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President Declares National Emergency for Coronavirus

On Friday, President Trump declared a national emergency, giving the Administration much broader flexibility to direct federal resources aimed at mitigating the public health and economic effects of the coronavirus outbreak. Among these measures are “broad new authorities” for Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar, including waivers for: telehealth flexibility including federal licensure; the 25-bed and 96-hour limit for Critical Access Hospitals; and physician credentialing, as well as other measures designed to improve the health care system response. ACEP staff is still awaiting specific details and regulatory guidance, and will update members as soon as this information becomes available.

The emergency declaration also provides as much as \$50 billion in additional federal resources and allows the Federal Emergency Management Agency to begin working to coordinate national response efforts. The President also announced a number of public-private partnerships to increase access to COVID-19 testing, including “drive-thru” testing sites at retail centers and other locations, as well as online resources to help patients determine whether or not they should seek out testing or care at hospitals. In addition, the President announced that he is waiving all interest that accrues on all federal student loans “until further notice” as part of his administration’s emergency actions in response to the coronavirus pandemic.

Friday’s announcement follows the President’s national address on Wednesday evening, where he announced a number of new policies in response to the outbreak, including a 30-day ban on travel to the U.S. for foreign visitors from the vast majority of Europe, new opportunities for small businesses to receive Small Business Administration (SBA) loans, as well as a deferment on federal tax payments without interest or penalties.

Congress Continues Focus on Additional Coronavirus Legislation

At this writing, Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) and Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin have reportedly reached a compromise deal on another coronavirus-related response bill, this one largely aimed at providing financial security and certainty for American families affected by workplace and school closures. Although details are unavailable at this time, the bill is expected to include provisions that would provide COVID-19 testing free of cost-sharing obligations, temporary paid sick leave, food security assistance, unemployment insurance, and other items. The House is expected to pass the legislation later today. The Senate canceled next week’s scheduled recess and is expected to come back on Monday to take up the House bill.

Committee activity across a wide swath of jurisdictions was almost uniformly focused on the coronavirus as well. Of note was the House Oversight Committee hearing, “[Coronavirus Preparedness and Response](#)” featuring Anthony Fauci, MD, Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease at the National Institutes of Health, Robert Redfield, MD, Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and Robert Kadlec, MD, Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response for the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Much to

Chairwoman Carolyn Maloney's (D-NY) chagrin, the sometimes-tense hearing was cut short due to many of the witnesses being called back to the White House for an emergency meeting.

Capitol Hill has also felt the immediate impact of the coronavirus, with several Representatives and Senators under precautionary self-quarantines and a Senate staffer who tested positive for COVID-19. A number of members have closed their offices and the Capitol complex has restricted access to visitors, closing off tours and limiting visitors to official business only.

ACEP continues to be a presence and voice of authority with legislators. Last Friday, ACEP President Bill Jaquis, MD, FACEP, participated in a coronavirus preparedness roundtable discussion in Florida, hosted by Representatives Ted Deutch (D-FL) and Lois Frankel (D-FL). On Monday, Todd Slesinger, MD, FACEP, participated in another coronavirus roundtable hosted by Rep. Deutch and Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz (D-FL). Finally, on Thursday afternoon, ACEP held a virtual Hill briefing for congressional staff to update them on the emergency physician experience on the ground, featuring emergency physicians in Washington state who have been actively involved in responding to the COVID-19 outbreak.

For the foreseeable future, Washington, D.C.'s attention is entirely focused on the public health, economic, and other impacts of the coronavirus outbreak. ACEP remains engaged with federal legislators and regulators to address priorities for emergency physicians who are at the front lines of the response.

Capital Minute

Check out the this Tuesday's edition of ACEP's Capital Minute to hear about everything from surprise billing to COVID-19.

[Click here](#) to view the Capital Minute or click on the blue box below.



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