



Healthy and Connected Member Newsletter - July 2026

Healthy and Connected is the South Carolina Department of Health and Human Services' (SCDHHS) member e-newsletter. Healthy and Connected features tips and tools to help you and your loved ones connect to resources and live healthier lives.

Having (UV-protected) Fun in the Sun



The summer season brings more time outside for many people. Although it's great to hold activities outdoors, there are ways to do so without too much exposure to the sun. Most skin cancers are caused by overexposure to the sun's ultraviolet (UV) rays. The rays can damage a person's skin cells. UV rays can reach you on cloudy days too. They tend to be the strongest from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

There are different ways you can protect yourself from the sun when UV levels are too high. To find out what the levels are like in your area, use this [UV index search](#). If it is three or more, use these types of protection to practice sun safety:

- Stay in the shade under an umbrella, tree or shelter.
- When possible, wear long-sleeved shirts or pants and skirts to provide protection for your skin. If this type of clothing isn't practical, try a T-shirt or beach cover-up. Tightly woven fabric offers the best protection.
- Wear a hat with a brim all the way around that shades your face, ears and back of your neck. Avoid straw hats with holes that let sunlight through.

- Sunglasses protect your eyes from UV rays and reduce the risk of cataracts. They also protect the sensitive skin around your eyes from being exposed.
- Put on a broad-spectrum sunscreen that filters out UV rays with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 15 or higher before going outside. Higher SPF means more protection. Remember, sunscreen does wear off. Reapply if you stay in the sun for more than two hours. Also reapply after swimming, sweating or wiping off with a towel. Don't forget to check the expiration date on the bottle.

More sun safety tips for school and the workplace are available on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC's) [website](#).

Learning About Cholesterol Levels

People tend to say, “watch your cholesterol levels.” But what does that really mean? [Cholesterol](#) is a waxy substance in our blood. Our bodies need it to build healthy cells. Sometimes, people's low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol levels can become too high. LDL is known as the “bad” type of cholesterol. High-density lipoprotein is the “good.” If your LDL cholesterol is high, it can cause fats to build up in your blood vessels. The buildup, called plaque, makes it harder for blood to flow through.

Having high cholesterol levels can raise the risk of heart disease, the [leading](#) cause of death in South Carolina. Heart disease is a term for a few types of heart conditions. But the most common type is coronary artery disease. This is the type that can be caused by a buildup of fats, cholesterol and other substances in the blood vessels.

There are no symptoms of high cholesterol. The only way to find out if you have it is through a blood test. Healthy Connections Medicaid members should speak with their doctor about a test during their visit.

There are also lifestyle habits you can adopt to help keep your cholesterol at a healthy level. These include:

- Eating a diet focused on lean protein, fruits, vegetables and whole grains. Limit sodium and added sugar.
 - Limit the amount of saturated and trans fats you eat. Instead, try things with healthy fats like oily fish, nuts and olive oil.
 - Lose extra weight and keep it off.
 - Quit smoking.
 - Exercise most days of the week for at least 30 minutes.
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- Limit your alcohol intake. This means up to one drink a day for women and up to two for men.

Seeing the Future Clearly: Protecting our Kids' Eye Health

As children grow, their vision can change fast. Vision is a big part of the development of a child. Their doctor will usually screen their vision as part of their checkup. This helps them see if they need any extra eye care. Having eyesight problems can affect their performance in school. This could include their class participation, testing and behavior.



There are a few [common vision problems](#) in children:

- Myopia – nearsightedness
- Hyperopia – farsightedness
- Astigmatism – when the cornea or lens is shaped differently than normal
- Amblyopia – when vision is reduced in one eye due to a communication error in the brain. This is commonly known as a lazy eye.
- Strabismus – affecting one or both eyes. It is when they do not focus on the same object at the same time. This is commonly known as cross-eyed.
- Convergence insufficiency – affects how the eyes work together when looking at objects closely. It can cause blurry or double vision.

There are ways parents can help protect their children's vision. This includes feeding your kids a healthy diet, rich in fruits and veggies. These types of foods contain vitamins which can help eyesight. A long amount of screen time can make uncorrected vision problems worse. Limit their screen time and have them take breaks. Making sure your children get enough sleep will also help their eyes recover from everyday use or environmental irritants. Taking kids outdoors lets them focus on distant objects. This helps their eyes after being strained or fatigued. Lastly, 90% of eye injuries can be prevented by wearing protective eyewear. If your kids play sports, make sure they're [protecting their eyes](#). This could look like sports goggles, sunglasses or a helmet with a faceguard.

Healthy Connections Medicaid covers children's vision care, including eye exams and treatment for vision issues. August is Children's Eye Health and Safety Month. Make sure to schedule your child's eye exam to help them start off their school year strongly.

National Immunization Awareness Month

August is [National Immunization Awareness Month](#). This month highlights the value of vaccines for people of all ages. Vaccines help shield kids, teens and adults from diseases. They can stop sickness before it starts too.

Healthy Connections Medicaid covers routine and preventive vaccines at [no cost](#). This includes childhood immunizations, yearly flu shots and recommended adult vaccines. Staying up to date on vaccinations helps protect more than just the health of you and your family. It also helps the health of your community.

It is time for kids to return to school and daycare. That means it's also time for parents to check their children's shot records. You may need to call your child's doctor for an appointment. [Adults](#) should talk with their doctor about vaccines suggested for their age, health and lifestyle too.

Vaccines are a safe and effective way to prevent many diseases. If you want to know more about which ones you and your family may need, talk to your doctor. You can see which vaccines Medicaid covers at scdhhs.gov.

Encouraging Healthy Lives for our Children



Teaching your kids the importance of [healthy eating and exercise](#) are core building blocks of life. Both are key to their development. Eating healthy food boosts their immunity and supports their growth. Being active can help them stay strong and excel in school. September is National Childhood Obesity Awareness Month.

Healthy Connections Medicaid managed care organizations (MCOs) have incentives that can help with your child's health and movement.

[Molina](#): \$150 toward the purchase of a bike and helmet. This is for kids who complete their eight, nine or 10-year-old well-child visit.

[Absolute Total Care](#): Covers sports activities fees. This MCO also covers sports physicals, often required to play youth sports.

[Healthy Blue](#): Wellness 360 Healthy & Active Kids program. It focuses on helping children eat well and stay active. It also promotes at least one hour of activity per day. The program gives parents support tools aimed at building longstanding healthy habits.

[Humana](#): Go365 well-being and rewards program. It includes a \$20 incentive for doing an annual health risk assessment. This MCO also offers a youth development and recreation [benefit](#). It covers up to \$250 per year for kids to join activities. These include things like YMCA programs, the Boys & Girls Club, swimming lessons, computer coding or music classes.

[First Choice by Select Health](#): Jump Start Back-to-School program. It provides health screenings and vouchers for swim lessons or youth sports through the YMCA.

One of the best ways to teach kids about how to be active is to lead by example. The CDC [has tips for parents](#) on how to add exercise into their family's routine.

Recovery is Possible

If someone is living with a mental health issue, a substance use disorder or both, treatment can help. It can allow them to improve their health, reach goals and build fulfilling lives. [State health officials](#) say thousands of South Carolinians get help each year.

September is National Recovery Month. Recovery is a lifelong journey. But no one has to go through it alone.

Healthy Connections Medicaid members may be able to get behavioral health help. These services may include:

- Outpatient care
 - Medication-assisted treatment
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- Crisis services
- Behavioral health supports

[The South Carolina Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities Office of Mental Health](#) offers mental health treatment options for adults, kids and families too.

There are ways you can help. Take time to learn about resources. Make sure to support loved ones who may need it. Champion lowering the stigma surrounding mental health and substance use.

Support from family, friends, health care providers, peer support experts and community groups can make a big difference.

Learn more about the help offered to Healthy Connections Medicaid members at [scdhhs.gov](https://www.scdhhs.gov).

Thank you for reading Healthy and Connected. Follow SCDHHS on our [Facebook](#) and [X](#) pages for regular updates. You can also [view the Medicaid Member Handbook](#) on SCDHHS' [website](#) to learn more about what is covered, where to go to ask questions and more.

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