

December 1, 2020

CHIEFS OF ONTARIO UPDATE

NON-INSURED HEALTH BENEFITS (NIHB) AND COVID-19

This update provides information on NIHB Updates from March to October 2020, including changes to benefit items and services resulting from the pandemic COVID-19. NIHB has provided four COVID-19 Updates from March to May. Benefit items related to COVID-19 can be found in general NIHB Updates from August to October 2020.

October 2020

Update on coverage of rituximab

- Rituximab is a type of medication used to treat some autoimmune conditions. Previously, the only rituximab product reimbursed by NIHB was Rituxan
- NIHB has recently listed a second rituximab product, Truxima
- Truxima was approved by Health Canada as 'biosimilar' to Rituxan, which means that these medications work in the same way and have similar effectiveness
- Adult clients with new prescriptions for a rituximab medication who meet NIHB's coverage criteria will be covered for Truxima (instead of Rituxan) for treatment of rheumatoid arthritis, granulomatosis with polyangiitis (GPA) or microscopic polyangiitis (MPA)
- Clients who are already taking Rituxan will continue to be covered for their current medication

Medical supplies and equipment (MS&E) information

- The MS&E policy guide and benefits lists have been combined so that information about eligible benefits and coverage policies can be found together
- The following MS&E coverage changes came into effect on October 7, 2020:
 - up to \$200 of coverage is available for hearing aid accessories, every 5 years. Consult the audiology benefits list

- adaptive feeding cups are now covered as open benefits and listed in the self-care benefits list

New coverage for preventive dental services

- NIHB added new coverage for preventive dental services
- Topical treatments such as silver diamine fluoride are applied to damaged areas on the surface of the teeth to prevent the progression of cavities
- These are called remineralization or antimicrobial treatments, and are now covered by NIHB without predetermination:
 - 3 times per 12 months for clients under 17 years of age
 - once per 12 months for clients 17 and older

August 2020

New pharmacy benefit listings

- NIHB now covers 3 Voltaren Emulgel products for treatment of back, muscle or joint pain. Eligible products listed in the NIHB drug benefit list are covered without prior approval, up to 100 grams per month
- NIHB recently listed triamcinolone hexacetonide, a steroid used to reduce swelling caused by a variety of health conditions including allergies, asthma or rheumatoid arthritis
 - The program now covers both injectable forms of the medication, triamcinolone hexacetonide and triamcinolone acetonide, as open benefits

Coverage of non-prescription pharmacy benefits recommended by pharmacists

- NIHB now accepts a pharmacist's recommendation for coverage of any eligible non-prescription 'over-the-counter' pharmacy benefit
- To be eligible for coverage, the item must be listed on the NIHB drug benefit list and within the pharmacist's scope of practice to recommend or prescribe
- Previously, NIHB had a selected list of non-prescription items that could be recommended by a pharmacist. That list is no longer in effect, and is replaced by this new policy

New dose limit for gabapentin

- For client safety, NIHB has changed the dose limit for coverage of gabapentin to 3600 milligrams per day, to a maximum of 30 days
- Pharmacists should call the Drug Exception Centre if a client reaches the dose limit

Medical supplies and equipment information

New coverage for oral digital thermometers (COVID-19 Related Update)

- During the COVID-19 pandemic, oral digital thermometers are listed as an open benefit with a price limit of \$25 and a replacement guideline of 1 per 5 years
- Thermometers are covered with a prescription from a physician or a nurse practitioner, or a written recommendation from a registered nurse or a pharmacist

Reminder: coverage of electric breast pumps (COVID-19 Related Update)

- Electric breast pumps are a limited use benefit and prior approval is required for coverage. Criteria for coverage can be found in the MS&E guide and benefit lists
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, electric breast pumps may be covered for purchase (instead of rental), once every 3 years at a maximum price of \$275.00

Increased coverage for some communication and respiratory benefits

- NIHB recently changed frequency guidelines for selected voice restoration products and supplies. Prior approval is required and the new frequency guidelines are:
 - puncture dilator: 1 per year
 - gel cap insertion system: 1 per year
 - plug insert: 2 per year
 - flushing device: 1 box per year
 - cleaning brush: 2 boxes per year
 - gel cap: 1 box per year
- The replacement guideline for inlet filters has increased to 14 filters per year
 - Inlet filters are used with home positive airway pressure (PAP) devices and are covered as open benefits

May 2020

Medical transportation (COVID-19 Related Update)

- NIHB continues to support clients who need transportation to access medically necessary appointments and services not available in their community
- Health and benefit providers may resume some services that were cancelled or postponed, however re-opening plans are determined by provincial or territorial authorities
- Contact your provider to find out what services are offered, and if appointments can be made or re-scheduled
- Some First Nations and Inuit communities have restrictions on re-entry into the community after travelling, so you should check with your community health centre or health manager about any restrictions
- If you are vulnerable due to age or health condition, talk to your health care provider for advice on travel to medical services. NIHB can cover private modes of transportation and accommodation, such as hotel, where necessary, and may be able to assist with temporary relocation to an urban centre for clients who have an ongoing need to attend essential medical appointments
- Communities that deliver medical transportation services, such as medical vans, have been advised that expenses for increased cleaning and sanitization are eligible under their funding agreements with NIHB. This includes the costs associated with installation of plexi-glass shields between the drivers and passengers seats
- Boarding homes have also been advised to take measures to support social distancing and increased infection-control practices
- If you are staying in a hotel while on medical travel and food services are not available, NIHB will provide additional coverage for meal delivery charges of \$7.00 per meal or \$21.00 per day, per family or group of travelers

Pharmacy Benefit information

New pharmacy benefit listings

- NIHB now covers the Trelegy Ellipta inhaler (fluticasone furoate/umeclidinium/vilanterol) as a limited use benefit for the treatment of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). This is the first triple drug inhaler for treatment of COPD available in Canada
- NIHB added open benefit coverage for Soliqua (lixisenatide + insulin glargine) and Adlyxine (lixisenatide) for treatment of type 2 diabetes. These injectable medications come in a pre-filled pen

- Internalized Normalized Ratio (INR) monitors and supplies are now listed as limited use pharmacy benefits. INR monitors are used by patients who take warfarin (a medication used to thin the blood), to measure how quickly blood clots in their circulatory system

Medical Supplies and Equipment (MS&E) information

Increased coverage for feeding supplies

NIHB has increased coverage for the following items to 1 per day:

- disposable feeding syringes
- feeding pumps bag
- gravity feeding bag
- feeding delivery set

Changes to audiology benefit coverage

- Invisible-in-canal hearing aids are now listed as limited use benefits (prior approval is required).
- NIHB has expanded coverage of FM systems (a type of assistive hearing device) to include the following conditions:
 - permanent hearing loss in one ear
 - auditory neuropathy (where the ear does not transmit sound to the brain)
 - difficulty processing auditory information
- Coverage for disposable batteries used in certain hearing devices has increased:
 - cochlear implant processors: 7 batteries per week
 - bone anchored hearing system processors: 3 batteries per week
- NIHB now covers rechargeable batteries and chargers for hearing aids:
 - rechargeable batteries for hearing aids are covered once every 3 years
 - rechargeable batteries for cochlear implant processors are covered once per year
 - battery chargers are covered every 5 years

Coverage for laryngectomy and voice restoration products

- Coverage for speaking valves (post-tracheostomy) has increased to 4 valves per year
- Hands-free speaking valves (post-laryngectomy) are now listed as limited use benefits, with coverage for 1 box (set of 3 valves) per year
- Cleaning supplies for these items are also covered

Please check the MS&E guide and benefit lists for more information and coverage criteria at: <https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1585320116553/1585320137871>

Reminder of prescription requirements for custom-made foot orthotics

- A prescription from a health care provider is needed for coverage of custom-made foot orthotics. You should have the prescription before you visit an enrolled provider to be fitted for the item
- A prescriber of custom-made foot orthotics could be a doctor, nurse practitioner or podiatrist
- NIHB now accepts prescriptions from chiropodists for custom-made foot orthotics in provinces where this profession is regulated:
 - Ontario
 - Saskatchewan
 - New Brunswick

APRIL 2020 (COVID-19 Related Updates)

Virtual dental consultation services

- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, dental providers have postponed non-emergency services
- NIHB will temporarily cover fees for consultation services by phone or other virtual methods offered by dental providers to help them assess clients' needs and facilitate access to emergency dental care
- Please contact your dental provider's office if you require emergency dental services

Virtual services and shipping for hearing devices

- During the COVID-19 pandemic, NIHB will cover some services that can be provided through tele-audiology, if offered by the provider. This includes:
 - fitting and dispensing
 - hearing aid performance check and readjustment
- If providers offer fitting and support services through tele-audiology, they can temporarily ship hearing devices directly to you, so you don't have to go to their office in person to pick up the item. This includes:
 - hearing aids
 - bone-anchored hearing system processors
 - replacement of cochlear implant processors
 - FM systems

- Providers will program the hearing device according to client-specific needs before shipping, and contact you by telephone to provide the first fitting remotely
- When providers begin offering in-person services again, they will contact you to schedule a follow-up visit to their office

Temporary coverage for electric breast pump purchase

- Until further notice, the purchase of a double electric breast pump will be covered instead of a rental

Positive Airway Pressure (PAP) therapy

- If a client infected with COVID-19 uses PAP therapy, this may increase the risk of transmission to others in the home
- If you are in this situation, talk to your health care provider about the risks and benefits of continuing PAP therapy
- Clients who have COVID-19 and continue PAP therapy can request additional supplies such as tubing, filters, and masks from the NIHB program

Information for parents and guardians of NIHB-eligible infant children

- During the COVID-19 pandemic, there may be delays in registering an infant for First Nation status
- In order to allow additional time for parents to register their infant children, NIHB has extended coverage of unregistered infants up to 24 months of age, until further notice
- Infants up to 12 months of age can access most types of NIHB benefits under the identification number of their eligible parent or guardian. Contact the NIHB Dental Predetermination Centre if dental services are required
- If your child has reached 12 months of age and is not registered, please call the NIHB Drug Exception Centre if pharmacy services are required. For all other benefits, call your NIHB regional office. You will be provided with a temporary NIHB client number that is valid until your child reaches 24 months of age

Reminder: changes in other coverage

- Let NIHB know as soon as possible if you no longer have other health benefit coverage (for example, through an employer sponsored plan)
- Contact your NIHB regional office, the Drug Exception Centre (for pharmacy benefits), or the Dental Predetermination Centre (for dental benefits)

- NIHB will update your file right away to avoid delays in processing future claims

Pharmacy benefit information

Change to prior approval for certain medications

- Prior approval for many limited use medications has been temporarily lifted
- Pharmacists have been advised of this change and are asked to submit all NIHB client prescriptions electronically to see if the medication is covered as open benefit
- The NIHB Drug Exception Centre (DEC) continues to process requests for prior approval, and can be reached at 1-800-580-0950

Pharmacist recommendation for fever and pain medications

NIHB covers a range of over-the-counter fever and pain medications with just a pharmacist's recommendation, so a prescription from a doctor is not needed:

- Up to 100 tablets for adults and youth
- One package of a chewable or liquid children's product

Medical supplies and equipment (MS&E) information

- Health care providers are not NIHB employees. They determine how to prioritize services to their patients
- Health services may cancel assessments to protect their staff, or because health professionals are urgently required in other areas
- Clients are encouraged to contact their MS&E provider to confirm store hours, benefit availability and make arrangements for delivery

Temporary changes for replacement of select medical equipment or supplies

- If you are unable to see your prescriber to get a new prescription for the replacement of equipment or supplies, your MS&E provider may use the existing prescription on file for the replacement of:
 - limb and body orthotics
 - custom made shoes and orthotics
 - medical grade compression stocking
 - mobility equipment
 - incontinence and ostomy supplies
 - self-care benefits (such as lift, transfer equipment, urinal)

- Quantities above the current recommended replacement guidelines may be requested without medical justification, if required due to circumstances caused by the COVID-19 outbreak

Oxygen benefits

- The requirement for testing (ABG and oximetry) is not required for clients applying for 9 month, 1 year or yearly renewal for coverage of home supplemental oxygen such as:
 - concentrators
 - portable cylinders
 - homefill systems
 - portable oxygen concentrators
- Your provider may contact you by telephone to obtain an update of your condition and the respiratory equipment in the home
- Initial requests for supplemental home oxygen continue to require testing results. The requirement for an ABG test is waived. Either oximetry or ABG testing is acceptable

Respiratory benefits

- For CPAP and BPAP benefits, purchase will be approved without a trial in situations where a prescription and diagnostic testing with physician interpretation are provided.
- Your provider will inform you if you are eligible

Communication benefits

- Communication benefits include items such as:
 - voice prosthesis
 - speaking valve
 - laryngectomy supplies
- No prescription will be required for renewal requests if the provider has a prescription on file
- Additional items can be approved without medical justification if you require greater access to these supplies due to a change in your condition, such as, due to respiratory infection
- Orders can be made at:
 - Atos Medical or 833-514-2867
 - Auto Control Medical or 800-461-0991

Renewal of Indian status card and NIHB client eligibility

- Service providers require your NIHB client identification number to submit a claim. If you are a registered First Nations person, providers may ask to see your Indian status card because your Indian status registration number is also your NIHB client identification number
- Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, you may experience challenges or delays in renewing your status card as band offices may be closed. You can still apply for a Secure Certificate of Indian Status by mail. Consult Indian Status
- Eligible NIHB clients should not be denied services because their status card has expired
- Service providers can still use your status number to verify your eligibility when submitting NIHB claims
- To verify client eligibility, providers can call Express Scripts Canada for dental, pharmacy and MS&E benefits. For all other benefits, contact the NIHB regional office: Toll free: 1-800-640-0642

Service standards and processing times

- Until further notice, usual program service standards no longer apply for processing of dental predetermination and appeals. Adjudication of prior approval requests for other benefits may take longer than usual
- Wait times at the NIHB Drug Exception Centre, Dental Predetermination Centre and NIHB regional call centres may be longer than usual

March 2020 (COVID-19 Related Updates)

The NIHB program is continuing to provide benefits and services while following public health guidance and recommendations from health professionals as the situation evolves.

The NIHB Drug Exception Centre, Dental Predetermination Centre and regional call centres continue to operate and receive calls from providers and clients. Please note that wait times may be longer than usual, and we appreciate your patience.

The NIHB program normally covers up to a 100-day supply of chronic medications. In determining the quantity to refill for clients, pharmacists will consider advice from professional associations and regulatory bodies, as well as patient-specific factors. If a client is seeking an early refill (before 2/3 of their medications are used), the pharmacist may submit the claim with an over-ride code, and NIHB will reimburse. However, it is the pharmacist's decision to provide early or longer refills.

NIHB clients are encouraged to consult with their health or benefit service provider to confirm whether routine, non-urgent appointments should be postponed.

Dental professional organizations across Canada have advised that non-emergency services should be postponed. Call your dental provider's office to see if any scheduled dental appointments have been cancelled.

You may contact your mental health service provider to confirm whether they can provide counselling services via telephone (tele-mental health services by eligible providers are covered by the NIHB program).

NIHB is continuing to support clients who need medical transportation benefits to access urgent or essential medical services. Vulnerable clients will be supported by prioritizing private modes of transport. Additional guidance has also been provided to support external service providers (such as boarding homes and airlines) for infection prevention/control.

As the situation evolves, information will be provided through NIHB call centres and posted online: <https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1578079214611/1578079236012>

Contacts

Headquarters

Non-Insured Health Benefits program

Address locator: 1909A

Ottawa ON K1A 0K9

Email: sac.nihb-ssna.isc@canada.ca

Toll free: 1-800-567-9604

Fax: 613-954-5265

Teletypewriter: 1-866-553-0554

Non-Insured Health Benefits Regional Office – Ontario

Sir Charles Tupper Building

2720 Riverside Dr 4th floor

Address Locator: 6604E

Ottawa ON K1A 0K9

General NIHB inquiries – Ontario

Toll free: 1-800-640-0642

Fax: 613-952-7054

Email for invoice or claim submission, related inquiries: Nihbontarioinvoices@hc-sc.gc.ca

Website: <https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1579274812116/1579708265237#a2>

Drug Exception Centre

Toll free: 1-800-580-0950

Fax: 1-877-789-4379

Website: <https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1579274812116/1579708265237#a1c>

Medical Supplies & Equipment Guide:

Website: <https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1585320116553/1585320137871>

Medical transportation (Southern zone)

Toll free: 1-800-881-3921

Medical transportation (Sioux Lookout zone)

Toll free: 1-807-737-5820 (weekdays 8 am to 4 pm Central time, except statutory holidays)

Toll free: 1-807-737-0828 (weekends and statutory holidays 8 am to 4 pm, Central time)

Toll free: after hours support (outside above listed hours): 1-833-MED-TRAV (1-833-633-8728)

Medical transportation (Thunder Bay zone)

Telephone: 1-807-343-5390 or toll free 1-877-779-7749

First Nations Inuit Health Branch (FNIHB) Ontario Region NIHB contacts:**Heather Larsen**

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Ontario Region Client Information Line: 1-800-640-0642

Toll-Free Fax

Ottawa: 1-800-806-6662

Thunder Bay: 1-866-551-5650

Sioux Lookout: 1-807-7373879

Chiefs of Ontario NIHB Navigators

If you need help accessing a Non-Insured Health Benefit, Please contact the Chiefs of Ontario Northern and Southern NIHB Navigators at:

Northern Ontario NIHB Navigators:

Jennifer Shisheesh

Phone: (807) 626-9339 from 9:00 am. – 5:00 pm

Email: jennifer.shisheesh@coo.org

Secretariat Office: (416) 597-1266

Toll-Free number: 1-877-517-6527

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