

Appointment availability standards



Aetna Better Health of Maryland emphasizes the importance of timely access to care for our members and expects our providers to uphold these standards.

In emergency situations, if a member calls or walks into your office, they should be directed to the emergency room (ER) immediately, as emergency care is not provided on-site.

For urgent care appointments with a primary care provider (PCP), members should be scheduled within 48 hours of the request. Additionally, non-urgent care appointments should be arranged within 72 hours. Routine, regular, or preventive appointments must also be scheduled within 30 days of the request.

For baseline physicals, members should be accommodated within 90 days. Additionally, child members under 21 years old and adult clients of Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) should be seen within 90 days of initial enrollment. Routine physicals should be scheduled within four (4) weeks, or in accordance with Early Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment (EPSDT) guidelines.

When it comes to specialist visits, we expect you to maintain the same commitment to accessibility. In emergency situations, members should again be directed to the ER. For urgent care appointments with specialists, ensure that members are scheduled within 48 hours. Follow-up, preventive, or routine care appointments with specialists should be arranged within 4 weeks of the request.

Regarding OB/GYN visits, emergency appointments should be handled by directing patients to the ER. Urgent care appointments with an OB/GYN should be scheduled within 48 hours of the request. Non-urgent appointments should be scheduled within 10 days of the request. Initial appointments for members who have had a positive pregnancy test, or high-risk patients, should be scheduled within 10 days of the request. For members in their first or second trimester, initial appointments should be arranged within 10 days of the request. Members in their third trimester, appointments should be scheduled within 10 working days. Additionally, follow-up, preventive, or routine care appointments with an OB/GYN should be scheduled within 10 days of the request. We also expect that the wait time from registration to seeing the physician is usually 45 minutes or less. If a member calls after hours, they should receive a return call from a practitioner within 24 hours.

Other standards include:

- Lab and radiology services should be accessible within 3 weeks for routine appointments and 48 hours for urgent care, with a maximum waiting time of 45 minutes in the office.

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Annual after-hour availability

Aetna Better Health of Maryland is also required to conduct an annual study to assess the availability of PCPs for after-hour consultations. This study surveys our PCP network, randomly selecting providers to contact after business hours or on weekends. The evaluation will determine whether the telephone response from providers meets acceptable criteria.

When a patient calls after hours, the phone should typically be answered directly by a physician, nurse practitioner, or physician assistant. A direct response ensures that patients receive immediate attention from qualified healthcare professionals. If the call is answered by an automated system, the recorded message provides an option for the caller to reach a physician, nurse practitioner, or physician assistant, including the ability to page that individual if necessary.

When a caller selects the option to speak to a live person, they are again connected directly to a physician, nurse practitioner, or physician assistant, ensuring that their medical concerns are addressed promptly. Additionally, the recorded message specifies the timeframe within which the patient can expect a return call from an on-call provider, which is crucial for managing patient expectations. During the survey, the interviewer will introduce themselves and confirm they are speaking with a physician or physician assistant, emphasizing the importance of this communication in maintaining quality care.

Unacceptable responses include leaving messages for the provider without follow-up, instructing callers to go to the ER unnecessarily, or failing to answer the call. This study is essential to ensure that clients have access to care when they need it, even outside regular business hours.

Thank you for your commitment to providing timely care to our members.

Aetna Better Health of Maryland

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