

U.S. House and Senate Notification
Thursday, December 10, 2009

To **Congressional Health Staff**

From: **Amy Hall**
 Director, Office of Legislation
 Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services

Subject: **Medicare Expands List of Covered Preventive Services to Include HIV Screening Tests**

This week, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) announced its final decision to cover Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) infection screening tests for Medicare beneficiaries at increased risk for HIV infection, including pregnant women and beneficiaries of any age who voluntarily request such screening.

This is the first new preventive benefit to be added to Medicare under authority given to the agency by the Medicare Improvements for Patients and Providers Act of 2008 (MIPPA) to add to Medicare's list of covered preventive services if certain requirements are met. Before MIPPA, a new screening test or other preventive service could only be added to Medicare through a specific act of Congress.

The CMS uses its evidence-based national coverage determination (NCD) process to make decisions on new preventive services. This process provides transparency of the evidence that CMS considers in making coverage decisions and allows opportunity for the public to comment on coverage proposals.

In announcing the decision, CMS Acting Administrator Charlene Frizzera noted the importance of Medicare coverage of HIV screening in protecting beneficiaries from the potentially devastating and life-threatening complications of HIV and Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS). AIDS is diagnosed when an HIV-infected person's immune system becomes severely compromised or a person becomes ill with an HIV-related infection. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that about a quarter of the more than one million Americans believed to have HIV infection don't realize they are infected. While there is presently no cure for HIV, screening can help identify infected individuals so they can receive treatment that may help delay the onset of AIDS for many years.

A Press Release on this coverage announcement is available at <http://www.hhs.gov/news/press/2009pres/12/20091208a.html>. A copy of the final decision memorandum is available at <http://www.cms.hhs.gov/mcd/viewdecisionmemo.asp?id=229>.

If you have any questions about this national coverage determination, please contact the CMS Office of Legislation. Thank you.