

August 18, 2021

Dear Provider,

A brief update on the COVID-19 Delta variant and our non-emergent medical transportation (NEMT) network.

**The situation:**

With the surge of the COVID-19 Delta variant, the state of Oregon is on the verge of declaring a state of emergency due to the influx of COVID patients in hospitals. This impacts NEMT availability as well. We know providers and clinics are doing everything possible to manage this with the resources they have. As you work to care for these patients and, where possible, get them discharged, we wanted to provide more details around the current situation for the NEMT network.

Columbia Pacific CCO partners with Tillamook County Transportation District (TCTD) to operate NEMT services under the NEMT brokerage NW Rides. On August 12, 2021, TCTD and NW Rides implemented its COVID-19 emergency response protocols after several district and brokerage staff members tested positive for COVID-19. As of August 17, fixed-route services have not been impacted. However, the paratransit program Dial-a-Ride and NW Rides' NEMT services have suffered due to staffing shortages. The overall impact has caused long hold times for those calling into the call center and less vehicle capacity available across all three counties.

**NEMT priority**

Helping patients as they are discharged from the hospital, and making sure other Columbia Pacific members can get to medically necessary appointments and services.

**What we're doing:**

- Immediate **call center services have been temporarily adjusted** since August 13, 2021, with many calls sent to voicemail. There is a dedicated team calling back those who leave voicemails as quickly as possible.
- A **backup NEMT call center** is currently being set up to provide scheduling support, with the aim of reducing hold times and answering live calls at normal operational levels no later than August 30, 2021. We are monitoring capacity and helping to address barriers that arise.
- We are working with NW Rides dispatch teams to **screen members** who are ambulatory and/or have someone in their household, a family, or a friend who has a vehicle and get set them up for ride reimbursement.
- We are working with NW Rides to **transition ambulatory members** who have no physical or behavioral needs to safely using public transit, when possible.
- We are prioritizing transportation for **those with critical, life-sustaining needs** and/or

rides for **members who are at highest risk of being hospitalized**.

- **If capacity is severely impacted**, we may temporarily restrict NEMT service to members with critical, life-sustaining needs and/or members who are at highest risk of being hospitalized. In that case, **the CCO may approve alternative transportation options** that support members getting to and from their health care appointments. This may include, but is not limited to:
  - Uber or Lyft
  - Local cab companies
  - Other private commercial transportation options

Reimbursements for these alternative options can be offered to health care providers and/or members directly. It is important to retain copies of receipts, if possible, to expedite processing these requests.

### **How you can help:**

1. Leave detailed voicemails when calling NW Rides if you cannot get a live agent.
2. Do not repeatedly call back in order to speak to a live agent. There is a dedicated team handling callbacks for voicemails as quickly as they can.
3. If it does not negatively impact a member's health, NW Rides may request your help in rescheduling appointments and arranging transportation.
4. Understand that it may be difficult for us to respond to last-minute requests or patients who need a higher level of service.
5. Schedule members for appointments well in advance, so they can contact their NEMT provider and the provider can plan better for needed capacity.
6. Communicate with patients about postponed or canceled appointments, clinic closures and other clinic decisions that affect patient visits.
7. Notify NW Rides if there are any unexpected clinic closures.
8. Supply NW Rides with all requested documentation when moving members to a higher level of transportation (i.e., vehicle-provided rides). This allows them to meet member needs as quickly as possible.
9. Remind patients to cancel any transportation requests when appointments have been canceled. This helps avoid deploying drivers unnecessarily, which impacts access.

**We will continue to update our website and provider portal as the situation develops. [Here are ways you can stay informed:](#)**

- Visit our online provider portal or our website
- Call Provider Customer Service: 855-722-8206, option 3

**If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact us.**

Thank you,  
Columbia Pacific CCO