one of the logos below is almost always time sensitive. It is likely you need to respond by a set date. If you have questions about mail from us, call the Member Contact Center at (888) 549-0820. It is open Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.

You've Got



Mail!

Please open mail related to your Healthy Connections Medicaid benefits immediately. Mail with one of these logos is usually time sensitive and may require action on your part.

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Thank you for reading Healthy and Connected. Follow SCDHHS on our Facebook and X pages for regular updates. You can also [view the Medicaid Member Handbook](#) on SCDHHS' [website](#) to learn more about what is covered, where to go to ask questions and more.

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