



CMS RELEASES ADDITIONAL WAIVERS FOR HOSPITALS AND OTHER FACILITIES

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The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) released additional waivers for hospitals and other healthcare facilities. The newest waivers:

- Expand hospitals' ability to offer long-term care services ("swing beds");
- Waive distance requirements, market share, and bed requirements for Sole Community Hospitals;
- Waive certain eligibility requirements for Medicare-Dependent, Small Rural Hospitals (MDHs); and
- Update specific life safety code requirements for hospitals, hospice and long-term care facilities.

These most recent blanket waivers are summarized below. A full list of all the waivers issued thus far is available [here](#). Copies of IHA's summaries of the prior waivers are available on [IHA's website](#).

Expanded Ability for Hospitals to Offer Long-term Care Services ("Swing-Beds")

Under section 1135(b)(1) of the Act, CMS is waiving the requirements at 42 CFR 482.58, *"Special Requirements for hospital providers of long-term care services ("swing-beds")"* subsections (a)(1)-(4) *"Eligibility"*, to allow hospitals to establish SNF swing beds payable under the SNF prospective payment system (PPS) to provide additional options for hospitals with patients who no longer require acute care but are unable to find placement in a SNF.

In order to qualify for this waiver, hospitals must:

- Not use SNF swing beds for acute level care.
- Comply with all other hospital conditions of participation and those SNF provisions set out at 42 CFR 482.58(b) to the extent not waived.
- Be consistent with the state's emergency preparedness or pandemic plan.

Hospitals must call the CMS Medicare Administrative Contractor (MAC) enrollment hotline to add swing bed services. Specifically, the hospital must attest to CMS that:

- They have made a good faith effort to exhaust all other options;

- There are no skilled nursing facilities within the hospital’s catchment area that under normal circumstances would have accepted SNF transfers, but are currently not willing to accept or able to take patients because of the COVID-19 public health emergency (PHE);
- The hospital meets all waiver eligibility requirements; and
- They have a plan to discharge patients as soon as practicable, when a SNF bed becomes available, or when the PHE ends, whichever is earlier.

This waiver applies to all Medicare enrolled hospitals, except psychiatric and long term care hospitals that need to provide post-hospital SNF level swing-bed services for non-acute care patients in hospitals, so long as the waiver is not inconsistent with the state’s emergency preparedness or pandemic plan.

The hospital shall not bill for SNF PPS payment using swing beds when patients require acute level care or continued acute care at any time while this waiver is in effect. This waiver is permissible for swing bed admissions during the COVID-19 PHE with an understanding that the hospital must have a plan to discharge swing bed patients as soon as practicable, when a SNF bed becomes available, or when the PHE ends, whichever is earlier.

Hospitals Classified as Sole Community Hospitals (SCHs)

CMS is waiving certain eligibility requirements at 42 CFR § 412.92(a) for hospitals classified as SCHs prior to the PHE. Specifically, CMS is waiving the distance requirements at paragraphs (a), (a)(1), (a)(2), and (a)(3) of 42 CFR § 412.92, and is also waiving the “market share” and bed requirements (as applicable) at 42 CFR § 412.92(a)(1)(i) and (ii).

CMS is waiving these requirements for the duration of the PHE to allow these hospitals to meet the needs of the communities they serve during the PHE, such as to provide for increased capacity and promote appropriate cohorting of COVID-19 patients.

MACs will resume their standard practice for evaluation of all eligibility requirements after the conclusion of the PHE period.

Hospitals Classified as Medicare-Dependent, Small Rural Hospitals (MDHs)

For hospitals classified as MDHs prior to the PHE, CMS is waiving the eligibility requirement at 42 CFR § 412.108(a)(1)(ii) that the hospital has 100 or fewer beds during the cost reporting period, and the eligibility requirement at 42 CFR § 412.108(a)(1)(iv)(C) that at least 60 percent of the hospital's inpatient days or discharges were attributable to individuals entitled to Medicare Part A benefits during the specified hospital cost reporting periods.

CMS is waiving these requirements for the duration of the PHE to allow these hospitals to meet the needs of the communities they serve during the PHE, such as to provide for increased capacity and promote appropriate cohorting of COVID-19 patients.

MACs will resume their standard practice for evaluation of all eligibility requirements after the conclusion of the PHE period.

Paid Feeding Assistants

CMS is modifying the requirements at 42 CFR §§ 483.60(h)(1)(i) and 483.160(a) regarding required training of paid feeding assistants. Specifically, CMS is modifying the minimum timeframe requirements in these sections, which require this training to be a minimum of 8 hours. CMS is modifying to allow that the training can be a minimum of 1 hour in length.

CMS is not waiving any other requirements under 42 CFR §483.60(h) related to paid feeding assistants or the required training content at 42 CFR §483.160(a)(1)-(8), which contains infection control training and other elements. Additionally, CMS is also not waiving or modifying the requirements at 42 CFR §483.60(h)(2)(i), which requires that a feeding assistant must work under the supervision of a registered nurse (RN) or licensed practical nurse (LPN).

Allow Occupational Therapists (OTs), Physical Therapists (PTs), and Speech Language Pathologists (SLPs) to Perform Initial and Comprehensive Assessment for all Patients

CMS is waiving the requirements in 42 CFR § 484.55(a)(2) and § 484.55(b)(3) that rehabilitation skilled professionals may only perform the initial and comprehensive assessment when only therapy services are ordered.

This temporary blanket modification allows any rehabilitation professional (OT, PT, or SLP) to perform the initial and comprehensive assessment for all patients receiving therapy services as part of the plan of care, to the extent permitted under state law, regardless of whether or not the service establishes eligibility for the patient to be receiving home care.

Expanding the category of therapists who may perform initial and comprehensive assessments provides HHAs with additional flexibility that may decrease patient wait times for the initiation of home health services.

The existing regulations at §484.55(a) and (b)(2) continue to apply; rehabilitation skilled professionals would not be permitted to perform assessments in nursing- only cases.

CMS continues to expect HHAs to match the appropriate discipline that performs the assessment to the needs of the patient to the greatest extent possible. Therapists must act within their state scope of practice laws when performing initial and comprehensive assessments, and access a registered nurse or other professional to complete sections of the assessment that are beyond their scope of practice.

Expanding Availability of Renal Dialysis Services to ESRD Patients.

CMS is waiving the following requirements related to Nursing Home residents:

Furnishing Dialysis Services on the Main Premises: ESRD requirements at 42 CFR §494.180(d) require dialysis facilities to provide services directly on its main premises or on other premises that are contiguous with the main premises. CMS is waiving this requirement to allow dialysis facilities to provide service to its patients who reside in the nursing homes, long-term care facilities, assisted living facilities and similar types of facilities, as licensed by the state (if applicable).

CMS continues to require that services provided to these patients or residents are under the direction of the same governing body and professional staff as the resident's usual Medicare-certified dialysis facility. Further, in order to ensure that care is safe, effective and is provided by trained and qualified personnel, CMS requires that the dialysis facility staff: 1) furnish all dialysis care and services; 2) provide all equipment and supplies necessary; 3) maintain equipment and supplies in off-premises location; 4) and complete all equipment maintenance, cleaning and disinfection using appropriate infection control procedures and manufacturer's instructions for use.

Specific Life Safety Code (LSC) for Multiple Providers - Waiver Information

CMS is waiving and modifying particular waivers under 42 CFR §482.41(b) for hospitals; §485.623(c) for CAHs; §418.110(d) for inpatient hospice; §483.470(j) for ICF/IIDs and §483.90(a) for SNF/NFs. Specifically, CMS is modifying these requirements as follows:

- **Alcohol-based Hand-Rub (ABHR) Dispensers:** CMS is waiving the prescriptive requirements for the placement of alcohol based hand rub (ABHR) dispensers for use by staff and others due to the need for the increased use of ABHR in infection control. However, ABHRs contain ethyl alcohol, which is considered a flammable liquid, and there are restrictions on the storage and location of the containers. This includes restricting access by certain patient/resident population to prevent accidental ingestion.

Due to the increased fire risk for bulk containers (over five gallons) those will still need to be stored in a protected hazardous materials area. Refer to: 2012 LSC, sections 18/19.3.2.6. In addition, facilities should continue to protect ABHR dispensers against inappropriate use as required by 42 CFR §482.41(b)(7) for hospitals; §485.623(c)(5) for CAHs; §418.110(d)(4) for inpatient hospice; §483.470(j)(5)(ii) for ICF/IIDs and §483.90(a)(4) for SNF/NFs.

- **Fire Drills:** Due to the inadvisability of quarterly fire drills that move and mass staff together, CMS will instead permit a documented orientation training program related to the current fire plan, which considers current facility conditions. The training will instruct employees, including existing, new or temporary employees, on their current

duties, life safety procedures and the fire protection devices in their assigned area.
Refer to: 2012 LSC, sections 18/19.7.1.6.

- **Temporary Construction:** CMS is waiving requirements that would otherwise not permit temporary walls and barriers between patients. Refer to: 2012 LSC, sections 18/19.3.3.2.