



## Healthy and Connected Member Newsletter - July 23, 2025

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.

### Raising Our Children to be Healthy



As children grow, it's important for them to maintain a healthy weight. Growing up at a weight that is right for your child can help their health through adulthood. September is Childhood Obesity Awareness Month. Obesity is a chronic condition caused by having too much body fat. When a child or teen is obese, it can lead to anxiety, low self-esteem or being teased/bullied.

It can also raise their risk for [health problems](#). This can include:

- Breathing problems
- Type 2 diabetes
- Sleep problems
- Heart problems
- Kidney and liver problems

There are different factors that can lead to a child being overweight or having obesity. These could include their eating habits, physical activity, stress, health problems and

genetics. The environment where they live and play also has an impact. There are ways to help your child reach a healthy weight.

- Move more! Find physical activities the whole family could enjoy together.
- Try to eat a variety of healthy foods. This includes fruits, veggies, whole grains and lean proteins.
- Get enough sleep. Try limiting your child's screen time before going to bed and waking up at the same time every day.
- Limit less-healthy food and drinks that have a lot of added sugars, saturated fat and sodium. This includes things like sodas, processed meats and bread.
- Set a good example. Making healthy choices for yourself can help teach your kids how to do it for themselves, too.

The best way to know if your child is at a healthy weight is to talk with their doctor. Children two years old and older may have their body mass index (BMI) measured. This helps the doctor know if your child is underweight, at a healthy weight, overweight or obese. You can also use [this BMI calculator](#) for children and teens from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Well-child visits are covered through age 21 for Healthy Connections Medicaid members.

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## Summer Water Safety

One way many people choose to beat the heat during the summer is to get in the water. South Carolina has different options for swimming like lakes, pools, oceans and rivers. Water activities can be fun for the whole family, but safety is important. According to the South Carolina Department of Public Health (DPH), the age group with the highest [rate of drowning](#) is children one to four years old. Children [with autism](#) are at an even higher risk – 160 times that of the general child population. This is largely due to their likelihood to wander away from a safe setting.

If you and your family plan to be around water, keep these safety facts in mind. It could help prevent drowning.

1. If you're at a non-public pool, make sure it has a fence all the way around it. Remove all toys from the pool that might attract kids when it's not in use.
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2. Assign an adult to supervise when children are in or near water. The adult watching should keep from distracting activities. This includes reading, using their phone and drinking alcohol.
  3. Wear a life jacket. They should be used by children for all activities in and around natural water. They also reduce the risk of drowning while boating for people of all ages.
  4. Know that natural waters like lakes, rivers and oceans have hidden dangers. This can include unsafe currents, waves, rocks or limited sight. Weather conditions can change quickly and cause flash floods, strong winds and thunderstorms.
  5. Remember to use the buddy system. Being in the water with a buddy is key for people with medical conditions that raise drowning risk. Choose swimming sites with lifeguards if you can.
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## First-time Breastfeeding Tips

August is National Breastfeeding Month. One of the best things a mother can do to give her baby a strong start in life is to breastfeed. Breastfeeding decreases a baby's risk for health issues like asthma, obesity, ear infections and sudden infant death syndrome. Human milk is the perfect food for a baby. It even has antibodies that help them grow a stronger immune system.



Although breastfeeding is a natural activity, it takes practice. It is a learning experience for both mother and baby. Mothers who may be pregnant for the first time could have questions about the process. [The Mayo Clinic](#) has answers.

**When will I start producing milk?** A mother's milk doesn't come in right after delivery. It can take three to five days. Colostrum is produced in the first few days. It is a thicker liquid rich in protein that helps the baby's digestive system develop.

**How will I know if I'm producing enough milk?** Mothers should monitor their baby's dirty diapers. Babies who get enough milk will go through about five to six diapers per

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day. Their doctor will also check the baby's weight regularly. Most moms make enough breast milk naturally.

**Am I doing it right?** Mothers can talk with their doctors or a breastfeeding specialist. They can make sure the mom and baby are positioned the right way and assess the latch on the breast. They can also answer any questions about the process.

**How do I know when baby is hungry?** Newborns should eat at least eight to 12 times a day. But babies give cues themselves when they're hungry. This can include putting their hands to their mouth, rooting from side to side and searching for a nipple. Crying is the last sign of hunger, so it's better to try feeding them before it starts.

Many Healthy Connections Medicaid managed care plans cover breastfeeding items like pumps. Check with your health plan to see what benefits are available. New and expecting mothers are [covered](#) for 12 months postpartum by Medicaid.

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## Telehealth Services: What's Available for Medicaid Members

South Carolina recognizes Telehealth Awareness Week Sept. 15-21. South Carolina Healthy Connections Medicaid members can access many covered services through telehealth. It's a way to get health care by phone or video instead of going to a doctor's office. It is important because it gives people faster and easier ways to get care.

Telehealth Awareness Week is a great time to remind Medicaid members of the telehealth services offered to them after recent updates.

Here's what you need to know.

These services are covered for telehealth.

- Doctor visits and check-ups
- Behavioral health services
- Well-child visits for kids ages two and older

These services are staying at least through 2025.

- Physical, occupational and speech therapy
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- Autism services, like evaluations and therapy sessions

Members should talk with their health care provider to see if telehealth may be an option for their care.

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## How to Support Loved Ones in Crisis



As National Suicide Prevention Month is observed this September, it's important to think about our relationships with loved ones. [Loneliness](#) and suicidal behaviors are reported to be related. Loneliness can come from living by yourself or feeling alone. One of the ways to help fight the feeling of loneliness is through focusing on the connections with those close to you.

Showing you care about someone who is struggling with suicidal thoughts or actions can be one of the best ways to support them. By offering your friendship, it can help to remind them they aren't alone.

If someone wants to talk to you about their struggles, they could be in a lot of pain and need help. You can offer your support by listening to them and showing empathy. [The National Alliance on Mental Illness](#) offers a few examples of compassionate statements you can say to help someone:

- "I'm so sorry you're going through this."
- "Would you like it if I came over?"
- "You mean so much to me. I can't imagine life without you."
- "I know that you're in pain."

Statements that show you care about your loved one are important to tell them. Validating their feelings, suggesting plans and stating their value in your life are all ways to help someone feel less lonely.

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It's important to ask questions, gauge their symptoms and know when it's time to reach out for professional help. This can be a therapist, psychiatrist or The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. The lifeline can be called by dialing "988." It offers free support 24/7 to those in life-threatening situations.

Healthy Connections Medicaid covers a wide variety of behavioral health services from counseling and other community-based treatment to inpatient care for people with mental health challenges.

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## SCDHHS Teams Help Communities Shelter from Storms

The South Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (SCDHHS) plays a key role in helping our communities stay safe during hurricanes. We work with partners across the state to help people stay safe before, during and after a storm.

Hurricane season runs June 1 through Nov. 30 each year. Gov. Henry McMaster declares May as South Carolina Hurricane Preparedness Month to remind residents to make safety plans. South Carolina is one of the most vulnerable states to hurricanes and tropical storms. These storms can cause damage along the coast and throughout the state.

During a state of emergency, some state agencies have special duties. As part of the state response team, SCDHHS staff in local offices help at shelters during a storm. They help sign people in and get settled, serve food, host activities and share updates about current conditions. Team members can help people apply for Medicaid and connect them to local resources too.

SCDHHS' Community Long Term Care (CLTC) team also helps people in their program. Members who receive CLTC services need support with daily living and medical care. CLTC staff help them review and update their personal emergency plans each year. For those in a waiver program, the CLTC team also shares info on the evacuation process. This is for both before and after a disaster.

If people need to leave their homes during a hurricane, CLTC staff work with providers, case managers, nurses and social workers to provide resources. They may even assist in moving members to a safe place that can manage their care. Staff make sure members have their medicines, supplies and needed support.

Everyone should take time now to prepare for a hurricane. Know your evacuation zone. Prepare your home to make sure it's ready for a hurricane. Plan your route and

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follow the blue evacuation signs if you need to leave. For more info on how to prepare for a hurricane, check out the [2025 South Carolina Hurricane Guide](#).

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## Newborn Screenings: Knowing Our Babies' Health Status

Having a newborn baby can bring joy and excitement into new parents' lives. But sometimes, it may feel like an overwhelming job knowing how to keep your baby healthy. You may not know the signs to tell if your new baby is sick. That's why newborn screenings (NBS) can be helpful.



September is NBS Awareness Month.

NBS are done 24-48 hours after birth. They test for markers of certain conditions or illnesses. NBS helps make sure babies have a healthy start to life.

Before starting the screening process, South Carolina requires hospitals to provide info about NBS to parents. The screenings are required by the state.

NBS consists of three parts.

1. Blood spot screening. This test uses a blood sample from the baby's heel to check for signs of specific disorders.
2. Pulse oximetry screening. This checks the baby's oxygen levels to look for signs of certain heart conditions.
3. Hearing screening. This tests to see if the baby could be deaf or hard of hearing.

DPH screens for [58 disorders](#). Test results will be sent to the hospital where the baby was born. Abnormal results are also sent to the DPH's Division of Children's Health for review.

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NBS provides parents with helpful information about their baby's health. Read DPH's [article](#) to see the positive impact that NBS can have.

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## Sickle Cell Disease Awareness

September is Sickle Cell Disease (SCD) Awareness Month. SCD is a red blood cell disorder that blocks blood and oxygen from moving through the body. It affects about 100,000 Americans. It can cause pain, infection and other health problems.

South Carolina has higher rates of SCD than most states. As of 2023, the Medical University of South Carolina reported more than 4,000 people in the state have the disease. It mostly affects African Americans. In our state, one in 350 babies is born with SCD.

Many people with SCD get health care through Healthy Connections Medicaid. Medicaid can help pay for important treatments, medicines and doctor visits. Medicaid also helps members find services to manage symptoms and schedule doctor visits.

DPH has an [SCD program](#) that works with Medicaid. The program helps pay for medical supplies, equipment and prescriptions. It also offers nursing, nutrition and social work services, when needed.

On June 1, 2025, South Carolina became one of 11 states to join the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services (CMS) Cell and Gene Therapy (CGT) Access Model for SCD. This program covers two drugs for sickle cell gene therapy. It can also help CMS track health data and outcomes. The CGT Access Model gives access to gene therapy by having the same guidelines for each state that participates. It helps cover transportation to care. Fertility preservation services may also be an option for those who qualify.

The goal of the model is to improve the lives of people with Medicaid who live with rare and serious diseases by giving them more access to new treatments. The model also makes it easier for states to offer cell and gene therapy treatments to people who need them.

For more info on the CGT Access Model, visit [CMS's website](#).

During SCD Awareness Month, Medicaid members are encouraged to ask about newborn screenings and learn about DPH's Sickle Cell [program](#).

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## Gearing Up for Kindergarten



Starting school for the first time is a big milestone, for both first-time kindergartners and their families. A little preparation now can make a big difference later. South Carolina First Steps has some tips to help you and your child get ready for their first day of school. Here's how to make the transition easier for everyone:

### **1. Make sure you're registered.**

If your child will be five years old by Sept. 1, it's time to sign up. Not sure where to start? Call your local school. They'll walk you through what to do and what to bring.

### **2. Get to know your school.**

Ask about open houses, tours or meet-the-teacher events. Seeing the building and classroom ahead of time helps take the mystery out of day one. It's a great way to help your child feel excited, not nervous.

### **3. Practice your new routine.**

Kindergarten mornings can be early! Start now with a regular bedtime and morning wake-up. Most five-year-olds need 10–13 hours of sleep each night. A good night's rest and a healthy breakfast (at home or school) will set the stage for a great day.

### **4. Celebrate!**

This is a proud moment. Let your child know how excited you are for them. Take a photo, read a special book or just say, "You've got this, and I've got you."

You're doing something amazing by helping your child get ready to learn, grow and shine. For more tips and resources, visit [kindergartenreadysc.org](http://kindergartenreadysc.org).

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.