

COVID-19 Guidance for Immigrants

FAQ for California version 7/11/20

If you're an immigrant living in California, the website below provides important information that you need to know to protect yourself, your family, and your community from coronavirus. <https://covid19.ca.gov/guide-immigrant-californians/#top>

The **Guide for Immigrant Californians** provides tips about services available to immigrant Californians, including public benefits. Some services are available regardless of immigration status. This guide is available in the following languages: **Spanish, Chinese traditional, Chinese simplified, Tagalog, Korean and Vietnamese** through the link above.

The English version of the guide can be accessed at:

https://covid19.ca.gov/img/wp/listos_covid_19_immigrant_guidance_en_daf.pdf

Please visit covid19.ca.gov for updates.

Testing & Treatment

If you have Health Insurance:

- In California, all [Health Insurance Plans](#) must provide *free* COVID-19 testing by FDA or State approved tests, without prior authorization, to people with or without symptoms.

For Undocumented and/or Low Income:

- COVID-19 testing is FREE
- Even if you are undocumented and/or don't have insurance, you can get the necessary testing and treatment for COVID-19 free through Medi-Cal emergency services, at a local clinic or hospital.
- Emergency services are also *free* for enrolled Medi-Cal beneficiaries which includes COVID-19 testing, evaluation and treatment services.
- Medi-Cal care for COVID-19 related testing or treatment DOES NOT count under the public charge rule because it is the treatment of an emergency medical condition.
- Many counties have developed health care plans for low income residents (most regardless of immigration status). Detailed information about plans, benefits, and eligibility in Alameda, Contra Costa, Fresno, Kern, Los Angeles, Merced, Monterey, Orange, Placer, Riverside, Sacramento, San Bernardino, San Diego, San Francisco, San Joaquin, San Luis Obispo, San Mateo, Santa Barbara, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, Stanislaus, Tulare, Ventura see: [County Medically Indigent Programs](#)

**Medi-Cal is a health insurance for low-income California residents who meet certain requirements. More info on Medi-cal: [Medi-Cal enrollment](#). To apply: <https://www.coveredca.com/apply>*

Medi-Nurse line:

If someone is undocumented or has no insurance or Medi-Cal, the person can contact **Medi-Nurse**, a 24/7 nurse advice line available at [1-877-409-9052](tel:1-877-409-9052). You can speak directly with a health professional

about your symptoms and get advice on where to get free testing or treatment for COVID-19 in your area. Advice on how to apply for health insurance is also provided if desired.

COVID-19 Treatment in California

All [commercial and Medi-Cal health insurance plans](#) must cover COVID-19 treatment at zero cost (including, but not limited to, co-pays, deductibles, or coinsurance) for all medically necessary screening and testing for COVID-19, including hospital (including emergency department), urgent care visits, and provider office visits where the purpose of the visit is to be screened and/or tested for COVID-19.

If a person goes to a clinic or hospital needing treatment for COVID-19 they will first be asked if he/she has any health insurance.

If the person has health insurance:

The hospital will charge the insurance, and the patient will *not* pay anything.

If the person has no insurance but is registered with Medi-Cal:

Medi-Cal pays for all expenses. The patient does not need to pay a co-charge.

If the person has no insurance and is not registered with Medi-Cal:

Someone in the clinic or hospital will work with the patient to submit an application to Medi-Cal or other health insurance carriers, if they qualify. *The patient must be provided testing, treatment and medical care—they do not need to wait until the application is approved.* If the application is accepted, the patient does not need to pay anything for treatment.

If the person does not qualify for full-scope Medi-Cal because of immigration status, they will be enrolled in COVID-19 Emergency Medi-Cal, which is free:

The physician in the clinic or hospital [will enroll them](#) in the Medi-Cal [COVID-19 Presumptive Eligibility Program](#). This entitles “individuals to seek the necessary COVID-19 diagnostic testing, testing-related services, and treatment services, including all medically necessary care such as the associated office, clinic, or emergency room visits related to COVID-19 at no cost to the individuals.” The COVID-19 PE Program coverage ends “on the last calendar day of the month in which the 60th day falls from the date of the PE application.” *Individuals in this program will not be enrolled in a Medi-Cal managed care plan (so these services will not count as a public charge for future immigration applications).*

Patients are immediately entitled to testing and medical care, without charge. “Providers are to render the COVID-19 diagnostic testing, testing-related services, and treatment services, including all medically necessary care related to COVID-19, for the individual at the time of the individual’s visit to the office, clinic, or hospital.”

ICE: Immigration and Customs Enforcement

During the COVID-19 crisis, ICE will not carry out enforcement operations at or near health care facilities, such as hospitals, doctors’ offices, accredited health clinics, and emergent or urgent care

facilities, except in the most extraordinary of circumstances. Individuals should not avoid seeking medical care because they fear civil immigration enforcement.

<https://www.ice.gov/coronavirus>

Note: Exception of “most extraordinary circumstances” is not defined

Public Charge Information

What is Public Charge?

“Public charge” is a ground of inadmissibility. Grounds of inadmissibility are reasons that a person could be denied a green card, visa, or admission into the United States. It is not a test that applies to everyone. In deciding whether to grant an applicant a green card or a visa, an immigration officer must decide whether that person is likely to become dependent on certain government benefits in the future, which would make them a “public charge.”

Who is Subject to Public Charge?

- Public charge does not apply to all immigrants. This law mainly impacts those seeking permanent resident status through family member petitions.
- In immigration law, public charge is a ground of “inadmissibility.” This law says that those who are viewed as likely to become dependent on the government in the future as a “public charge” are inadmissible. Grounds of inadmissibility only apply to those seeking entry at our borders or those applying for a green card (lawful permanent residence).
- Many immigrant categories are exempt from the public charge ground of inadmissibility, even if they might be applying for status or a green card. U visa holders, T visa holders, asylum applicants, asylees, refugees, and many more categories are exempt.
- Public charge laws do not apply in the naturalization process, through which lawful permanent residents apply to become U.S. citizens.

COVID-19 and Public Charge

All noncitizens should get the care they need. USCIS announced that testing, treatment and preventive care (including a vaccine if one becomes available) for COVID-19 will not be considered in the public charge test.

These services will have no negative impact, even if such treatment is provided or paid for by one or more public benefits, as defined in the rule (e.g. federally funded Medicaid). These services also will not impact nonimmigrants seeking an extension of stay or change of status.

Additionally, if a person subject to public charge ground of inadmissibility lives and works in a jurisdiction where disease prevention methods such as social distancing or quarantine are in place, or where the person’s employer, school, or university shuts down operations to prevent the spread of COVID-19, they may submit a statement with their application for adjustment of status to explain how such methods or policies have affected the factors USCIS must consider in a public charge inadmissibility determination. <https://www.ilrc.org/public-charge>

Additional Benefits Not Considered Public Charge Include

- Unemployment benefits
- Many food support services, with the exclusion of “food stamps”

See full list at:

- <https://www.lawfirm4immigrants.com/new-public-charge-rule/#which-benefits-are-ok-to-use>
- <https://www.uscis.gov/green-card/green-card-processes-and-procedures/public-charge>

Insurance: Additional Info Not Restrictive to Immigrants

Medi-Cal/Medicaid vs. Medicare

Medicaid:

Medicaid is an assistance program. It serves low-income people of every age. Patients usually pay no part of costs for covered medical expenses. **(Medi-Cal is California’s Medicaid program)**

Medicare:

Medicare is an insurance program. Medical bills are paid from trust funds which those covered have paid into. It serves people over 65 primarily, whatever their income; and serves younger disabled people and dialysis patients. Patients pay part of costs through deductibles for hospital and other costs. Small monthly premiums are required for non-hospital coverage. COVID-19 Testing is free for everyone (includes serology tests). No need for referral. COVID-19 Treatment requiring hospital stay may however require a co-payment charge, which will depending on the length of stay, and the type of insurance plan. Some insurers have waived those costs but not all.

<https://www.medicare.gov/medicare-coronavirus#400>

<https://www.hhs.gov/answers/medicare-and-medicaid/what-is-the-difference-between-medicare-medicaid/index.html>

<https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/faqs-on-medicare-coverage-and-costs-related-to-covid-19-testing-and-treatment>

Public Charge Implications:

The use of Medi-Cal benefits is not considered public charge for COVID-19 testing or treatment, including hospitalization, because COVID-19 is considered a medical emergency.

Additional Medicaid (Medi-Cal) benefits that are not considered public charge:

- Medicaid benefits that are used to pay for the treatment of other medical emergencies
- Medicaid benefits provided in conjunction with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act;
- Medicaid benefits received before turning 21; and
- Medicaid benefits received by a women during pregnancy and the first 60 days thereafter.

Source: <https://www.lawfirm4immigrants.com/new-public-charge-rule/#which-benefits-are-ok-to-use>

NOTE: Usage of Medi-Cal benefits in other situations will be considered as public health charge.

In case of doubt, to know what benefits are considered as Public Charge, contact a free legal representative: [Immigration Services Public Charge Contact List](#)

Cost Implications:

To know if there is any cost from using Medi-Cal for other situations than COVID-19, ask the Medi-Cal Billing Department in Sacramento. They can be reached at Tel: (916) 636-1980.

To apply for full scope Medi-Cal (for other than COVID-19): [here](#). (It can take from 1 to 45 days)

To determine eligibility for Medical or to ask other questions about Medi-Cal you can also contact your local County Welfare/Social Services Department: [County Social Services Office Listing](#).

San Francisco

Visit <https://sf.gov/information/help-immigrants-during-coronavirus> for immigration updates and financial resources.

In San Francisco, people can get assistance via Medi-Cal in the San Francisco General Hospital, or any other Clinic/Hospital listed in the 'San Francisco Health Network' <https://sfhealthnetwork.org/> (please call first to see if they are accepting new patients)

Free Legal Representative in San Francisco: "Bay Area Legal Aid" **Tel:** (415) 982-1300



Keeping Our Families and Communities Healthy



UCSF Pandemic Initiative for Equity & Action
California Prevention Training Center
Center for Excellence in Primary Care
Curry International Tuberculosis Center

UCLA Extension
UCLA Fielding School of Public Health
Community Health Sciences

