
FEHB Program Carrier Letter

All Carriers

U.S. Office of Personnel Management
Healthcare and Insurance

Letter No. 2014 - 26

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Fee-for-service [22] Experience-rated HMO [22] Community-rated HMO [24]

SUBJECT: Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB) Program Carrier Guidance on Ebola Virus

Purpose

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) is issuing guidance on Carrier responsibilities for handling enrollees and family members exposed to Ebola virus.

Background

Federal employees from numerous agencies have been assigned to duties that could expose them to individuals infected with Ebola virus. All appropriate precautions are being taken to protect their health and safety. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Department of Defense and others have issued guidance about training, monitoring for potential exposure, risk evaluation, travel/restricted movement, and medical clearance. The World Health Organization has declared Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) to be a “public health emergency of international concern” and the growing number of Ebola cases in West Africa has captured the attention of world leaders. The first cases diagnosed in the United States (US) highlight the importance of effective strategies to identify those at risk and limit further exposure.

The Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Defense, Department of State, Department of Homeland Security, Department of Veterans Affairs and other Federal agency personnel are involved in the global or domestic response to EVD. The CDC has taken the US clinical lead and posts pertinent information at www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola. Hospitals and medical professionals are simultaneously refreshing their understanding of this disease and its management. We expect that carriers are also undertaking a comprehensive review to update and align policies.

Carrier Responsibility Guidance

As with natural disasters and other public health emergencies, FEHB carriers should remain abreast of the evolving situation and inventory capabilities in case action is needed on behalf of an enrollee or family member that suffers exposure or infection. Special consideration may be required to ensure that affected enrollees and family members receive appropriate medical support.

Specifically:

- Carrier Letter 14-13 provides guidance on coverage of medications or vaccines authorized under FDA Emergency or compassionate use provisions at www.opm.gov/healthcare-insurance/healthcare/carriers/2014/2014-13.pdf
- Carrier Letter 12-09 (Section II, Subsection B) provides guidance on experimental or investigational therapies provided under the auspices of an approved clinical trial at www.opm.gov/healthcare-insurance/healthcare/carriers/2012/2012-09.pdf
- On a case-by-case basis in consultation with the relevant public health authority and OPM, carriers should be prepared to relax referral or pre-authorization requirements to provide benefits for
 - Care at specialized centers
 - Transportation reimbursement
 - Early refills of prescription medications for displaced individuals
- In the case of a work related exposure that may be payable by the Office of Workers' Compensation Programs (OWCP), FEHB carriers should provide immediate payment and seek subsequent reimbursement from OWCP.

To date, medical evacuation and patient transport has occurred in accordance with CDC guidance at www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola/hcp/guidance-air-medical-transport-patients.html. Additionally, Federal agencies deploying workers to Ebola outbreak areas are incorporating medical evacuation arrangements into their planning. Patients may also need to be moved domestically to centers equipped to handle their specialized care. Accordingly, FEHB carriers should review any relevant contracts with air ambulance companies to assess whether resources are in place to safely transport infectious patients. We hope that these capabilities will not be needed, but believe prudence dictates such an assessment.

By separate communication, OPM is addressing workforce management policy to complement the medical response to this emerging public health threat.

Carrier Reporting Requirements

Please notify your contract specialist in the event that your plan becomes involved in arranging the care of an FEHB enrollee or family member exposed to or infected with EVD. After hours or on weekends, you may alert us via email directed to FEHBevd@opm.gov. We would also appreciate notification regarding key questions or insights that we can share with other FEHB plans. As circumstances dictate, we will develop and post Frequently Asked Questions to the carrier website.

You may also wish to check the following websites:

- www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola
- www.nih.gov/health/ebola.htm
- www.who.int/csr/disease/ebola/en
- www.osha.gov/SLTC/ebola
- www.dhs.gov/ebola-response

Conclusion

As always, thank you for your attention to the health of our Federal workforce and families.

If you have any questions about the information provided in this letter, please contact your contract specialist or Avisa Hwang at Avisa.Hwang@opm.gov.

Sincerely,

John O'Brien
Director
Healthcare and Insurance