

Emerging Data Shows NEW Neurologic Symptoms May Identify COVID-19 Earlier

Dear Florida Blue Providers:

Health care professionals and others in our communities and across the nation are working diligently to find ways to combat coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and its spread. As COVID-19 continues to evolve, questions being asked include:

- Are we screening for all the right symptoms?
- Are we collecting the right data?
- Are there other important questions we need to be asking?

These are the questions the Florida-based [Brain Health Initiative](#) (BHI) and other researchers are now starting to answer. One area of emerging data is that in some cases, **sudden** neurologic symptoms are appearing before more common COVID-19 symptoms (fever, cough, shortness of breath) manifest, often resulting in more **severe** outcomes. These **new** neurologic symptoms to be aware of include:

- Loss of smell or taste
- Severe headaches
- Muscle aches
- Mental fog/confusion

A second area of emerging research indicates that patients with mental health symptoms, including depression, anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and substance use disorders, may be at heightened risk for COVID-19. Conversely, COVID-19 may lead to a worsening of pre-existing mental health symptoms. Given the critical reciprocal nature of mental and physical health, it seems apparent that mental health factors contribute to the morbidity and mortality associated with COVID-19, as well as the recovery process from this coronavirus.

As we continue to support the work and the guidelines of the Florida Department of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), we are also collaborating with BHI. Our goal is to help raise awareness of these neurologic symptoms that can occur prior to the onset of more familiar COVID-19 symptoms. If these symptoms are recognized and result in early screening, isolation of suspect cases could be implemented sooner, reducing spread and perhaps improving the course of illness and overall outcome. Further, ongoing monitoring of COVID-19 patients for neurologic or mental health symptoms is important as we gain understanding of the long-term implications of the virus.

Understanding the Neurologic and Mental Health Indicators

The data collected from the BHI indicates:

- Neurologic symptoms often precede the appearance of respiratory symptoms in patients with COVID-19 by several days.
- Neurologic symptoms are present in some of the most severe cases of the virus.
- Identifying these neurologic symptoms early in the COVID-19 testing process may reduce the severity and decrease the spread of the virus.

- Patients who attest to heavy alcohol or drug use are more likely to require ventilation in cases of respiratory illness.
- Patients who attest to depression, PTSD or severe anxiety may require the assistance of trained mental health staff during treatment, as there is heightened risk for self-harm, suicide and other behaviors that may interfere with recovery.
- Tailoring treatment based on certain neurologic and mental health symptoms may optimize recovery.

Here's What You Should Consider When Seeing Patients

As you provide care to your patients who show these new neurologic and/or mental health symptoms, please keep the following in mind:

- When screening patients for COVID-19, look for these neurologic and mental health symptoms in your evaluation.
- Once diagnosed, direct patients to self-isolate and monitor symptoms.
- Stay in regular contact with patients, as evidence suggests these patients could develop more severe cases of COVID-19.
- Observe patients over an extended period to ensure no long-term neurologic and/or mental health complications develop.

BHI Symptom Screener and Infographic Available

To assist providers with earlier detection of COVID-19, BHI has developed a *Neurologic and Mental Health Symptom Screener* to use with your patients. The tool also screens for other mental health symptoms that may be exacerbated during the pandemic. To adopt the screener into your clinical practice, you may [complete the data use agreement and register to review](#).

In addition, this [infographic](#) helps your patients understand the progression of the virus. We are sharing this infographic with our members through a variety of channels. The infographic is also available in other languages including [Spanish](#) and [Creole](#).

About BHI

The BHI is an initiative of the Massachusetts General Hospital, a Harvard Medical School teaching hospital, headquartered in Lakewood Ranch, Fla., Its mission is to protect brain health and fight brain illness across the lifespan and throughout the state of Florida.

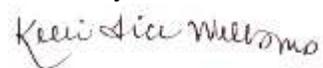
Florida Blue is a supporter of BHI's effort to identify and take action on factors associated with brain health, illness and performance across the lifespan.

Learn More

Learn more about BHI's COVID-19 Neurologic and Mental Health Campaign [here](#). This [site](#) provides additional information for your patients.

Thank you for the care you provide to our members.

Sincerely,



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