



UnitedHealthcare Community Plan of California Requirements for Maternal Mental Health Screening

Effective **July 1, 2019**, California state law requires care providers who provide prenatal or postpartum care to screen women for maternal mental health conditions. Here's what you need to know about maternal mental health screening guidelines for your patients who are UnitedHealthcare Community Plan members:

ACOG Guidelines for Maternal Mental Health Screenings

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) recommends that OB-GYNs and other obstetric care providers screen patients for depression and anxiety at least once during the perinatal period using a standardized, validated tool. It's recommended that a full assessment of mood and emotional well-being (including screening for postpartum depression and anxiety with a validated instrument) be completed during the comprehensive postpartum visit for each patient.

If a patient is screened for depression and anxiety during pregnancy, they should also be screened during the comprehensive postpartum visit. Women with current depression or anxiety, a history of perinatal mood disorders, risk factors for perinatal mood disorders or suicidal thoughts, warrant particularly close monitoring, evaluation and assessment.

There's evidence that screening alone can have clinical benefits, although initiation of treatment or referral to mental health care providers offers maximum benefit. Therefore, clinical staff in obstetrics and gynecology practices should be prepared to initiate medical therapy, refer patients to appropriate behavioral health resources when indicated or both. Additionally, systems should be in place to help ensure follow-up for diagnosis and treatment.

How to Perform Maternal Mental Health Screenings

The state of California and ACOG recommend care providers adhere to the following guidelines when performing maternal mental health screenings:

- Utilize the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9) tool during pregnancy and/or the postpartum period. You can access the PHQ-9 [here](#). The tool is available in multiple languages.
- Conduct the mental health screening using the designated screening tool during the second and/or third trimester, and/or during the postpartum visit.
- Adhere to the following screening protocol:
 - Introduce the screening with a lead-in statement, such as:
 - “It’s not easy being a new mother and it’s okay to feel unhappy at times. Since you recently had a baby, we’d like to know how you’re feeling.”
 - “Please check the answer that comes closest to how you have felt during the past several days, not just how you’re feeling today.”
 - Administer the screening
 - Score the screening tool

- Refer the member to behavioral health services as needed
 - Follow up with member within a week after performing the screening to schedule an additional office visit, as needed
- Refer the member to outpatient behavioral health services (OBHS) or another behavioral health entity for further evaluation if needed. The referral process should be monitored to help ensure the member successfully connects with OBHS.
- OBHS will conduct further evaluation to determine the best course of action to treat any mental health concerns.

We're Here to Help

If you have questions, please email our Quality Department at uhccscaqualitydepartment_dl@ds.uhc.com. Thank you.