

Administrator

Important news and updates from your benefits professionals

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A crisis explored, from working remotely to contact tracing.

Contact Tracing

Likely to be an important part of re-opening the economy.

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Trends, News, Updates and More Inside!

A Time for Leadership



There are many concerns that cause top executives to lose sleep, but the events of the past couple months have tested business owners and decision makers in ways that can only be described as unprecedented.

The uncertainty surrounding the Coronavirus coupled with a burning desire to get back to business have created an increasingly dynamic and stressful time. From manufacturers scrambling to provide healthcare workers with PPP to non-essential businesses that have had to furlough workers, most CEOs are faced with the biggest challenges of their careers. And while employees are able to share their concerns, leaders must have the courage to hide theirs. Real leaders are able to endure intense pressure while making sure the people around them don't sense it.

Ensuring Safety & Access to Care

The reality is that in the face of this pandemic, true leaders are preparing rather than panicking. After taking steps to keep people safe, they're thinking and planning for a

future that will likely be very different. Leaders know that staying calm is critical to sound decision making. Clear thinking helps them communicate with confidence and listen in a way that calms other's fears. In a crisis, taking the time to listen can make all the difference to a worker finding it really difficult to cope.

While some insurance carriers are waiving member copays, co-insurance and deductibles for COVID-19 diagnostic testing and treatment, some states are mandating it. While state mandates don't apply to self-funded plans, some plan sponsors have chosen to provide COVID-19 patients with first dollar coverage. These actions require the approval of your stop loss carrier since related claims may exceed your stop loss deductible. A written and executed plan amendment is also required. As always, we stand ready to help with these requirements as well as the expansion of HDHP, HSA and FMLA benefits included in the Families First Coronavirus Response Act. We hope you will contact us if your plan is facing any of these issues.

No-Deductible COVID-19 Care



Uninsured people needing medical treatment for the coronavirus will be able to get that treatment without concerns about out-of-pocket costs or unexpected charges. Thanks to the federal stimulus package passed by Congress in early April, hospitals and health-care providers that treat these folks will be paid for unreimbursed care at current Medicare rates.

While the law does not require that health insurance carriers and employer-sponsored health plans waive cost-sharing charges such as deductibles and co-insurance for coronavirus patients requiring medical treatment, many groups are pushing for this relief. In response, some large insurance carriers and health

plans have said they would waive out-of-pocket costs for in-network COVID-treatment through the end of May. Pressure for this relief is expected to mount as shutdowns of non-essential businesses continue and more and more workers are laid off or furloughed.

Relief for HDHPs and HSAs

In another emergency ruling, the IRS said that HSA users with high deductible health plan coverage can use their coverage to pay for testing for SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19 pneumonia, without having to be concerned about satisfying the minimum deductible requirements common to HSA coverage. The same flexibility will now also apply to HSA account holders who need to use their coverage to pay for treatment of COVID-19 pneumonia. The IRS has cautioned that this guidance only applies to the COVID-19 emergency and does not void the other requirements governing High Deductible Health Plans and Health Savings Accounts. Since regulations and requirements regarding benefits for COVID-19 continue to evolve rapidly, plan members are advised to consult their health plan before seeking testing or treatment.

Supreme Court Postpones ACA Decision

Even though the House of Representatives asked the Supreme Court justices to quickly decide whether a decision by a New Orleans-based federal appeals court renders the entire Affordable Care Act unconstitutional, the justices denied the request and postponed any further consideration to the fall. As such, the law remains in effect during the litigation, which began after

Congress reduced the penalty under the insurance mandate to \$0 and argued that the elimination of the tax rendered the mandate unconstitutional. While a brief statement issued by the court did not cite a reason for the postponement, leaders on both sides of the aisle have assumed that the court wanted to make the health-care law less of a factor in the November 2020 election.

Trends Latest Happenings in Today's World

Young Workers Staying Longer

A survey conducted by Prudential showed that nearly 60% of millennials have worked for their current employer for 3 years or more, with almost 50% saying they want to work for their employer for at least another four years. The recent economic boom is credited for this increased loyalty – not just because of rising

demand for talent, but also because business growth has provided more young people with opportunities that used to require a move.

More Multiple Jobs

While the Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that 5 percent of Americans hold multiple jobs, a Gallup survey reflects a number more than 5 times higher. No matter which estimate

you endorse, the fact is that the “gig” economy is growing. At least half say they do it to earn extra money needed to cover the rising costs of healthcare, housing or education.

Family Coverage Exceeds \$20,000

The Kaiser Family Foundation reports that annual premiums for employer-based, family coverage increased to

What Is Contact Tracing?

As some state and local governments move to re-open, we're hearing more about contact tracing. Since many Americans may be unsure of its meaning, we thought it might help to explain how this process may impact us.

Massachusetts seems to be out front, already working to hire and train nearly 1,000 people to do contact tracing. Other health departments have formed teams to begin the process, which consists of identifying and isolating anyone exposed to a confirmed COVID-19 patient. Here's how it typically works:

- Health officials call a person who recently tested positive for the virus.
- The patient describes where they have gone and who they interacted with during the 48 hours prior to their symptoms appearing.
- Health officials then reach out to these businesses and individuals to inform them that they may have been exposed to the virus.
- People who were in close contact with this individual for several minutes are advised to self-isolate for 14 days.

Technology developed by Apple and Google is expected to identify people who have come in contact with a person infected by the virus. While this makes far more sense than expecting someone to remember exactly where they've been, concerns about privacy are still keeping these apps from being rolled out in the U.S.

FMLA Expansion Under Coronavirus Response Act

When President Trump signed the Families First Coronavirus Response Act into law in mid-March, employers with fewer than 500 employees became responsible for providing paid leave to certain employees through Dec. 31, 2020.

The benefit extends to employees unable to work or telework due to the need for leave to care for a son or daughter under the age of 18 that has been impacted by the closing of a school or place of care as a result of a federal, state or local emergency declaration. According to the law, the first 10 days of this leave may be unpaid but provided with pay after 10 days at a rate no lower than two-thirds of an employee's regular rate of pay. Paid leave is not to exceed \$200 per day or \$10,000 in aggregate and employees cannot be required to use available paid time off before receiving the benefit. This expansion applies to employers with fewer than 50 employees even though they are not currently subject to FMLA.



\$20,576 in 2019. This represents a one year increase of about 5 percent and a pattern of similar increases each year throughout the past decade, significantly outpacing the rate of annual inflation over the same period.

Financial Wellness Growing

MetLife recently released a report showing that an increasing number of employers believe that personal

finance has become the main source of stress for their employees. Lack of an emergency fund, student loan repayment and a need for advice top the list of concerns... and this was prior to the Coronavirus crisis. Knowing that no single solution can help every employee, employers are working to identify priorities and shape future offerings to include more education including self-help tools.

Short Workweeks, More Productivity

No one was surprised that workers celebrated when Microsoft Japan instituted a trial 4-day workweek last summer. What was surprising, however, was the 40 percent increase in productivity reported during the trial. Other companies, from call centers and financial advisory firms to metal fabricators and automotive service centers,

have reported similar results. With the responsibilities of parenting and caregiving impacting more working adults each year, a shorter workday or 4-day workweek just may have as positive an impact on the bottom line as it can have on employee morale.



ADAPTING TO CHANGE

Building a Remote Workforce

In mid-March when Discover Financial Services made the decision to put safety first, it meant quickly devising a plan to move 8,000 call center agents from their cubicles in 4 different regional facilities to their homes. Infrastructure services and customer service teams worked 24/7 to develop work-from-home kits consisting of monitors, keyboards and cables, then arranged drive-thru operations at each location, enabling agents to easily transfer the equipment to their cars. In all, 1,900 agents per day were equipped and ready to work off-site. And if that wasn't challenging enough, Discover's largest call center in Utah was forced to cope with a 5.7 magnitude earthquake.

While few companies have to mobilize thousands of workers in just a few days, businesses large and small have been forced to establish a plan, communicate it effectively and go remote during the coronavirus outbreak. Experts say communication is key to maintaining positive morale while still getting the job done. A few best practices may include:

- When possible, adopt a beginning and an end date to the arrangement or adhere to a state or locally mandated stay-at-home order, making adjustments if needed.
- Depending on normal work styles, try to establish consistent work hours, including times when people should be around their desks or be available to collaborate with their teams.
- Take advantage of the flexibility a remote arrangement can provide. Trust and safety should yield greater peace of mind and empower people to get the job done with minimal supervision.

While many Discover employees were accustomed to working remotely, it will be new to many businesses. Many will find that for employees in appropriate positions, working remotely can increase both employee engagement, workplace productivity and job satisfaction.

Did You Know? New Ideas for Healthy Consumers

How COVID-19 Is Transmitted

According to the CDC, the Coronavirus is thought to spread mainly through being close enough to an infected person to be touched by respiratory droplets discharged by coughing, sneezing or talking. These droplets can land in the mouth or nose or be inhaled into the lungs. Physicians suggest the virus can spread very easily between people, but not quite as easily by touching something that has the virus on it and then touching your mouth, nose or eyes.

A recent study published in the New England Journal of Medicine says the Coronavirus is detectable in the air for up to 3 hours, but that a very small amount can

remain on cardboard for 24 hours and on plastic or stainless steel for as long as 2-3 days. The WHO says the likelihood of an infected person contaminating commercial goods is very low and that catching the virus from a transmitted package is also very low.

While physicians on the Administration's Coronavirus Task Force consistently agreed that masks were only needed by healthcare workers, authorities now recommend that masks be worn by all when going outdoors or to public places such as grocery stores, pharmacies, etc.

What You Should Know About Vaping

According to the U.S. Surgeon General, one in six high school students admitted to using e-cigarettes in 2015, with use among teens rising. While the media and elected officials have warned Americans of the risks inherent to electronic cigarettes, it is important to be aware of the dangers.

E-cigarettes, consisting of a battery, an atomizing device and an e-liquid, are devices used to heat the liquid cartridge and release a vapor that is inhaled. Most e-cigarettes contain nicotine and other dangerous substances including metals such as nickel, tin,

lead and diacetyl, a flavoring chemical linked to lung disease. And just as second-hand smoke from regular cigarettes harms those nearby, vaping exposes those close by to toxic chemicals.

In addition to being addictive like nicotine in regular cigarettes, liquid nicotine is poisonous – especially to young children. Teenagers are at greater risk of addiction because their brains are still developing. The more nicotine a young person consumes, the more likely it is that they will become addicted for life.

Do Your Children Need a Pediatrician?



According to HealthDay News, a study covering millions of children age 17 and younger showed that overall visits to pediatricians in the U.S. fell by 14% from 2008 to 2016, with sick visits dropping by 24%. At the same time, however, well-child preventive visits increased by 10%. Researchers mention increasing out-of-pocket costs and the increased availability of urgent care clinics as possible reasons for the change. A professor of Pediatrics at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine reminds us that while deductibles, copays and co-insurance costs related to sick visits have continued to rise, a growing number of health plans provide 100% coverage for well-child visits.

Please Contact Us: This newsletter is not intended as a substitute for personal medical or employee benefits advice. Please consult your physician before making decisions that may impact your personal health. Talk to your benefits administrator before implementing strategies that may impact your organization's employee benefit objectives.



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