

Nebraska State and Legislative Actions:

Governor Update

Gov. Pete Ricketts began his Monday press conference by asking Nebraskans to consider what they can do to further limit their social interactions. He then announced that he spoke with Dr. Anthony Fauci earlier in the day, and that Dr. Fauci said Nebraska was on the same page as the guidelines Fauci has recommended.

Domestic Violence

Gov. Ricketts said cases of domestic violence and sexual assault are likely to increase amid these difficult times. He said we need to keep aware for signs of abuse and violence, especially right now since victims can be trapped at home more. Lynne Lange, on behalf of the Nebraska Coalition to End Sexual and Domestic Violence, joined the Governor and announced that numerous shelters and programs across the state are available to keep people safe during the crisis.

Q&A

Gov. Ricketts was asked why Nebraska hasn't implemented a stay-at-home order, and he said the entire state is now under a directed health measure. He said that the DHMs across the state are very similar to the stay-at-home orders in other states, and even more strict than some implemented. He noted Florida, which is under a shelter-in-place order, is still allowing religious services—whereas Nebraska is not. The Governor was also asked about a letter sent to him signed by Grand Island doctors asking for additional stay-at-home measures to be implemented. He said he had a phone call with those doctors, as well as the Mayor of Grand Island, and that they will be working together to address their concerns by talking to both employees and employers about the guidelines currently in place, as well as communicating more with minority communities.

Medicaid Waiver

This morning, the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services announced that Nebraska Medicaid submitted an 1135 Waiver application to the federal government amid the coronavirus pandemic. "This waiver will give Nebraska Medicaid certain flexibilities to make sure Medicaid beneficiaries are able to continue to receive needed health care services through the emergency," said Jeremy Brunssen, interim director of the Division of Medicaid and Long-Term Care, in a [press release](#).

The 1135 Waiver will affect the Nebraska Medicaid program in the following ways:

1. It will provide flexibility to waive certain provider enrollment criteria, such as revalidations and site visits, through the public health emergency.
2. It will provide flexibility to waive the annual renewal of Pre-Admission Screening and Annual Resident Review (PASRR, levels 1 and 2) for nursing facility residents for 30 days and provide other flexibilities around these requirements.
3. It will extend the time beneficiaries have available to request state fair hearings and allow Nebraska Medicaid flexibility in scheduling hearings and issuing state fair hearing decisions.
4. It will allow facilities flexibility to evacuate their patients and provide care in alternative settings if needed.

5. It will provide flexibility regarding the requirements around public notices and tribal consultation for disaster relief state plan amendments and waivers.
6. It will provide flexibility to waive prior authorizations for services for Nebraska Medicaid's fee-for-service beneficiaries, when clinically appropriate.

Federal:

Hydroxychloroquine: An Overview

In recent days, the White House has called on doctors to use hydroxychloroquine, or commonly known as Plaquenil, when treating patients diagnosed with COVID-19.¹ However, there have been many differing opinions on the use of the drug. See the facts below:

- **Origin:** Derived from quinine, which French chemists discovered in 1820 by deriving quinine from the bark of cinchona tree. In 1934, German scientists created the synthetic chloroquine as part of a class of anti-malarials. Hydroxychloroquine is the less-toxic version of chloroquine.
- **Effectiveness in Treating COVID-19:** Plaquenil has shown in labs that it has some effectiveness in treating the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus causes. However, Dr. Deborah Birx has said just because something is shown effective in a lab doesn't mean that will be the same case for humans. A study in China revealed the prognosis was good, but it needed to be investigated further. Another study conducted in France that combined the drug with antibiotic Azithromycin proved to be ineffective.
- **Is it anti-malarial?** Yes, however it isn't typically used for malaria anymore due to problems with resistance. It also has value as a "disease-modifying anti-rheumatic drug" that can decrease the pain and swelling of arthritis, according to the American College of Rheumatology. It is used to treat rheumatoid arthritis, childhood arthritis, some symptoms of lupus and other autoimmune diseases.
- **Future Studies on Humans:** Drug makers have provided millions of doses to the federal government, and the US Food and Drug Administration, which has not officially approved hydroxychloroquine for treating COVID-19, issued an emergency use authorization to treat COVID-19 patients with it.
- **Is it safe?** According the US Centers for Disease Control, hydroxychloroquine is well tolerated in COVID-19 patients. The American College of Rheumatologists says it's well tolerated in general. Side effects are rare, and typically include nausea and diarrhea. Other side effects include rashes, hair changes, weakness and, in rare instances, anemia or changes in vision—though these are less common.

¹ <https://www.cnn.com/2020/04/06/health/hydroxychloroquine-coronavirus-covid-19-explainer/index.html>