COVID-19 Vaccination:
Important Information from Our Medical Director

I want to strongly encourage all of you, with very few exceptions, to be vaccinated against COVID-19. The vaccines are safe and effective and are a powerful tool to save lives, stop the spread of the disease, and open our communities back up. Still, it’s understandable that you might have some concerns. That’s why I want to make sure you have the information you need.

**The vaccines are safe.** The COVID-19 vaccines have gone through several stages of testing (clinical trials) to prove that they are safe. The United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) also verified their safety.

**The vaccines are effective.** Clinical trials also test whether a vaccine works. Trials showed the available vaccines are extremely effective at preventing both mild and severe symptoms of COVID-19.

Some of the other information you should know includes the following:
- There is no cost to be vaccinated against COVID-19.
- Some vaccines require 2 doses. If you get a 2-dose vaccine, do not skip the 2nd dose.
- If you have already had COVID-19, you should still be vaccinated.
- The vaccine cannot give you COVID-19. It may cause side effects similar to the flu vaccine. These include muscle pain and fever.

Vaccines are currently being distributed based on risk level. If you have not been notified already, you can ask your health care provider when the vaccine will be available to you and where you can go to be vaccinated. Your provider can answer any other questions you may have.

Again, I encourage you to be vaccinated. You can protect yourself, others, and the well-being of our communities.

Sincerely,

Susan Paulson, M.D.

Susan Paulson, MD
Beware of COVID-19 Scams

Unfortunately, many people are trying to use the COVID-19 pandemic as a way to commit fraud by collecting your personal information. When it comes to phone calls, text and social media messages, and door-to-door visits, keep the following in mind.

• Don’t share your personal, medical, or financial information unless you are sure it’s safe. Some scammers may pretend to be COVID-19 contact tracers or may offer COVID-19 tests and supplies you haven’t asked for.

• Know the facts about vaccines. No honest person will ask you for money or personal information in exchange for a vaccine appointment.

If you suspect COVID-19 health care fraud, you can report it to the PrimeWest Health Compliance Hotline at 1-866-763-2952. TTY users call 1-800-627-3529 or 711. These calls are free. You can also report it to the Federal government online at www.oig.hhs.gov/report-fraud or by calling 1-800-447-8477. The call is free.

Have you ever gotten a survey from PrimeWest Health and wondered why we ask some of the questions we do?

You might expect questions from us about how often you see your provider. But how does a question about the language you speak or your access to transportation relate to your health care or well-being? We really do have good reasons for asking—and that’s why we hope you’ll take the time to answer!

For example, being able to see a provider who speaks your language is important. When we know what languages our members speak, we can work to make sure we have network providers who also speak those languages.

WHY We Ask the Questions We Ask

When we ask questions about transportation, access to food, and living situation, it helps us find out if you have other needs that may affect your health. Once we know those needs, we can help connect you to services provided by local and community agencies that can help.

It might not seem like it at first, but these questions are related to your health care and well-being! That means these questions are important to answer. Telling us this information helps us connect you with providers and offer services that can address your needs.
The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a lot of change and uncertainty. Anxiety is a common reaction to this. Sometimes, however, anxiety can become overwhelming. When this happens, it can affect your health and make it hard to get through the day. That’s why learning how to manage anxiety is important.

**MANAGING ANXIETY**

Incorporating the following into your daily life can help manage anxiety.

- **Get the facts.** Knowledge can give you power over anxiety. Learn what you can about COVID-19, how to protect yourself, and what you should do when it comes to testing and vaccination.
- **Look away.** It’s important to be informed, but spending too much time reading about the pandemic or hearing about it can increase your anxiety. Give your mind a break.
- **Exercise.** Burning off extra energy can help you feel calmer. Exercise also releases endorphins, which are hormones that make you feel good. You can read about the benefits of taking your exercise routine outside on page 6.
- **Find ways to stay connected.** Having someone to talk to can help ease anxiety. Connect with friends and family through phone and video calls, emails, letters, and texts.
- **Practice self-care.** Spend time each day doing something for yourself. Take a bath, meditate, or listen to music. Also, be sure to get enough sleep and eat as well as possible.

**Getting help**

Sometimes you simply cannot manage anxiety on your own. It’s okay if you need help. Talk to your health care provider. She may be able to refer you to a specialist or prescribe medication. Also be sure to check out page 7 for resources you can contact if you are having an emergency or need someone to talk to. Anxiety is a real problem. Don’t be afraid to ask for help!

**Telehealth for Mental Health**

Seeing your mental health care provider in person is usually best. But, sometimes that doesn’t work out. When it doesn’t, telehealth may be a good option. Telehealth means connecting electronically with your provider. Instead of going into the office, you can have your appointment over the phone or by video chat. This might work well for you if any of the following apply:

- You have concerns about COVID-19
- You don’t have access to reliable transportation
- You don’t have access to a mental health provider in your area or there is a provider in a different area you would like to see
- You are going through a rough period and going to an appointment feels impossible

If you are interested in this option, ask if the provider offers telehealth. If he does, your next mental health appointment could be a virtual one!
Falls: Risks and Prevention

People might laugh when they see someone fall on TV, but in reality, falling is no laughing matter. Among other things, falls can lead to broken bones, brain injury, pain, and a loss of independence. Certain risk factors can increase your chance of falling. Fortunately, there are steps you can take to lower that risk.

Risk factors

Several factors—including ones you may not associate with movement—can make you more likely to fall. Some examples are listed below.

- **Age.** Adults over age 65 are at an increased risk for falls: 36 million older adults fall each year in the United States. Older adults are also more likely to experience the other risk factors listed below.
- **Decline in fitness.** A drop in your physical fitness caused by age or physical inactivity can lead to muscle weakness and loss of balance, coordination, and flexibility. Each of these can increase your risk for falls.
- **Vision problems.** Not being able to see well can make it hard to judge distance and see objects you might trip over or run into.
- **Chronic conditions.** Certain conditions, like heart disease, can increase weakness, dizziness or lightheadedness, and loss of balance. Diabetes can damage the nerves in your legs and feet, making it difficult to walk. Stiffness caused by arthritis can lead to decreased strength and loss of balance.
- **Medication.** Some medications have side effects that can lead to falls or make you less able to prevent them. Side effects can include dizziness, drowsiness, and/or confusion. The way different medications interact can also cause side effects.

Prevention

- **Talk to your health care provider.** He can assess your risk for falling and give you personalized information on reducing falls. He can also review your medications for side effects and interactions.
- **Exercise.** Building up balance and leg strength can help keep you from falling. Walking is a good way to improve both. Your health care provider can also suggest more specific exercises.
- **Take care of your eyes.** Get your vision checked regularly. If you have glasses, wear them! And keep your prescription up to date.
- **Make your home safer.** Get rid of throw rugs and clutter on the floor or stairs. Install grab-bars if needed, use handrails, and don’t try to carry heavy items up or down stairs. Keep your home well-lit and use nightlights.
- **Take extra precautions.** Wear shoes that fit well and have low heels. Try to avoid walking on wet or icy surfaces. When you have been sitting, try not to stand up too quickly. Get up slowly and pause to make sure you aren’t dizzy before starting to walk.

Sources: AgingCare, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

Let’s Be Social!

Did you know PrimeWest Health is on Facebook and Instagram? Well now you know! And now that you know, you can follow us! PrimeWest Health on social media is a great source for bite-sized health education with links to more information from trusted and reliable sources. So let’s be social—like and follow PrimeWest Health on Facebook and Instagram!
PREGNANT?

Here are 4 things you can do as you wait for your new arrival!

1. **Let your county or MinnesotaCare worker know you’re pregnant.** Your worker will update your eligibility to show you are pregnant. This means you won’t have copays while you’re pregnant.

2. **Tell your health care provider the news** and make a prenatal appointment. You should have your first prenatal appointment within the first 8 – 12 weeks of pregnancy, so schedule it as soon as you know you are pregnant.

3. **Get a car seat from your local Public Health agency.** When you go, tell them you are a PrimeWest Health member and they will set you up with a car seat and make sure it is installed correctly.

4. **Know that PrimeWest Health is here to help!** If you have questions about pregnancy, childbirth, or children, you can call Sheila, RN, at 1-888-588-4420 ext. 4149. TTY users call 1-800-627-3529 or 711. These calls are free.

YOUR PRIMARY CARE PROVIDER AND YOU

PrimeWest Health recommends that everyone have a primary care provider. Finding a provider who is right for you and seeing that provider for the majority of your health care needs can help you in many ways.

Choosing a primary care provider

A primary care provider is most often a family medicine provider or an internal medicine provider. Women may have an obstetrician/gynecologist (OB/GYN) as their primary care provider. A pediatrician may act as primary care provider for a child. Typically, if you are able to make an appointment with one of these provider types, it means that provider is available to be your primary care provider. If you aren’t sure, just ask!

Benefits of having a primary care provider

- **Care coordination.** If you have a chronic or complicated condition, your primary care provider can help coordinate your care. With your permission, she can communicate and share information with other providers to make sure your care team is on the same page.

- **Help with referrals.** If you need a referral to a specialist, such as a behavioral health provider, your primary care provider can help you get in to see the right specialist.

- **It can decrease wait times.** You will likely have to wait longer for an appointment with a provider you haven’t seen before. That’s because the appointment itself takes longer since the provider needs more time to learn about you. It’s hard for clinics to block off long chunks of time, so your wait time might be longer. On the other hand, once you have a relationship with a provider, appointments can be shorter and more easily scheduled. That means you can usually get in to see a provider you’ve seen before faster than one you haven’t.

What do YOU say?

PrimeWest Health members who saw a behavioral health specialist in 2020 and had a referral from their primary care provider reported higher satisfaction levels than those who didn’t get a referral.

94% said arranging the appointment was easy.
88% said they were satisfied with the specialist they saw.

An important relationship

Having a strong relationship with one provider can help make sure you get the best care for you. If you need help finding a primary care provider, call Member Services at 1-866-431-0801. TTY users call 1-800-627-3529 or 711. These calls are free.
Have a HEALTH PROBLEM and Not Sure What to Do?

If you are hurt or sick and aren’t sure what to do, you can always call our nurse line, Nurse24℠. When you call, you’ll get advice about whether you can take care of your injury or illness at home, if you need to make an appointment with your health care provider, or even if you need to go to the emergency room*. Just call 1-866-201-4601 (TTY 711). These calls are free.

*In an emergency that needs treatment right away, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room.

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Revising Your Healthy Eating Resolution

Eating healthier is part of many New Year’s resolutions. Below are some tips that might help if you find yourself hitting a spring slump!

- **REPLACE UNHEALTHY HABITS.** Keep track of what you eat for a few days and then look for unhealthy patterns. Then, pick one habit to change. For example, if you notice you drink soda pop every day at lunch, try replacing it with milk or water. Then, when you’re ready, pick a new habit to replace.

- **ONLY EAT WHEN YOU’RE HUNGRY.** People eat for many other reasons besides hunger. Eating out of loneliness, stress, or boredom is common. Before you start eating, ask yourself if you are truly hungry. If you’re not, try to find something to do instead. Go for a walk, work on a jigsaw puzzle, or pick up a good book.

- **SLOW DOWN WHILE YOU’RE EATING.** It takes your brain about 20 minutes to signal that your body is full. This means that if you eat slower, you will feel full faster. Tips for slowing down include putting your fork down between bites and avoiding distractions—like TV—while you eat.

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Spring is a great time to get outside and get moving! Exercise is a key part of staying healthy and preventing disease. Exercising outside has even more benefits!

- **An even better mood.** The sunshine you get when you exercise outside increases a mood-enhancing hormone called serotonin. That’s in addition to the other feel-good hormones released by exercise itself.

- **An even better workout.** When you’re outside, there are bumps and hills and even obstacles you may need to move around! This challenges your body more than exercising on a flat surface like a treadmill.

- **An even more enjoyable experience.** Exercising outside can make exercise feel less like…exercise! Being able to focus on nature gives you something else to think about.

In addition, exercising outside is free! All you need is sun protection (sunscreen, sunglasses, and a hat), shoes, and some water! Talk to your health care provider before starting an exercise routine. Then get moving outside!

Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Everyday Health, Medline Plus, WebMD

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How are oral health and physical health connected?

• The heart connection. When bacteria from your mouth enter your bloodstream, it can cause serious health problems. The connection is not fully understood, but studies link heart disease, clogged arteries, and stroke to oral bacteria in the bloodstream.

• The lung connection. Inhaling the bacteria from your mouth into your lungs can lead to pneumonia and other respiratory diseases.

• The diabetes connection. If your blood sugar is not controlled, you are more likely to have problems with your oral health. Uncontrolled blood sugar leads to more bacteria in your mouth, which can lead to cavities and gum disease. Dry mouth, bleeding gums, and infections may be signs your blood sugar is not under control.

• The pregnancy connection. Changes in hormones and eating habits during pregnancy can increase the risk for oral health problems. In turn, gum disease during pregnancy has been linked to preterm delivery and low birth weight. Be sure to keep seeing your dentist during pregnancy!

How can you keep your mouth—and body—healthy?

• See a dentist regularly for checkups and cleanings.
• Brush your teeth for 2 minutes, 2 times a day, with fluoride toothpaste.
• Floss your teeth once a day.
• Eat a balanced diet, limit sugary drinks like soda pop, and don’t snack between meals.

Keep connected!
Make sure the connection between your mouth and body is a healthy one! Practice good oral health habits and see your dentist regularly.
Health and wellness or prevention information

NOTE: The information in this magazine is not professional medical advice. It is not a substitute for diagnosis or treatment. Do not ignore your health care provider’s advice or wait to ask for it because of something you read here. Links to other websites are provided as a resource only. PrimeWest Health does not endorse, recommend, or pay for products or services offered by such sites.
Attention. If you need free help interpreting this document, call the above number.

Mلاحظة: إذا أردت مساعدة مجانيّة لترجمة هذه الوثيقة، اتصل على الرقم أعلاه.

Attention. Si vous avez besoin d’une aide gratuite pour interpréter le présent document, veuillez appeler au numéro ci-dessus.

Thov ua twb zoo nyeem. Yog hais tias koj xav tau kev pab txhais lus rau tsab ntaub ntawv no pub dawb, ces hu rau tus najnpawb xov tooj saum toj no.

알려드립니다. 이 문서에 대한 이해를 돕기 위해 무료로 제공되는 도움을 받으시려면 위의 전화번호로 연락하십시오.

Por lo tanto, si desea recibir asistencia gratuita para interpretar este documento, llame al número indicado arriba.

Chú ý. Nếu quý vị cần được giúp đỡ dịch tài liệu này miễn phí, xin gọi số bên trên.


**Civil Rights Notice**

*Discrimination is against the law.* PrimeWest Health does not discriminate on the basis of any of the following:

- race
- color
- national origin
- creed
- religion
- sexual orientation
- public assistance status
- age
- disability (including physical or mental impairment)
- sex (including sex stereotypes and gender identity)
- marital status
- political beliefs
- medical condition
- health status
- receipt of health care services
- claims experience
- medical history
- genetic information

**Auxiliary Aids and Services:** PrimeWest Health provides auxiliary aids and services, like qualified interpreters or information in accessible formats, free of charge and in a timely manner to ensure an equal opportunity to participate in our health care programs. **Contact PrimeWest Health at memberservices@primewest.org, or call Member Services at 1-866-431-0801 (toll free) or TTY 1-800-627-3529 or 711.**

**Language Assistance Services:** PrimeWest Health provides translated documents and spoken language interpreting, free of charge and in a timely manner, when language assistance services are necessary to ensure limited English speakers have meaningful access to our information and services. **Contact PrimeWest Health at memberservices@primewest.org, or call Member Services at 1-866-431-0801 (toll free) or TTY 1-800-627-3529 or 711.**

**Civil Rights Complaints**

You have the right to file a discrimination complaint if you believe you were treated in a discriminatory way by PrimeWest Health. You may contact any of the following four agencies directly to file a discrimination complaint.

**U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Office for Civil Rights (OCR)**

You have the right to file a complaint with the OCR, a federal agency, if you believe you have been discriminated against because of any of the following:

- race
- color
- national origin
- age
- disability
- sex
- religion (in some cases)
Contact the OCR directly to file a complaint:
Director
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Office for Civil Rights
200 Independence Avenue SW
Room 515F
HHH Building
Washington, DC 20201
Customer Response Center: Toll-free: 800-368-1019
TDD 800-537-7697
Email: ocrmail@hhs.gov

Minnesota Department of Human Rights (MDHR)
In Minnesota, you have the right to file a complaint with the MDHR if you believe you have been discriminated against because of any of the following:
• race
• color
• national origin
• religion
• creed
• sex
• sexual orientation
• marital status
• public assistance status
• disability

Contact the MDHR directly to file a complaint:
Minnesota Department of Human Rights
540 Fairview Avenue North
Suite 201
St. Paul, MN 55104
651-539-1100 (voice)
800-657-3704 (toll free)
711 or 800-627-3529 (MN Relay)
651-296-9042 (fax)
Info.MDHR@state.mn.us (email)

Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS)
You have the right to file a complaint with DHS if you believe you have been discriminated against in our health care programs because of any of the following:
• race
• color
• national origin
• creed
• religion
• sexual orientation
• public assistance status
• age
• disability (including physical or mental impairment)
• sex (including sex stereotypes and gender identity)
• marital status
• political beliefs
• medical condition
• health status
• receipt of health care services
• claims experience
• medical history
• genetic information

Complaints must be in writing and filed within 180 days of the date you discovered the alleged discrimination. The complaint must contain your name and address and describe the discrimination you are complaining about. After we get your complaint, we will review it and notify you in writing about whether we have authority to investigate. If we do, we will investigate the complaint.
DHS will notify you in writing of the investigation’s outcome. You have the right to appeal the outcome if you disagree with the decision. To appeal, you must send a written request to have DHS review the investigation outcome. Be brief and state why you disagree with the decision. Include additional information you think is important.

If you file a complaint in this way, the people who work for the agency named in the complaint cannot retaliate against you. This means they cannot punish you in any way for filing a complaint. Filing a complaint in this way does not stop you from seeking out other legal or administrative actions.

Contact DHS directly to file a discrimination complaint:

Civil Rights Coordinator
Minnesota Department of Human Services
Equal Opportunity and Access Division
P.O. Box 64997
St. Paul, MN 55164-0997
651-431-3040 (voice) or use your preferred relay service

PrimeWest Health Complaint Notice
You have the right to file a complaint with PrimeWest Health if you believe you have been discriminated against because of any of the following:

- medical condition
- health status
- receipt of health care services
- claims experience
- medical history
- genetic information
- disability (including mental or physical impairment)
- marital status
- age
- sex (including sex stereotypes and gender identity)
- sexual orientation
- national origin
- race
- color
- religion
- creed
- public assistance status
- political beliefs

You can file a complaint and ask for help in filing a complaint in person or by mail, phone, fax, or email at:

Rebecca Fuller
Civil Rights Coordinator
PrimeWest Health
3905 Dakota St
Alexandria, MN 56308
Toll Free: 1-866-431-0801
TTY: 1-800-627-3529 or 711
Fax: 1-320-762-8750
Email: rebecca.fuller@primewest.org

American Indian Health Statement
American Indians can continue or begin to use tribal and Indian Health Services (IHS) clinics. We will not require prior approval or impose any conditions for you to get services at these clinics. For elders age 65 years and older this includes Elderly Waiver (EW) services accessed through the tribe. If a doctor or other provider in a tribal or IHS clinic refers you to a provider in our network, we will not require you to see your primary care provider prior to the referral.