

'Public Charge' in the Time of COVID-19

It is more important than ever to have health care coverage! Find out what type of health care coverage you [qualify](#) for and how to [sign up](#).

What should I do if I have symptoms or want to get tested?

Current symptoms reported for patients with COVID-19 have included mild to severe respiratory illness with fever, cough, and difficulty breathing.¹

- If you have a primary care provider, call them for guidance.
- If you don't have a primary care provider, call your local [Community Health Center](#).
- If you want additional information, call 2-1-1.

If you are experiencing an emergency and need immediate medical care, go to the nearest hospital emergency room or call 911. In Massachusetts, testing and treatment for COVID-19 is available free of charge for most low-income residents, regardless of immigration status. Hospital staff can check your eligibility and help you sign up for coverage.

Will getting tested and receiving treatment for COVID-19 make me a 'public charge'?

No. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) has said that it will NOT consider testing, treatment, or preventive care (including a vaccine if one becomes available) related to COVID-19 in deciding whether an applicant for a green card is likely to become a "public charge."

How much will I have to pay for testing and treatment?

- In Massachusetts, all public programs such as MassHealth and Health Safety Net, and Health Connector plans (including Connector Care) and unsubsidized plans cover testing and treatment of COVID-19 with ZERO out-of-pocket expenses. If you don't have insurance but can afford to pay for it, you can sign up on the Connector until May 25.
- Effective April 9, for the duration of Massachusetts' state of emergency, ALL employer-based plans are required to cover COVID-19 testing and treatment with ZERO out-of-pocket expenses.

Will collecting unemployment benefits make me a 'public charge'?

No. Unemployment benefits are earned and are ALWAYS exempt from the public charge test. Remember that you must have proof that you are eligible to work (such as an Employment Authorization Document) in order to apply for unemployment benefits. Also, a valid Social Security number must be provided on the unemployment benefits application.²

I am not eligible for benefits, but I want to apply for benefits for my U.S. citizen children. Will this make me a 'public charge'?

No. Benefits received by other family members, such as food stamps (SNAP) for U.S. citizen children, are NOT counted when determining if a green card applicant is likely to become a public charge.

Where can I find more information about 'public charge'?

You can find more information about public charge rules, the many categories of immigrants who are not affected by them, and the benefits considered here: www.miracoalition.org/pif.

¹ <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/frequently-asked-questions-about-covid-19#should-i-be-tested?>

² For a list of benefits available to everyone, regardless of immigration status, go to <https://www.masslegalservices.org/publiccharge> and check out the [Benefits For All](#) resource.