

## Part B Insider (Multispecialty) Coding Alert

### Physician Notes: Expect the PHE to Last All Year

**Plus: Bank on regulatory relief to continue, too.**

With no end in sight, the feds anticipate that the COVID-19 public health emergency (PHE) - and the waivers and flexibilities associated with it - will extend through 2021, according to a new Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) letter to state governors.

**Backtrack:** Before resigning in January, outgoing HHS Secretary Alex Azar extended the PHE for a fourth time for another 90 days, effective Jan. 21. Azar previously extended the PHE in April, July, and October.



**Now:** The PHE is not going away any time soon and the Biden administration plans to continue to offer regulatory relief through its duration. "To assure you of our commitment to the ongoing response, we have determined that the PHE will likely remain in place for the entirety of 2021," HHS Acting Secretary **Norris Cochran** said in the Jan. 22 letter. "When a decision is made to terminate the declaration or let it expire, HHS will provide states with 60 days' notice prior to termination."

The letter specifically mentions telemedicine as a tool to increase access to healthcare during a PHE. "Predictability and stability are important given the foundation and flexibilities ... that are tied to the designation of the PHE," Cochran maintains.