

PrimePartners

for Case Managers

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Flu Prevention: Encourage Members to Get Vaccinated and Wash Their Hands!

Elizabeth Warfield, RN, BSN, PHN, Special Needs Plan Manager

Fall means flu season! We encourage you to talk with members about how to reduce their risk of illness by taking precautionary measures, including getting vaccinated and keeping their hands washed.

Vaccination

A flu vaccine is the best way to prevent the flu. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that everyone age 6 months and over (with some exceptions*) get an annual flu vaccine. An annual flu vaccine is especially important for people in any of the following high-risk groups:

- Children ages 6 months – 5 years
- Adults age 65 and over
- Residents of nursing or long-term care facilities
- People with chronic health conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, or asthma
- Pregnant women
- People who care for or live with people in high-risk groups, such as health care workers, family members, and other direct caregivers (CDC "Preventive Steps")

Encourage the members you work with to talk with their health care provider about getting a flu vaccine. This encouragement can go a long way, especially if a member is hesitant about getting vaccinated. You can also provide education about the flu and the flu vaccine to address some of the concerns that cause hesitation. Make sure members understand that the flu vaccine *cannot* give them the flu. What it can do is help protect the person getting vaccinated from getting the flu *and* protect others (including people who aren't able to get the flu vaccine), via herd immunity.

Members who were vaccinated in previous years but who still got the flu may question the vaccine's effectiveness. People in this situation may have been exposed to a strain of the flu virus that the vaccine did not cover or they may have been exposed to the flu before their vaccination took effect. Let members know that each year's flu vaccine is formulated to protect against the most common strains of the flu virus as identified by researchers (CDC "Preventive Steps"). While the vaccine may not be 100 percent effective, it is the best protection available.

Handwashing

In addition to the flu vaccine, handwashing is an important tool in preventing the spread of the flu and other illness. Remind members that proper handwashing means more than a quick rinse, and should include the

following steps: wet hands with clean, running water and apply soap; rub hands together to lather the entire hand, including fingers and under the nails; scrub for **at least 20 seconds**; rinse well with clean water; and dry.

If soap and water are not readily available, hand sanitizer can be helpful, but make sure members know it does not kill every type of germ and doesn't work as well when hands are visibly dirty (CDC "When and How").

Help members stay healthy this flu season

In addition to getting vaccinated and keeping their hands washed, let members know about other preventive steps they can take, such as avoiding touching their eyes, nose, and mouth; disinfecting frequently touched surfaces and objects; and limiting contact with people who are sick. Likewise, remind members to stay home when they are sick and to cover their mouths when coughing or sneezing (CDC "Preventive Steps").

Talk with members about how serious the flu can be—it is more than "just a nasty cold" and it can lead to hospitalization and even death. Reinforce the message that the best protection is getting vaccinated and practicing preventive measures such as good handwashing techniques.

*Some people should *not* get the flu vaccine. People with any of the following should talk to their health care provider before getting vaccinated:

- History of a severe allergic reaction to a flu shot
- Severe egg allergy
- History of Guillain-Barré syndrome
- Symptoms of illness or infection (especially fever) (CDC "Who Should")

Sources:

- CDC, "Preventive Steps," September 2019, www.cdc.gov/flu/prevent/prevention.htm.
- CDC, "When and How to Wash Your Hands," September 2019, www.cdc.gov/handwashing/when-how-handwashing.html.
- CDC, "Who Should and Who Should Not Get a Flu Vaccine," September 2019, www.cdc.gov/flu/prevent/whoshouldvax.htm?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fflu%2Fprotect%2Fwhoshouldvax.htm. 

Breast Cancer Awareness: Talk to Members about Mammograms

Jennifer Bundy, RN, MSN, PHN, CMCN, CCP, Director of Care Management

While October is a month set aside for raising awareness about breast cancer, PrimeWest Health encourages county case managers to talk with members about the importance of mammograms throughout the year.

During your conversations, let members know that mammograms are effective. The rate of breast cancer deaths dropped 39 percent between 1989 and 2015, a decrease believed to be due to earlier detection and better treatment. This underscores the importance of letting members know that mammograms can find cancer before any symptoms show up, and that the earlier cancer is found, the more effectively it can be treated (ACS).

A discussion about mammograms is also a good time to tell members about lifestyle changes that can help reduce the risk of breast cancer, such as not smoking, controlling weight, and being physically active. Limiting alcohol is another important lifestyle change. You can learn more about why in the following article, "Alcohol and Breast Cancer."

PrimeWest Health offers certain members incentives for having a mammogram. These incentives are available to eligible female members ages 52 – 74 who are enrolled in Families and Children, MinnesotaCare, or Special Needs BasicCare (SNBC). If you work with members who you think may be eligible, please send an email to caremanagement@primewest.org. We'll review the member's information and mail the member a voucher if she is eligible.

Thank you for taking the time to encourage members to get their yearly screenings and letting them know that early detection really *does* save lives!

Source:

- American Cancer Society, *Breast Cancer Facts & Figures 2017 – 2018*, Atlanta: American Cancer Society, 2017, www.cancer.org/content/dam/cancer-org/research/cancer-facts-and-statistics/breast-cancer-facts-and-figures/breast-cancer-facts-and-figures-2017-2018.pdf. 

Alcohol and Breast Cancer

Danielle Turner, Behavioral Health Care Coordinator

Many people use alcohol as a way to unwind or incorporate it into their social interactions. In 2016, for example, 63.7 percent of Minnesotans reported that they drink alcohol (MDH). What many people may not know is that alcohol consumption can increase a woman's risk of developing breast cancer (National Cancer Institute).

Alcohol can change the way the body metabolizes estrogen. This can lead to high blood estrogen levels, which, in turn, can increase the risk of developing hormone-receptor-positive breast cancer (Susan G. Komen). Alcohol may also add to the risk of developing breast cancer by increasing other hormones associated with hormone-receptor-positive breast cancer and by damaging cell DNA (Breastcancer.org).

Women do not have to engage in binge drinking or be diagnosed with an alcohol use disorder to be at an increased risk. According to Breastcancer.org, "Compared to women who don't drink at all, women who have three alcoholic drinks per week have a 15% higher risk of breast cancer. Experts estimate that the risk of breast cancer goes up another 10% for each additional drink women regularly have each day."

You can help by educating members about the risks associated with alcohol and talking to them about their alcohol consumption. Encourage members who use alcohol to decrease their intake, no matter how much they consume. Offer ideas for alcohol alternatives such as mocktails or smoothies. For members who choose not to discontinue using alcohol, recommend they slowly sip their drink to reduce their consumption. If you feel a member has a problem with alcohol, you can recommend that they get a Rule 25 assessment or a comprehensive assessment to evaluate their need for substance use disorder treatment.

Encouraging lifestyle changes like limiting alcohol can play a big part in reducing the risk for breast cancer. If you have questions, please contact **Danielle Turner**.

Sources:

- Breastcancer.org, "Drinking Alcohol," accessed October 3, 2019, www.breastcancer.org/risk/factors/alcohol.
- Minnesota Department of Health (MDH), "Alcohol and Other Drugs: Quick Facts," April 3, 2019, www.health.state.mn.us/communities/alcohol/data/quickfacts.html.
- National Cancer Institute, "Alcohol and Cancer Risk," reviewed September 13, 2018, www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/causes-prevention/risk/alcohol/alcohol-fact-sheet.
- Susan G. Komen, Alcohol," January 9, 2019, www5.komen.org/BreastCancer/DrinkingAlcohol.html. 

Recognizing Risk Factors and Warning Signs of Suicide

Nancy Euteneuer, RN, Behavioral Health Manager

Suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the United States, accounting for close to 45,000 deaths in 2016. Being aware of risk factors and warning signs can help identify those who are at increased risk of death by suicide.

Risk factors

Risk factors are circumstances or events that may increase someone's risk of a suicide attempt. Medical concerns such as mental health diagnoses, chronic pain, or substance misuse can be risk factors for suicide, as can significant

negative life events such as trauma or loss. In addition, previous suicide attempt(s) or the loss of a loved one to suicide can increase a person's risk for suicide. Access to lethal means is another risk factor that should be assessed.

It's important to note that more than half of all deaths by suicide were not associated with a diagnosed or known mental health condition. Because a condition is not diagnosed does *not* mean it doesn't exist.

Warning signs

Warning signs are behaviors a person exhibits that may indicate he/she is actively contemplating suicide or has a plan in place. Warning signs may include verbalizations of hopelessness or lack of purpose and talk of death. More than one in five people who died from suicide in 2016 expressed their intent to commit suicide.

Sudden behavior changes can also be a warning sign of suicide and can include increased substance use or misuse or reckless behavior. A change in social activities, such as withdrawing from usual activities or relationships without a reason, can also indicate someone may be considering suicide.

How you can help

If you notice a member is exhibiting or experiencing risk factors and/or warning signs or makes comments regarding suicide, take action. **Don't be afraid to directly ask the person if he/she is thinking about suicide.** Arrange for someone to stay with the person, help get immediate professional help if needed, connect him/her with ongoing support services, and take steps to reduce access to lethal means.

You can also give members information for the Crisis Text Line and the Suicide Prevention Lifeline. Both services are available to anyone 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

- Crisis Text Line: Text **MN** to **741741**
- Suicide Prevention Lifeline: Call **1-800-273-8255 (1-800-273-TALK)**

Source:

- American Psychiatric Association (APA), "Suicide prevention," reviewed June 2018, www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/suicide-prevention. 

Livanta: Minnesota's New QIO

Effective June 8, Minnesota's Beneficiary & Family Centered Care (BFCC) Quality Improvement Organization (QIO) changed to Livanta. If members with Medicare have questions or complaints about their health care, please let them know they can contact Livanta. You can explain to them that Livanta is a group of doctors and other health care professionals—not connected with PrimeWest Health—who help improve the quality of care for people with Medicare. Members with Medicare can make a complaint to Livanta about the following:

- Quality of care received
- A hospital stay they think is ending too soon
- Home health care, skilled nursing facility (SNF) care, or comprehensive outpatient rehabilitation facility (CORF) services they think are ending too soon

You can also file a complaint with Livanta on behalf of a member with Medicare as long as you have the member's consent.

Call: **1-888-524-9900** (toll free; TTY users call **1-888-985-8775**)

Fax: **1-833-868-4059**

Write: Livanta BFCC-QIO Program

10820 Guilford Rd, Ste 202

Annapolis Junction, MD 20701 

Tell Us Your Topic Ideas!

We hope you like what you see in *PrimePartners*. To help make sure there's even more of interest to you, we invite you to let us know what topics you'd like to see addressed in future issues. Just click on the button below to submit an idea.



Important Dates

✓ County supervisor meetings

Meetings are held the third Thursday of the month, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., at PrimeWest Health in Alexandria, unless otherwise noted.

2019

November 21

December 19

2020

January 16

February 20

March 19

April 16

May 21

Contact Information

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danielle.turner@primewest.org

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