



Behavioral Health Timely Access to Care and After-Hours Emergency Instructions Fact Sheet November 2024

Below are reminders pertaining to timely access to care standards and after-hours emergency instructions for behavioral health providers.

Ensuring timely access to care is an important step in preventing serious behavioral health issues. In accordance with regulatory and accreditation standards and the [Blue Shield of California Independent Physician and Provider Manual](#) or [Blue Shield of California HMO IPA/Medical Group Procedures Manual](#), below are the access to care standards to which all contracted behavioral health providers must adhere.

These requirements apply to both IPA/medical groups and directly contracted PPO professional providers. If your HMO IPA/medical group carries the risk for behavioral health care for your assigned members, please ensure that your group's practitioners adhere to these timelines

| Access to Care | Standard |
|--|-------------------------|
| Care for an emergent, non-life-threatening situation | Within 6 hours |
| Urgent care visits | Within 48 hours |
| Initial routine visits with non-physician practitioners and behavioral health physicians | Within 10 business days |
| Routine and follow-up visits with non-physician practitioners | Within 10 business days |
| Routine and follow-up visits with behavioral health physicians | Within 15 business days |

In addition to following access to care standards, contracted behavioral health providers are required to have appropriate after-hours emergency messaging for patients who telephone their office after normal business hours. A list of compliant and non-compliant responses are listed below for your convenience.

| Compliant Responses | Non-Compliant Responses |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Hang up and dial 911. | "Stay on the line and you will be connected to a clinician." |
| Go to the nearest emergency room. | "Leave your name and telephone number and someone will call you back." |
| | Giving another number to contact a different provider |
| | "[The provider] or [on-call provider] can be paged at..." |
| | The caller is automatically transferred to urgent care. |
| | The caller is transferred to an advice/triage nurse. |
| | No emergency instructions are given. |