

MetroPulse Provider Newsletter

Fall 2024



Urge patients to get a flu shot

The New York State Department of Health, along with the CDC, stress the importance of flu vaccinations for everyone ages 6 months and older.

Review the benefits

Most patients recognize the importance of vaccines. However, they may need a reminder from their provider to get vaccinated. Take the opportunity to recommend and offer the flu vaccine to patients during visits.

Emphasize that the vaccine has been updated to better match this year's flu viruses, enhancing its effectiveness against infection. Patients should also know vaccination is a quick and easy way to protect not just the individual but also their family and community. It helps prevent the flu, reduce the severity of illness in those who do still get sick, and decrease missed days at work or school.

Protect high-risk populations

While the flu vaccine is recommended for everyone ages 6 months and older (with rare exception), it is

particularly important for those more likely to develop serious complications. Every year, about 2,000 New Yorkers die of seasonal flu and pneumonia — a common complication of the flu. Groups at higher risk include:

- Adults ages 65 and older
- Children younger than age 2
- Pregnant people
- People with certain chronic conditions

For the latest in flu prevention and vaccine recommendations, visit [cdc.gov/flu/professionals/vaccination/vax-summary.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/vaccination/vax-summary.htm).

MEMBER REWARD REMINDER

Members can earn a reward for getting their flu shot. Direct members to this link: metroplus.org/member-rewards/.

About MetroPlusHealth

MetroPlusHealth offers a large network of doctors, hospitals, and urgent care centers. With more than 34,000 top providers and sites, members can find many offices right near them, along with local family care sites and over 100 urgent care sites like CityMD, Northwell-GoHealth Urgent Care, and more. Our network consists of over 40 hospitals, including NYC Health + Hospitals, NYU Langone, Mount Sinai, and Montefiore.

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FALL 2024

Read more about the following topics on our website:

- Helping your patients prevent diabetes
- Model of Care training
- Cultural competency training
- New Behavioral Health Announcements and Updates section
- Smoking cessation
- Rx carve-out and pharmacy benefit change
- Fluoride varnish
- Changes to COVID-19 testing coverage
- Syphilis screening
- Hepatitis C screening

Provider Services Call Center

Reach out to your MetroPlusHealth Quality Management contact or call the Provider Services Call Center at **800.303.9626**, Monday to Friday, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Reminder!

Complete your annual Model of Care training by December 31, 2024, to ensure you are ready to continue serving our members.

New breast cancer screening guidelines

Breast cancer remains a leading health concern in New York State. Staying informed about the latest screening guidelines is essential for providers to ensure early detection and effective treatment. The recent recommendations by the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) bring significant updates that impact screening protocols.

The current landscape

The incidence rate of breast cancer in New York surpasses the national average. Every year in New York, more than 16,000 women are diagnosed with breast cancer and about 2,500 women die of the disease.

Updated guidelines

In April 2024, the USPSTF updated its breast cancer screening guidelines to better align with current research and patient outcomes. Here are the key points:

- Starting at age 40, women should get mammograms every other year.
- Regular screenings should continue through age 74.

Encouraging patient compliance

Here are some tips for encouraging patients to adhere to these new guidelines:

- **Schedule reminders.** Remind patients when they are due for a screening. This can be through your office's electronic health records or with a simple reminder card.

- **Offer education.** Discuss the benefits and risks of screening with your patients. Highlight how regular mammograms can help save lives.
- **Address concerns.** Be prepared to answer questions about mammograms. Provide reassurance regarding the safety and importance of regular screenings.

MEMBER REWARD REMINDER

Members can earn a reward for completing their breast cancer screening. Direct patients to this link: metroplus.org/member-rewards/.

HOW PROVIDERS CAN HELP

Document breast screening visits. Breast cancer screenings are a measure in the MetroPlusHealth Pay for Performance (P4P) program, and your data is used as part of the program. Access your gaps-in-care list by reaching out to your MetroPlusHealth Quality Management contact or by calling the Provider Services Call Center at **800.303.9626**, Monday to Friday, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Are your patients current on vaccinations?

The National Adult and Influenza Immunization Summit (NAIIS) urges providers to increase vaccination rates. Here's how you can help:

Prioritize vaccine recommendations.

Familiarize yourself with the vaccines your patients need based on their age, lifestyle, or health conditions. Check the CDC's recommendations [here](#).

Foster a culture of vaccination.

Remind patients that vaccines not only help safeguard their own health but also contribute to the well-being of the community by:

- Preventing illnesses and disabilities
- Reducing the risk for premature death

- Limiting the spread of infectious diseases

Check vaccination status.

Regardless of whether you provide vaccines, discuss vaccination status at all visits. Regular dialogue helps foster an environment where patients are more inclined to stay up-to-date with their vaccines.

Document and refer.

Document all administered vaccines promptly and accurately. In addition, make referrals for patients to receive vaccines if they aren't available in your practice.

For information from the New York State Department of Health, click [here](#).

How to support patients with high blood pressure

One in four New Yorkers has hypertension. It's a common condition that can lead to serious health issues if not managed properly. That's why it's essential to engage with patients to help them understand and control their blood pressure. Here's how you can support them.

Facilitate regular discussions

Consistent dialogue helps emphasize the importance of monitoring and managing blood pressure. Focus on:

- **Frequency:** Discuss hypertension at every appointment, not just during annual checkups.
- **Personalization:** Tailor recommendations to each patient's specific risk factors and lifestyle.
- **Patient input:** Ask patients what matters most to them regarding hypertension management.

Clarify health risks

Educating patients on blood pressure management is crucial. For a Hypertension Management Program Toolkit with interactive e-learning modules from the CDC, click [here](#).

Explain to patients how uncontrolled high blood pressure can lead to heart disease, stroke, and other serious health problems. Emphasize that managing blood pressure can improve their quality of life and reduce the risk for complications.

Outline lifestyle changes

Lifestyle modification is the cornerstone of hypertension management. Encourage patients to take gradual, sustainable steps toward healthier habits. For example:

- Recommend replacing high-sodium favorites with lower-sodium alternatives. Patients can try a **low-sodium recipe** on the MetroPlusHealth website.
- Suggest ways to fit in 30 minutes of physical activity on most days of the week.
- Offer treatment options to cut back on smoking.

Acknowledge that it isn't easy to make lifestyle changes. Urge patients to ask for help when they need it.



Promote self-monitoring practices

Empower patients to monitor their blood pressure at home. It's a proven approach for catching and improving high blood pressure. Assist patients in selecting an easy-to-use blood pressure monitor and teach them how to track their readings accurately. If your patients have more questions about taking blood pressure, they can **watch this video**.

By implementing these practices, you can help your patients understand their condition better, manage their blood pressure effectively, and ultimately lead healthier lives.

QUESTIONS TO ASK PATIENTS

- Is there any aspect of your high blood pressure that worries you?
- What management steps have you taken since our last meeting?
- Are there specific goals you'd like to focus on?
- How confident do you feel about monitoring your blood pressure at home?
- What obstacles are getting in the way of managing your numbers?
- What could make controlling blood pressure easier for you? How can I help?

Patients with heart failure can make small changes for a big impact

Heart failure is a challenging condition. But with the right support and lifestyle adjustments, patients can manage their symptoms and enjoy full, active lives.

The power of small steps

For patients facing heart failure, the thought of making lifestyle changes can be daunting. Reassure them that it's OK to start with manageable changes. They don't have to overhaul their habits overnight. Remind them that even incremental adjustments can lead to significant improvements in their health.

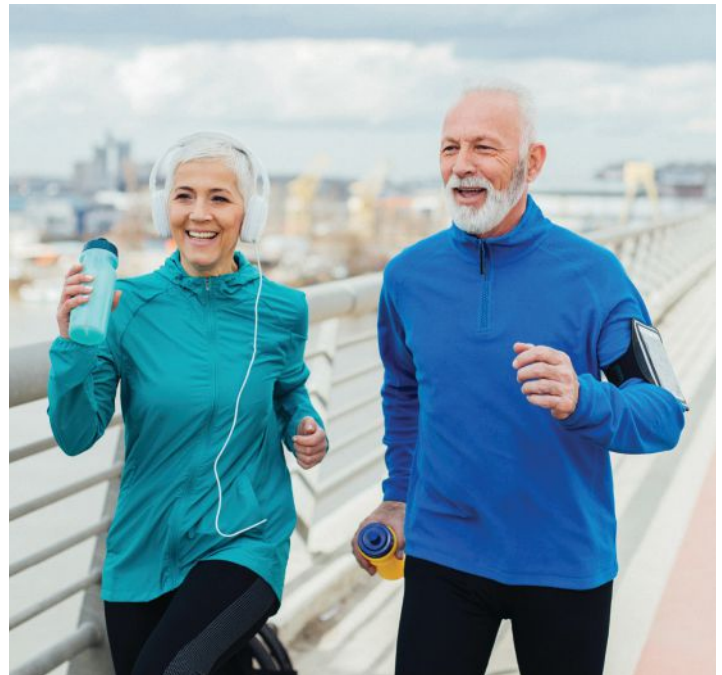
Offer support and encourage patients to reach out if they have any challenges. Asking for help now could mean avoiding hospitalization later.

Lifestyle recommendations

A heart-healthy lifestyle is vital for managing heart failure. Here are four areas where small changes can make a big difference:

- 1. Nutrition:** Recommend a diet low in sodium, saturated fats, and trans fats. Emphasize the importance of eating plenty of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. The MetroPlusHealth website also offers many **heart-healthy recipes**.
- 2. Exercise:** Encourage your patients to do physical activity that gets them moving and burning calories. It could be as simple as walking or raking leaves. Patients can also take free fitness classes offered through **Shape Up**. Direct patients to this link: nycgovparks.org/events/shape-up-nyc.
- 3. Rest:** Highlight the importance of downtime and giving the heart a chance to pump more easily. During the day, it may be easier for patients to nap after lunch or put their feet up every few hours. At night, they can use pillows to prop their head up for better sleep.
- 4. Smoking cessation:** Strongly advise patients who smoke to quit and provide cessation resources. Inform patients about the quit-smoking programs available through NYC Quits at nysmokefree.com.

Alongside these lifestyle adjustments, patients should understand that medication adherence and regular checkups are necessary for monitoring progress and adapting treatments to optimize heart health.



Monitoring symptoms

Even with adopting healthy habits, monitoring symptoms is still crucial for patients with heart failure. Talk with patients about watching for signs of worsening heart failure, such as:

- Shortness of breath (that isn't related to exercise)
- Rapid weight gain
- Swelling in the ankles, legs, or abdomen
- Loss of appetite and nausea
- Weakness, dizziness, or increased fatigue
- Frequent dry, hacking cough

Ask your patients to keep a daily log of their symptoms and report any significant changes immediately.

ENCOURAGE CARDIAC REHAB

Cardiac rehabilitation programs can significantly improve the health and well-being of patients with heart failure. For a Cardiac Rehabilitation Communications Toolkit from Million Hearts®, click [here](#).

Encourage parents to make well-child visits a **priority**

Most parents bring their children to your office when something is wrong. But they may not understand the critical importance of well-child visits for monitoring and preventive care.

While adherence to well-child visits is on the rise, about 40% of children ages 0 to 3 are still missing some recommended appointments. Disparities in income and access mean that children who need preventive care the most are even less likely to receive it.

As a provider, you can educate patients on why well-child visits matter. Explain that during these appointments, you'll ensure the child is growing and developing properly. You'll also give recommended vaccines, answer any questions, and ensure early detection of any emerging health problems.

Sticking to the schedule

Within the first 15 months of a child's life, they should have at least six well-child visits.

New parents already have a lot on their plates. Ease the burden by suggesting they make appointments in advance. Appointment reminders may increase adherence, as can addressing barriers such as a lack of transportation.

Marking important milestones

At each visit, check that the child is developing properly, mentally and physically. Record your firsthand observations of developmental milestones, as well as interviewing parents. At age 9 months, if not beforehand, do a full developmental and behavioral screening. Refer families to appropriate further testing or interventions as needed.

Encourage parents to monitor milestones between visits. One helpful tool is the CDC's free Milestone Tracker app, which includes checklists from ages 2 months through 5 years. Ask parents to share what they've noticed and report any questions or concerns.

Keep appropriate records

Getting the child into your office is only the first step. It's also important to ensure all their vital information is added to the well-child visit record. For each encounter, include:

- Date of the visit
- Child's health history
- Mental and physical developmental history
- Measurements, including weight, length, head circumference, and blood pressure
- Physical exam results
- Any specific health education or anticipatory guidance you provided
- Your signature

Take a moment to check on parents, too, asking about their mental health, their concerns about caring for their children, and their support system. These factors can influence the health and safety of the child, and the whole family.

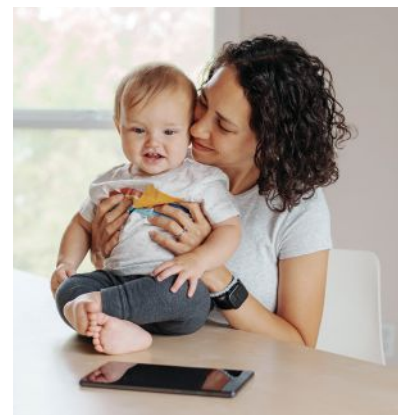
MEMBER REWARD REMINDER

Members can earn a reward for completing well-child checkups. Direct patients to this link: metroplus.org/member-rewards/.

Timing recommendations for well-child visits

The American Academy of Pediatrics Bright Futures suggests appointments at:

- 3 to 5 days
- 1 month
- 2 months
- 4 months
- 6 months
- 9 months
- 12 months
- 15 months



BEST PRACTICES FOR ADOLESCENT WELL-CARE VISITS



The importance of pediatric preventive care extends beyond the early childhood years. However, parents may not realize adolescents should still attend yearly well-child visits.

Providers can help educate families on why teens need checkups even when they don't have immediate health concerns. Discuss the ways early intervention can prevent more serious problems later, as well as establish positive health behaviors for a lifetime.

What adolescent well-care visits should entail

In addition to completing a health history and physical exam, continue to monitor adolescents for developmental milestones, such as progression through puberty. Screen for mental health conditions, substance abuse, and violence exposure. Discuss the risk for sexually transmitted infections and ensure teens have received recommended vaccines, including HPV and pneumonia.

You can use the **Bright Futures Tool and Resource Kit** to compile a teen's history, identify age-appropriate risk assessment and medical questions, and take proper next steps based on the answers.

Well-child visits differ from sports physicals, which screen for safe participation in athletic programs. However, if adolescents visit a provider only for a sports physical, providers can take the opportunity to screen for other conditions as well.

Building rapport with teen patients

Teens are naturally skeptical, but the right approach builds trust. Treat them as independent individuals, offering respect and empathy. Be honest and avoid withholding information about their health.

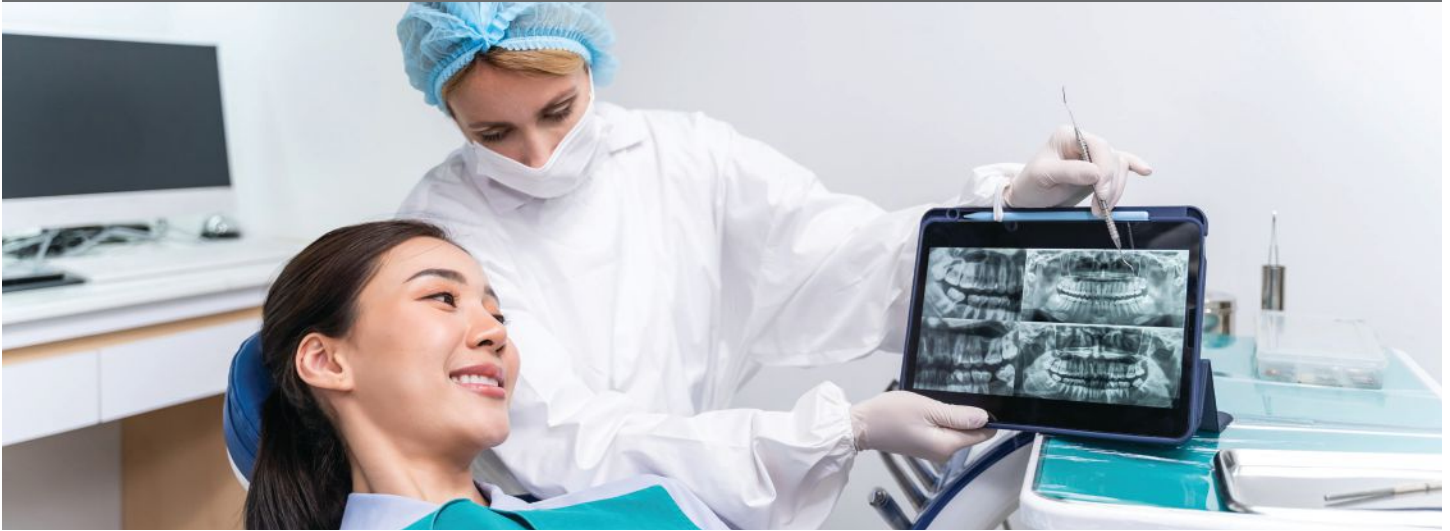
A positive experience on the first visit may mean teens are more likely to keep future appointments. That way, they'll become active participants in their health care now, and stay that way as they grow into adulthood.

MEDICATION THERAPY MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

MetroPlusHealth Medicare members have access to the **Medication Therapy Management (MTM) program**. Members who take eight or more Medicare Part D covered maintenance drugs, have three or more chronic health conditions, and are likely to spend more than \$4,935 in prescription drug costs in 2023 are automatically enrolled in this free, voluntary program. Note: Costs may change starting on January 1, 2025. Participants in the MTM program are provided with a comprehensive medication review (CMR) and a targeted medication review (TMR). Encourage your patients to take advantage of this important service provided by MetroPlusHealth. During the CMR, the

member discusses all the medications they take with a pharmacist. At the end, the pharmacist will give the patient a personal medication list with the medications discussed during the CMR as well as a medication action plan, with suggestions from the pharmacist of things the patient should discuss with their provider. With a TMR, MetroPlusHealth will mail or fax suggestions to providers every three months about prescription medications that may be safer or work better than the current medications a member is taking. As always, the prescribing provider will decide whether to consider our suggestions. The prescription medications will not change unless the provider and patient decide to change them.

Integrating oral health education into patient care



The relationship between oral health and overall health means that common diseases like cavities and periodontitis can have wide-reaching consequences. They not only influence how patients eat, speak, and smile, but are also linked with conditions like depression, cardiovascular disease, and diabetes. Periodontitis, for example, can result in worsening glycemic control for those with diabetes.

Discuss healthy habits

Encourage all patients to keep up with self-care and routine preventive services. Remind them to:

- Limit the intake of beverages and foods high in added sugar
- Avoid tobacco
- Drink tap water, which is fluoridated in New York
- Brush twice a day with fluoride toothpaste and floss daily
- Reach out to their dental provider if they have pain or other problems. They shouldn't wait until their next scheduled dental appointment.
- Complete dental checkups and cleanings once or twice a year, as advised by their provider

Patients with diabetes, weakened immune systems, or other concerns may need to visit the dentist more frequently.

Explain pediatric guidelines

Baby teeth are important. Urge parents and caregivers to foster good oral health from infancy. This includes following recommendations for pediatric oral care:

- Complete an initial dental appointment after a child's first tooth eruption within six months of the tooth coming in and no later than the child's first birthday
- Continue having dental checkups every six months, unless the provider advises a more frequent schedule
- Complete fluoride varnish application at least once every three to six months, depending on the child's risk for cavities

To help with adherence from ages 6 months to 5 years, reassure parents that fluoride varnish application is safe and painless. Let them know it can be done by a dentist or health care provider. Providers can click **here** to be directed to training resources. Fluoride varnish is a reimbursable service.

Effectiveness of care HEDIS® measures

1. **OED (oral evaluation dental services)** —
Applicable to patients younger than 21
2. **TFC (topical fluoride for children)** —
Applicable to patients ages 1 to 4

MEMBER REWARDS REMINDER

Members can earn a reward for completing their annual dental checkups. Direct patients to this link to sign up: metroplus.org/member-rewards/.

Make cervical cancer screenings a priority

Cervical cancer screenings have saved many lives over the past 40 years. They can help find high-grade precancerous lesions and cervical cancer. But everyone isn't benefiting from early detection and treatment at the same rate.

New York made headlines in 2023 for ranking fourth among all states for both incidence *and* mortality from the disease. Black and Hispanic New Yorkers have a higher rate of cervical cancer than other residents. Black women have the highest mortality rate.

Age-based recommendations

Cervical cancer is most common in women who've never been screened or waited more than five years between screenings. Proactively urge patients who have an *average risk* of developing cervical cancer to follow these screening guidelines from the U.S. Preventive Services Taskforce (USPST):

Ages 21 to 29	Screen with a Pap test every three years.
Ages 30 to 65	Consider patients' needs to decide which option is the best for them: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Pap test every three years2. High-risk human papillomavirus (hrHPV) test every five years3. Cotesting with hrHPV test and Pap test every five years
Ages 66 and older	Screening is not advised for patients who have an adequate screening history.

Patients older than age 65 with inadequate or unknown screening histories may benefit from testing. All patients with a *higher-than-average risk* for cervical cancer require a personalized plan for screening and follow-up. This includes those who have a compromised immune system or were previously treated for precancerous lesions or cervical cancer.



Care reminders

- Patients should complete screenings even if they aren't sexually active and/or have had HPV vaccines.
- Document all patient visits. Cervical cancer screening is one of the Quality Measures in the MetroPlusHealth Provider Pay for Performance (P4P) program.
- Timely, proactive follow-up improves outcomes for patients with abnormal test results.

Test patients for tuberculosis

Tuberculosis (TB) remains a concern for New York City residents. Providers are frontline defenders in the fight against TB. If you encounter a patient, including children, with suspected or confirmed TB, it's mandatory to report it to the New York City Health Department.

The NYC Health Department provides guidelines for TB treatment, referrals, and reporting. For more information, click [here](#). To reach the TB Provider Hotline, call **844.713.0559**.

For provider resources on tuberculosis, [click here](#).

Routine preventive care includes STI screenings

As with other conditions, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) like HIV may not cause early symptoms, yet they can have serious health repercussions. An STI's ability to spread, however, adds urgency to the need for routine testing. Roughly 40% of all new HIV infections are spread by people who don't know they have the virus.

HIV test recommendations

To help put patients at ease, acknowledge that HIV testing is offered to everyone as a part of routine care. The frequency is based on factors like age, gender, and lifestyle.

Age-specific recommendations

At least once	Everyone ages 13 to 64
At least once a year	Everyone ages 13 to 64 with a higher risk for infection: sexually active, uses injectable or street drugs, is in treatment for another STD
Every 3 to 6 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Men who have sex with menPeople who use PrEP and/or have a sex partner with HIV
At least once while pregnant	<ul style="list-style-type: none">As early as possible, along with tests for syphilis and hepatitis B and CRetest in the third trimester if HIV results were negative

If a patient declines testing, make a note in their medical record. You should also inform them of alternatives: Confidential, anonymous testing is available at no or low cost to anyone ages 12 and older at **NYC Sexual Health Clinics**.

Associated topics

Along with offering STI testing, inform patients about:

- Strategies for making sexual activity and/or drug use safer. Examples include using condoms and sterile needles.
- Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP). A daily pill or bimonthly injection can reduce the risk for HIV infections from sex or injectable drug use.



- Antiretroviral treatment (ART). If a patient is HIV positive, ART should be started immediately to suppress their viral load.
- Consent rules in New York State, if applicable. Minors can agree to HIV testing and PrEP or ART treatment without involving a parent or guardian.

Important member reward update

Tell your patients living with HIV about the enhanced MetroPlusHealth Rewards Program. Patients enrolled in Partnership in Care can get rewards for health screenings and activities. There is a substantial reward for attending appointments for HIV care. Learn about the program [here](#).

Tips for talking with patients

An open, honest discussion about a patient's sexual history is important, but not always easy to achieve. Replace standard risk assessment questions with open-ended ones when possible. This can help you identify what's important to the patient and mirror the language they use when appropriate. Also, listen to responses and capture relevant information. Then, use follow-up questions to obtain any critical details needed for clinical decision-making.

For advice and sample scripts, click [here](#).

Spirometry testing precautions

Providers should take precautions when they conduct spirometry testing. For best practices from the American Lung Association, click [here](#).

Mental health well-being check

Make sure to ask patients about their mental well-being. If needed, refer them to MetroPlusHealth's behavioral health services. To search for behavioral health resources, click [here](#). As always, we appreciate the care you provide for our members' health.

Provider Resource Library

The Provider Relations department is developing a Provider Resource Library. Providers will be able to access all their training needs, such as:

- Access and Availability training
- Model of Care training
- Cultural Competency training
- And more developing trainings and resources to come!

More information coming soon.

Follow lead-testing guidelines

Lead exposure poses significant risks to children, with the potential to cause learning difficulties, behavioral issues, and health problems. New York State law mandates lead testing in children, with results submitted to the New York State Department of Health (DOH). If a child's blood reveals lead exposure, providers should conduct further testing, advise parents or caregivers on prevention strategies, and offer feedback on reducing risk. Nutritional counseling plays a crucial role, too, as a healthy diet can help limit the absorption of lead.

For provider resources, click [here](#). To report lead exposure, call New York State DOH Lead Poisoning Prevention at **518.402.7600**, email LPPP@health.ny.gov, or click [here](#).

Compliance Hotline

MetroPlusHealth has its own Compliance Hotline, **888.245.7247**. Call to report suspected fraud or abuse, possibly illegal or unethical activities, or any questionable activity. You may choose to give your name, or you may report anonymously.

BetterDoctor

MetroPlusHealth is partnering with industry leader Quest Analytics' BetterDoctor solution to simplify our verification process.

Now, **BetterDoctor** (a division of Quest Analytics) will reach out to you on a 90-day basis to ensure that your information in our Provider Directory is accurate, based on CMS's "No Surprises Act" guidelines. BetterDoctor will provide us with any updates needed to maintain accurate information about your practice for our directory. Soon you won't need to reach out to MetroPlusHealth any longer regarding validation.

With BetterDoctor on our team, keeping your information current will be easier. We'll have a more robust, efficient process in place for your data intake and a streamlined means of ensuring its accuracy.



Report any demographic changes

Notify MetroPlusHealth of any changes to your demographic information or if you leave your practice or join a new one. Changes can be faxed in writing on office letterhead directly to MetroPlusHealth at **212.908.8885** or by calling the Provider Services Call Center at **800.303.9626**, Monday to Friday, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Access and availability standards: TIPS FOR SUCCESS

MetroPlusHealth would like to remind you that with your assistance we are committed to helping our members stay healthy and receive the health care services within New York State accessibility standards. Provider practices are expected to have procedures in place to schedule patient services within the following time frames and provide 24-hour accessibility.

- MetroPlusHealth participating providers must be available to patients, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year, either directly or through coverage arrangements.
- Ensure that patients' calls are responded to by live voice or a covering answering service, or via an answering service with direct access to the provider or covering provider.
- If an answering machine is used, it must provide an option for the patient to directly contact the provider or covering provider to address emergencies.
- Responses via an answering machine should give the patient options to request a callback and not simply refer the patient to an emergency room, except for a life-threatening issue.
- MetroPlusHealth highly suggests that your practice review the access and availability standards on a regular basis with your schedulers and call centers where applicable.
- When possible, perform secret shopper audits to evaluate and determine if your practice is in compliance with New York State regulations.
- Audit and educate staff and practices that fail self-conducted audits and implement corrective action plans to ensure compliance.



If you have any questions, please call the Provider Services Call Center at **800.303.9626**, Monday to Friday, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.

For a list of our Behavioral Health Access and Availability standards, [click here](#).

Medicaid Managed Care primary care providers are required to schedule appointments in accordance with the aforementioned appointment and availability standards. Providers **must not** require a new patient to complete prerequisites to schedule an appointment, such as providing a copy of their medical record, a health screening questionnaire, and/or an immunization record. The provider may request additional information from a new member if the appointment is scheduled at the time of the telephonic request.