



NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE
Ashwin Vasan, MD, PhD
Commissioner

2024 Health Advisory #2: COVID-19 Treatments Transition to Commercial Distribution

- Continue to prescribe antiviral treatment for eligible patients at risk for severe COVID-19 to reduce their likelihood of hospitalization and death.
- COVID-19 oral antiviral treatments have transitioned from U.S. government-managed purchase and distribution to the commercial market.
- Access to Paxlovid at no cost is possible, but most patients with Medicare and Medicaid and those who are uninsured must enroll in Pfizer's Patient Assistance Program to do so.
- Providers should advise patients about access to patient assistance programs to minimize out-of-pocket costs and delays in treatment.

February 1, 2024

Dear colleagues,

Respiratory virus season continues in New York City (NYC) with high levels of [SARS-CoV-2 \(COVID-19\)](#), [influenza](#), and [RSV](#) transmission. Certain populations are at higher risk for severe outcomes from COVID-19 and should be prioritized for treatment. This includes patients who are older (those ages ≥ 50 years and especially those ages ≥ 65 years) or who have certain medical conditions, including moderate to severe immunocompromise. This advisory outlines considerations to ensure patients can continue to access COVID-19 oral antiviral medications. For more information on outpatient treatment options, visit the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Interim Clinical Considerations for COVID-19 Treatment in Outpatients](#) and the [National Institute of Health's COVID-19 Treatment Guidelines](#).

Oral Antivirals Transition to Commercial Distribution

As of December 2023, the COVID-19 oral antivirals nirmatrelvir with ritonavir (Paxlovid) and molnupiravir (Lagevrio) are no longer being purchased and distributed by the federal government. They are available to order through commercial distributors. Any remaining stock of free U.S. government-purchased oral antiviral treatments can continue to be dispensed to patients until supplies are depleted or until the [Emergency Use Authorization expires on March 8, 2024](#). Providers can refer to [Health and Human Services \(HHS\) resources](#) and [Frequently Asked Questions](#) for more information about the transition process.

Because of these changes, effective February 1, 2024, Alto Pharmacy will no longer be providing free U.S. government purchased oral antivirals as part of the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (Health Department)'s Home Delivery Program. Alto Pharmacy will stock Paxlovid and Lagevrio and dispense and deliver them per routine procedures (e.g., billing insurance and charging associated co-pays). Alto Pharmacy is participating in the Pfizer's Paxcess Patient Assistance Program for eligible patients (see below).

Oral antivirals continue to be available in pharmacies throughout New York City. Approximately 82% of NYC pharmacies are already enrolled in Pfizer’s Paxcess Patient Assistance Program. Pharmacies wishing to enroll can email PharmacyNetworkContract102101@assistrx.com for more information.

Clinicians should recommend to patients that they call ahead to their pharmacy to confirm availability of their prescribed oral antiviral medication and whether there will be a co-pay or other charges.

Patient Assistance Programs

Patient assistant programs have been developed to help ensure uninsured and underinsured patients have continued and timely access to critical COVID-19 oral antiviral treatments. **Counsel your patients on these programs when prescribing antivirals and help them enroll or provide them with the necessary information to do so to avoid unnecessary costs or delays in treatment.** Provider resources and patient education materials can be found at paxlovid.pfizerpro.com/access-support/access.

People who have insurance coverage through Medicare and Medicaid plans still must enroll in Pfizer’s patient assistance program (Paxcess) to access Paxlovid at no cost through 2024. If they do not enroll, most will have to pay for it out-of-pocket and will not be reimbursed.

Nirmatrelvir/Ritonavir (Paxlovid) Access Programs	
Uninsured and Medicare/Medicaid/Tricare/CHIP (through 2024)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patients must enroll in Pfizer’s Paxcess Patient Assistance Program before picking up their prescription to avoid out-of-pocket costs. • The patient, caregiver, provider, or pharmacist can visit PAXCESSPatientPortal.com or call 877-C19-PACK (877-219-7225) to complete a short application. • Once approved, information will be provided on how and where to pick up the prescription. Prescriptions can only be filled at a Paxcess participating pharmacy, which can be found at the HHS Treatment Locator (treatments.hhs.gov). • Patients will not be reimbursed for out-of-pocket costs if they do not enroll in the Paxcess program. • Patients also have the option to request overnight mailing of the prescription via FedEx (Sundays excluded) by calling 877-219-7225.
Commercial insurance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most commercially insured patients are eligible for co-pay assistance via Pfizer’s Co-Pay Savings Program. • Patients can go to paxlovid.com/paxcess or call 877-219-7225 to enroll in the Co-Pay Savings Program prior to picking up the prescription at any pharmacy (not limited to pharmacies enrolled in Pfizer’s Paxcess program). • Patients who have paid a co-pay for Paxlovid may be eligible for a rebate. Information and forms are available at paxlovid.com/paxcess.
Molnupiravir (Lagevrio) Access Programs	
Uninsured	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Patient Assistance Program is available for people without health insurance. Visit merckhelps.com/LAGEVRIO for more information on eligibility.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To enroll patients in the program, a provider must call 800-727-5400 and tell the program representative that they are making an Urgent Need Request for Lagevrio for their patient. The program representative will provide further instructions. If approved, Lagevrio will be shipped overnight to the patient's address.
Insured	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lagevrio is covered by most health plans. Patients should check with their pharmacy and health plan about co-payment costs. Some insured individuals may still qualify for the Patient Assistance Program if they attest to special circumstances of financial and medical hardship and their income meets program criteria. Providers should call 800-727-5400 to check eligibility.

Access to Health Care

- Refer patients who do not have a provider or are uninsured to:
 - The federal [HOME Test To Treat](#) program for free evaluation and treatment for COVID-19 and flu, if eligible.
 - NYC Health + Hospitals [ExpressCare](#) (212-COVID19; 212-268-4319) for low or no cost treatment and care, including IV remdesivir if indicated for patients unable to take Paxlovid.
- Refer patients to get free assistance to sign up for low- or no-cost health insurance by having them call 311, text CoveredNYC (SeguroNYC for Spanish) to 877877, or visit [GetCoveredNYC](#). To connect with a NYC Health Department Certified Application Counselor, visit nyc.gov/health/healthcoverage.

Thank you for your help in ensuring that New Yorkers have access to these potentially lifesaving treatments.

Sincerely,



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