

FALL/WINTER 2011



The Plan

FROM YOUR VENTURA COUNTY HEALTH CARE PLAN



**Member
Updates**

**Important
New
Legislation**

**It's Back!
Flu Season**



The Plan

Fall/Winter 2011 newsletter of your
Ventura County health Care Plan



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For Medical Emergencies:

Call 911, or go to the nearest emergency room if you believe that an emergency medical condition exists.

Ventura County Medical Center • Emergency Room • 3291 Loma Vista Road • Ventura, CA 93003 (805) 652-6165 or (805) 652-6000

Santa Paula Hospital, A Campus of Ventura County Medical Center • 825 N Tenth Street • Santa Paula, CA 93060 • (805) 933-8632 or (805) 933-8600

Your Primary Care Physician is available 24 hours a day. (See ID card for phone number.)

Ventura County Health Care Plan 24-hour Medical Director access for emergency providers. (805) 981-5050 or (800) 600-8247

For Assistance:

Ventura County Health Care Plan • 2220 E. Gonzales Road Suite, 210-B, Oxnard, California 93036

Member Services • Monday - Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. • Phone: (805) 981-5050 FAX (805) 981-5051 • TDD to Voice: (800) 735-2929 • Voice to TDD: (800) 735-2922 www.vchealthcareplan.org

OptumHealth Behavioral Solutions (24-hour assistance) (800) 851-7407

Pharmacy Help (800) 233-8065 • www.express-scripts.com

For help with mailing address issues, call Member Services at the telephone number listed above.



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Member Update

Eat Well - Move More **Message from our Administrator**

The U.S. government recently revised its *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, which provides important advice on eating habits that can promote health and reduce the risk for disease.

Because many people in this country are overweight, the government also included in the report advice on exercise and lifestyle factors of Americans.

The new guidelines call for more vegetables, fruits, whole grains and fat-free and low-fat milk products. They also emphasize choosing a variety of protein foods including seafood, lean meat and poultry, eggs, beans, peas, soy products, unsalted nuts and seeds.

For better health, cut out processed food. These are foods with added sugars, solid fats, high salt (sodium) content and refined grains. They have lots of calories and little or no nutritional value.

The guidelines also urge Americans to take an active role in eating better by reading food labels, learning to cook healthier meals and making more nutritious choices when eating out.

Besides eating right, Americans should also get enough physical

activity. That's at least 60 minutes for children and 30 minutes for adults on most days. It's also important to limit computer and television time.

The new guidelines offer an important reminder that healthy habits start in childhood. If you have children, the best way to teach them to be healthy is to set a good example yourself by eating right and being active.

The County of Ventura offers a Wellness Program, which has been a repeat recipient of the California Fit Business "Gold" Award. The program has been managed by Susan Heller since 1986. The Wellness Program website offers practical tips and resources to help you *Eat Well* and *Move More*. Additionally, all Regular County Employees and their Spouses are encouraged to sign up for free *Nutrition and Fitness* classes and a *Wellness Profile*. The *Wellness Profile* includes a valuable array of tests and a personalized results booklet to help County employees and their spouses get healthy and fit.

For a current Wellness Program schedule or to view the healthy living tips visit the Wellness Program website at <http://ceo.countyofventura.org/benefits/wellness>.

Check it out!

Yours in health,
Larry Keller
VCHCP Administrator



Discounts to Health and Fitness Programs



The County of Ventura “Wellness Program” helps take you in a healthy direction by opening the door to membership discounts at participating facilities throughout the county. For details view the *Health Club Discount List* on the program website at: <http://ceo.countyofventura.org/benefits/wellness>.

Ojai:

- ◆ Bryant Street Health & Fitness
- ◆ Don’s Gym

Camarillo:

- ◆ Camarillo Pilates, Inc
- ◆ Curves For Women
- ◆ George Erb Fitness Center Inc.
- ◆ L. A. Workout

Port Hueneme:

- ◆ Club 257/Powerhouse Gym

Channel Islands:

- ◆ Edge Fitness Club

Santa Paula:

- ◆ Great American Nautilus
- ◆ Santa Paula Health & Fitness

Oxnard:

- ◆ Harold & Jean’s Health Club

Ventura:

- ◆ Hollywood Fitness (24/7)
- ◆ Jazzercise Poinsettia Pavilion Center
- ◆ Mind & Body Wellness Studio
- ◆ Pierpont Racquet Club

Newberry Park:

- ◆ Newbury Park Athletic Club



New Legislation — Need to See the Doctor?

A new California law that went into effect this year requires health plans such as VCHCP to see that members are able to obtain appointments for health care services in appropriate time frames.

Appointment Wait Times

Effective earlier this year health plan members have the right to obtain appointments within the following time frames:

Within 48 hours of a request for an urgent appointment for services that do not require prior authorization,

Within 96 hours of a request for an urgent appointment for services that do require prior authorization,

Within 10 business days of a request for non-urgent primary care appointments,

Within 15 business days of a request for an appointment with a physician specialist,

Within 10 business days of a request for an appointment with non-physician mental health care providers, and

Within 15 business days of a request for a non-urgent appointment for ancillary services (lab, xray, physical therapy, etc.) for the diagnosis or treatment of injury, illness, or other health condition.

For this purpose “urgent condition” is considered to be one that may lead to a negative outcome if not treated within a short period of time.

While the law sets these time frames, health care providers can be flexible in scheduling appointments if a longer time frame is appropriate for the member’s health. It must be noted in the member’s record that a longer waiting time will not be harmful to the health of the member.

If you or a family member are not able to get an appointment in the timeframe appropriate for your needs, please notify VCHCP member services by calling 981-5050 and selecting option # 1.



Preventive Care: What does it mean?

Under the Affordable Care Act (the federal health care reform bill), you can receive preventive care services with no cost sharing (co-payments, deductibles or coinsurance). The federal government has developed guidelines for what constitutes preventive care. The guidelines come from the Preventive Services Task Force. You can find them at www.healthcare.gov/law/provisions/preventive/index.html.

To Your Health

New Technology Benefiting Patients at VCMC

“We want patients to know we can provide quality care with the latest technology, while providing exceptional customer service”, reports Kathleen Kellerhouse, Chief of Hospital Operations at VCMC/SP hospitals. “These improvements will offer a more convenient and comfortable patient experience”.

Anchored by the recent installation of a state-of-the-art CT scanner, major technological upgrades in the VCMC Radiology Department are providing patients and their doctors with more advanced diagnostic imaging services than previously available.

New technologies include a Philips 128 slice CT scanner, ER X-ray room, Radiography & Fluoroscopy exam room and three new Hologic digital mammography suites, including 2 screening/diagnostic exam rooms and a dedicated biopsy suite, all scheduled for completion by the end of this year.

Key advantages of the new CT scanner include: shorter scan times, highest image detail available, a 650lb table capacity, and all with a significant reduction in radiation dose.

Digital mammography screening/diagnostic rooms and one dedicated biopsy room featuring a prone biopsy table with vacuum assist are currently under construction. New Hologic mammography equipment provides improved visualization of the area biopsied. The prone feature enhances patient comfort during the procedure and provides patients with life-saving early detection.

Upon completion of the mammography project, the Health Care Agency will be fully digital. The transition from film to digital has been under way since September 2008 beginning with the implementation of PACS (Picture Archiving and Communication System). PACS allows doctors to see and read images on a computer screen from virtually anywhere. Referring physicians and Radiologist can consult and review patient studies simultaneously from completely separate locations.



VCMC Radiology Department
Hours: Monday - Friday 8am-5pm.
For an appointment, call (805)
652-6080

Changes to the Preferred Drug List

This information applies to members whose prescription drug program is with Ventura County Health Plan's Pharmacy Benefit managed by Express Scripts. Here is an overview of your benefit and the current preferred drug list (also called the Formulary).

Drugs are divided into the following four categories which define the type of drug and the member's copayment.

- Tier 1: Generic medications
- Tier 2: Preferred brand-name drugs
- Tier 3: Non-preferred brand-named drugs
- Tier 4: Specialty and self-administered injectables (excluding diabetic medications)

Prior authorization

The following prescription drugs may now require clinical consultation:

- **Januvia, Janumet, Onglyza™** for the treatment of diabetes
- **Singulair, Accolate, Zflo/CR™** for the treatment of asthma, allergic rhinitis
- **Rhinocort Aqua, Beconase AQ, Nasacort AQ, Nasarel, Nasonex, Flonase, Veramyst, Omnaris** - for the treatment of asthma, allergic rhinitis
- **Ambien, Sonata** - for the treatment insomnia
- **Declomycin, Adoxa, Monodox, Avidoxy/kit, Adoxa/CK/TT/Pak, Doryx, Vibramycin, Vibra-Tabs, Oraxyl, Periostat, Oracea, Dynacin, Minocin/kit/PAC, Solodyn** - for the treatment of dermatologic Conditions

Removed from preferred drug list

- **Avandia®, Avandamet® and Avandaryl®** for the treatment of diabetes

New to the Specialty drug list

The following drugs are now tier 4.

Brand Name	Condition Treated
Benlysta	Systemic lupus erythematosus
Sylatron	Melanoma
Vandetanib	Symptomatic or progressive medullary thyroid cancer
Zytiga	Metastatic castration-resistant prostate cancer
Incivek	Hepatitis C
Nulojix	Prophylaxis of organ rejection in adult patients receiving a kidney transplant
Victrelis	Hepatitis C

New on the Preferred drug list

The following drugs are now tier 2.

Brand Name	Generic Name	Condition Treated
Corifact	Factor XIII	Factor XIII deficiency
Edurant	rilpivirine hydrochloride	HIV-1 infection in ART-naïve adult patients
Xarelto	rivaroxaban	Prophylaxis of deep vein thrombosis in patients undergoing knee or hip replacement

New Generics

The following drugs are available in generic form. The generics are covered on tier 1, and the brand-name drugs are tier 3 or non-preferred.

Brand Name	Generic Name	Condition Treated
Effexor XR	venlafaxine	depression
Sular	nisoldipine	hypertension
Xalatan	latanoprost	glaucoma
Lipitor**	atorvastatin	high cholesterol

**Coming in November 2011. Generic status to be confirmed based on generic alternatives.

Rx Tip

To save money on prescriptions, ask your doctor or pharmacist for a generic drug. The Food and Drug Administration requires generic medications to have the identical active ingredients as similar brand-name drugs. Generics must adhere to the same standards of purity, stability, strength and quality. A generic drug must have the same therapeutic effect as its brand-name counterpart, and its active ingredients must achieve the same concentration in the blood.

For More Information

For the most current preferred drug list, required procedures and prescription drug updates, visit our web site at www.vchealthcareplan.org. For a printed copy of the preferred drug list and required procedures, please call 805 981-5050 and select the Member Services department.





IT'S BACK!

What is influenza (also called flu)?

The flu is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses that infect the nose, throat, and lungs.

It can cause mild to severe illness, and at times can lead to death. The best way to prevent the flu is by getting a flu vaccine each year.

Signs and symptoms of flu

People who have the flu often feel some or all of these signs and symptoms:

- ◆ Fever* or feeling feverish/chills
- ◆ Cough
- ◆ Sore throat
- ◆ Runny or stuffy nose
- ◆ Muscle or body aches
- ◆ Headaches
- ◆ Fatigue (very tired)
- ◆ Some people may have vomiting and diarrhea, though this is more common in children than adults.

*It's important to note that not everyone with flu will have a fever.

How flu spreads

Most experts believe that flu viruses spread mainly by droplets made when people with flu cough, sneeze or talk. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby. Less often, a person might also get flu by touching a surface or object that has flu virus on it and then touching their own mouth, eyes or possibly their nose.

Period of contagiousness

You may be able to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, as well as while you are sick. Most healthy adults may be able to infect others beginning 1 day **before** symptoms develop and up to 5 to 7 days **after** becoming sick. Some people, especially young children and people with weakened immune systems, might be able to infect others for an even longer time.

How serious is the flu?

Flu is unpredictable and how severe it is can vary widely from one season to the next depending on many things, including:

- ◆ what flu viruses are spreading,

- ◆ how much flu vaccine is available
- ◆ when vaccine is available
- ◆ how many people get vaccinated, and
- ◆ how well the flu vaccine is matched to flu viruses that are causing illness.

Certain people are at greater risk for serious complications if they get the flu. This includes older people, young children, pregnant women and people with certain health conditions (such as asthma, diabetes, or heart disease), and persons who live in facilities like nursing homes.

Flu seasons are unpredictable and can be severe. Over a period of 30 years, between 1976 and 2006, estimates of flu-associated deaths in the United States range from a low of about 3,000 to a high of about 49,000 people.

Complications of flu

Complications of flu can include bacterial pneumonia, ear infections, sinus infections, dehydration, and worsening of chronic medical conditions, such as congestive heart failure, asthma, or diabetes.

Preventing seasonal flu: Get vaccinated

The single best way to prevent the flu is to get a flu vaccine each season. There are two types of flu vaccines:

“Flu shots” — inactivated vaccines (containing killed virus) that are given with a needle. There are three flu shots being produced for the United States market now.

The regular seasonal flu shot is “intramuscular” which means it is injected into muscle (usually in the upper arm). It has been used for decades and is approved for use in people 6 months of age and older, including healthy people, people with chronic medical conditions and pregnant women. Regular flu shots make up the bulk of the vaccine supply produced for the United States.

A hi-dose vaccine for people 65 and older which also is intramuscular. This vaccine was first made available during the 2010-2011 season.

The nasal-spray flu vaccine — a vaccine made with live, weakened flu viruses that is given as a nasal spray (sometimes called LAIV for “Live Attenuated Influenza Vaccine”). The viruses in the nasal spray vaccine do not cause the flu. LAIV is approved for use in healthy* people 2 to 49 years of age who are not pregnant.

An intradermal vaccine for people 18 to 64 years of age which is injected with a needle into the “dermis” or skin. This vaccine is being made available for the first time for the 2011-2012 season.

About two weeks after vaccination, antibodies develop that protect against influenza virus infection. Flu vaccines will not protect against flu-like illnesses caused by non-influenza viruses.

The seasonal flu vaccine protects against the three influenza viruses that research suggests will be most common.

When to get vaccinated against seasonal flu

Yearly flu vaccination should begin in September, or as soon as vaccine is available, and continue throughout the flu season which can last as late as May. This is because the timing and duration of flu seasons vary. While flu season can begin early as October, most of the time seasonal flu activity peaks in January, February or later.

Who should get vaccinated?

Everyone 6 months and older should get a flu vaccine each year. This recommendation has been in place since February 24, 2010 when CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) voted for "universal" flu vaccination in the U.S. to expand protection against the flu to more people. While everyone should get a flu vaccine each flu season, it's especially important that certain people get vaccinated either because they are at high risk of having serious flu-related complications or because they live with or care for people at high risk for developing flu-related complications.

Who is at high risk for developing flu-related complications?

- ◆ Children younger than 5, but especially children younger than 2 years old
- ◆ Adults 65 years of age and older
- ◆ Pregnant women
- ◆ American Indians and Alaskan Natives seem to be at higher risk of flu complications
- ◆ People who have medical conditions including:
 - Asthma (even if it's controlled or mild)
 - Neurological and neurodevelopmental conditions [including disorders of the brain, spinal cord, peripheral nerve, and muscle such as cerebral palsy, epilepsy (seizure disorders), stroke, intellectual disability (mental retardation), moderate to severe developmental delay, muscular dystrophy, or spinal cord injury]
 - Chronic lung disease (such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease [COPD] and cystic fibrosis)
 - Heart disease (such as congenital heart disease, congestive heart failure and coronary artery disease)

- Blood disorders (such as sickle cell disease)
- Endocrine disorders (such as diabetes mellitus)
- Kidney disorders
- Liver disorders
- Metabolic disorders (such as inherited metabolic disorders and mitochondrial disorders)
- Weakened immune system due to disease or medication (such as people with HIV or AIDS, or cancer, or those on chronic steroids)
- People younger than 19 years of age who are receiving long-term aspirin therapy
- People who are morbidly obese (Body Mass Index [BMI] of 40 or greater)

Who else should get vaccinated?

Others for whom vaccination is especially important:

- ◆ People who live in nursing homes and other long-term care facilities
- ◆ People who live with or care for those at high risk for complications from flu, including:
 - Health care workers
 - Household contacts of persons at high risk for complications from the flu
 - Household contacts and caregivers of children younger than 5 years of age with particular emphasis on vaccinating contacts of children younger than 6 months of age (children younger than 6 months are at highest risk of flu-related complications but are too young to get vaccinated)

Who should not be vaccinated against seasonal flu?

Some people **should not be vaccinated** without first consulting a physician. They include:

- ◆ People who have a severe allergy to chicken eggs.
- ◆ People who have had a severe reaction to an influenza vaccination in the past.
- ◆ People who developed Guillian-Barré syndrome (GBS) within 6 weeks of getting an influenza vaccine previously.
- ◆ Children younger than 6 months of age (influenza vaccine is not approved for use in this age group).
- ◆ People who have a moderate or severe illness with a fever should wait to get vaccinated until their symptoms lessen.
- ◆ If you have questions about whether you should get a flu vaccine, consult your health care provider.

Source: Centers for Disease Control & Prevention



APPENDICITIS

by Kurt Blickenstaff, M.D., Director of Anacapa Surgery Associates
Ventura County Medical Center



Kurt Blickenstaff, M.D.

Appendicitis is a fairly common illness that requires emergency surgery. It is estimated that 1 out of 15 people in the United States will get appendicitis at sometime in their life. Although it can occur at any age, it is most common between ages 10 and 30 and rarely occurs under age 2.

What causes appendicitis? The appendix is like a small sack that connects to the intestine. Appendicitis occurs when the opening to the intestine becomes blocked. It can be blocked by a hard piece of stool (fecalith), or by things that we eat (for example seeds, nuts, etc.), or occasionally by cancer. Blockage may also occur from infection, since the appendix swells in response to infection. As the appendix begins to swell, it fills with pus and also obstructs the tiny blood vessels that supply it with blood. If not treated promptly, the appendix can rupture, spilling its infectious contents into the peritoneal cavity.

Appendicitis usually starts with a vague aching pain over the entire stomach. The pain usually increases over 12 to 18 hours and eventually transitions into a sharp and severe pain in the right lower abdomen. The pain is worse if you cough, walk or jump up and down. It improves somewhat if you lie still. Associated symptoms include nausea, vomiting, fever, loss of appetite, bloating, gassiness, constipation or diarrhea. Most patients do not have all of these symptoms.

You should see your doctor if you, or your child, have a stomach ache that persists and becomes worse over 12 or more hours. After reviewing your symptoms and doing a thorough exam, the doctor will likely order blood and urine tests. He may also order abdominal x-rays or a CT scan. These studies help to confirm the diagnosis and rule out other problems and can present with a similar picture.

The treatment of appendicitis almost always involves surgical removal of the appendix. The patient can usually go home on the day following surgery unless the appendix has ruptured. Patients with ruptured appendicitis will need to stay in the hospital for antibiotic treatment for a few days.

When to use the Emergency Room

When to use an alternative to the Emergency Room

What will you do if you or a loved one needs immediate medical care? Most of us answer, “Go to the nearest emergency room.” But ER wait times are at an all-time high. So, unless it’s a true emergency, you’ll likely get quicker, quality medical care somewhere else, like urgent care centers. That’s why it’s important to know your ER alternatives now, before you need them. You can often get treated more quickly and pay much less than you would for emergency care.

ER alternatives

Use these options when you need medical care quickly, but can’t see your regular doctor. These clinics are usually open nights and weekends, and cost about the same as a doctor visit. Before you go, call and ask about their hours, and services. All VCHCP contracted Urgent Care facilities are included in our on-line Provider Directory. See a chart of symptoms to learn about what symptoms should be treated at an ER Alternative. Remember, if you’re an HMO member, you should call your primary doctor’s office or medical group to find out your Emergency Room alternative options for urgent care.

Urgent care center — A doctor’s office that doesn’t require you to be an existing patient or have an appointment. Can handle routine care and common family illnesses.

Some Urgent Cares can do xrays, lab tests, stitches and X-rays. Call to make sure if you think you might need one of these services.

EMERGENCY ROOM RULE OF THUMB

Call 911 or go to the emergency room if you think you could put your health at serious risk by delaying care.

Want more information on urgent care centers?

Call our 24/7 Nurse Advice Line. The number is (800) 334-9023.

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Hospital Ambulatory Care Survey*





Ventura County Health Care Plan
2220 E. Gonzales Road, Suite 210-B
Oxnard, CA 93026

Thanks for the Feedback!

We use your feedback to help make improvements to the way care is delivered and services are rendered by our provider network and health plan. Each year, as part of our continuing commitment to provide top-quality care to our members, VCHCP engages a company to conduct the nationally-recognized “*Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems*” (CAHPS) study which captures information about consumer-reported experiences with health care.

We would like to thank the over 400 members who participated in our survey this year and provided us with valuable feedback.

CAHPS scores determine how well plans meet their members’ expectations, which areas of service have the greatest effect on members’ overall satisfaction, and identify areas of opportunity for improvement.

For example, our CAHPS scores indicate that some of the survey respondents felt that claims submitted by them could be processed on a more timely basis. We are now looking at this internally to identify ways that will help to speed up reimbursement to our members.

Thanks again for taking time to share your opinions with us!

Need Medical Advice?

Most of us know that if we have a medical emergency, we should call 911 or seek help immediately at the nearest emergency or urgent care facility. In an urgent situation, we recommend that you contact your primary care provider (PCP) for advice. All PCPs have an after-hours answering service and an on-call physician to assist you. If you are unable to reach your PCP, you may want to contact VCHCP’s new Nurse Advice Line, our 24-hour emergency assistance and medical advice service, at 800-535-9700. You can also contact the Nurse Advice Line about less urgent medical issues and request health education information.

