

Health Matters

Summer 2026

Inside this issue:

- Stay on track with preventive care and vaccines
- Get ready for back-to-school season
- Learn simple ways to stay safe and healthy this summer
- Discover rewards, recipes, and member resources





Hello!

Summer is still in full swing, and it's a great time to focus on your well-being. In this issue, you'll find tips, resources, and reminders to help you stay on track with preventive care and make the most of your health plan benefits. You'll also find healthy eating ideas and recipes, information about recommended vaccines, Healthy Incentives, and summer safety reminders.

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Preventive care starts with you

Don't miss your checkup: Why PCP visits matter

Did you know that one of the best ways to stay healthy is to see your primary care provider (PCP) regularly?

Your PCP is your partner in staying healthy. Regular checkups can help prevent illness, manage ongoing health conditions and catch potential health problems early.

When you keep your appointments, your PCP can help you:

- Stay on top of preventive care and screenings.
- Manage ongoing conditions, such as asthma, diabetes and high blood pressure.
- Refill medications and coordinate your care.
- Connect you with specialists and other helpful resources.

Life gets busy, but making time for your health is important. If you can't make an appointment, call your doctor's office to reschedule. Regular visits help you stay on track with your health goals and get the care you need when you need it.

Need help finding a PCP?

To find a primary care doctor, go to **sentarahealthplans.com/findadoc**

Healthy tip: Before your next appointment, write down any medications, symptoms or questions you want to discuss with your PCP. Scheduling regular checkups is an important step toward staying healthy and addressing concerns early.



Take charge of your health with an adult wellness visit

An Adult Well Visit is a chance to focus on your health and plan for the year ahead. During this yearly visit, you can talk with your doctor about your health, ask questions, and discuss care that may be right for you.

Your visit may include:

- A review of your health history.
- Recommended screenings and vaccines.
- A discussion about your health goals and concerns.
- Tips to help you stay healthy and prevent future health problems.

An Adult Well Visit is also a good time to think about what matters most to you:

- Staying active and healthy as you get older.
- Eating healthier foods.
- Improving sleep.
- Managing stress.
- Preventing future health problems.
- Family health history and health risks.
- Any problems you are struggling with.

Taking time for this yearly visit can help you stay informed, prepared and in control of your health.

Eligible Medicaid members may earn a \$25 Healthy Incentive gift card for completing an Adult Well Visit by Dec. 31¹

Healthy Tip: Think about one health goal you would like to work on this year. Your Adult Well Visit is a great time to talk with your doctor about steps you can take to reach it.



Vaccines and back-to-school health

Are you up-to-date on your vaccines?

Vaccines play an important role in protecting your health at every stage of life. Adults need routine vaccines to help prevent serious illnesses, reduce the risk of complications, and avoid hospital stays.

August is the National Immunization Awareness Month and is a great reminder to check whether you're up to date on the vaccines recommended for your age and health needs.



Depending on your age and health history, you may be due for one or more of these vaccines:

Vaccination	Details
Flu (Influenza)	Adults should receive a flu vaccine every year to help protect against seasonal influenza.
Tetanus, Diphtheria, and Pertussis (Td/Tdap)	Adults should get a Td or Tdap booster every 10 years to maintain protection against these serious diseases.
Shingles (Zoster)	Adults age 50 and older should receive two doses of the shingles vaccine, given at least 28 days apart.
Pneumococcal	Adults age 65 and older should receive a pneumococcal vaccine to help protect against pneumonia and other serious infections. Talk with your health care provider to confirm whether you're up to date.
Hepatitis B	Adults ages 19 to 59 should be protected against hepatitis B. You may already be covered if you completed the hepatitis B vaccine series as a child or received the full adult vaccine series.
COVID-19	Adults should receive recommended COVID-19 vaccinations and boosters based on guidance from their health care provider.

Back-to-school vaccines for children and teens

Heading back to school is a great time to make sure your child is up to date on recommended vaccines. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends following the childhood immunization schedule to help protect children and teens from serious diseases.³

Back-to-school vaccine checklist

Age	Vaccine
4 to 6 years	DTaP, Polio (IPV), MMR, and Varicella (chickenpox)
11 to 12 years	Tdap booster, HPV vaccine, and Meningococcal (MenACWY) vaccine
16 years	Meningococcal (MenACWY) booster
Every year	Flu vaccine for children and teens, as recommended

Talk with your child’s provider or review their immunization record before the school year begins. The CDC’s recommended immunization schedule can help families track vaccines from birth through age 18.³

Why vaccines matter

Keeping your vaccinations current can help:

- Prevent serious illness and long-term health complications
- Reduce the risk of hospitalization
- Protect family members, friends, and others in your community
- Support a healthier community for everyone

Eligible members may earn a \$25 Healthy Incentive gift card for completing a Child and Adolescent Well Visit by Dec. 31.¹

What you can do

Taking a few simple steps can help you stay protected:

- Ask your provider whether you’re up to date on recommended vaccines
- Discuss vaccinations during routine checkups
- Get vaccinated when recommended
- Keep a personal record of your immunizations
- Review your health plan benefits to understand your vaccine coverage

No matter the time of year, it’s a good idea to check your vaccination status and talk with your provider about what’s recommended for you. Staying up to date is one of the easiest and most effective ways to protect your health and the health of those around you.

Sources:

National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA), HEDIS® Measurement Year 2026, Adult Immunization Status (AIS-E).
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Recommended Immunization Schedules for Adults, Children, and Adolescents
[cdc.gov/vaccines-children/schedules/index.html](https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines-children/schedules/index.html)





Maternal health matters

August: National Breastfeeding Month

National Breastfeeding Month celebrates and supports parents during one of life's most important journeys. Breastfeeding can offer health benefits for both parent and baby, and access to education, resources and support can help families feel more confident during pregnancy and after delivery. Whether you breastfeed, formula feed, or do a combination of both, finding the approach that works best for you and your baby is what matters most.

Here are a few simple tips that may help support your breastfeeding journey:

- Try different breastfeeding positions, such as the cradle hold, football hold or side-lying position.
- Watch for early hunger cues, such as rooting or sucking on hands.
- Use pillows or supports to help keep you and your baby comfortable during feedings.

Medicaid members enrolled in Welcoming Baby may be eligible for a free breast pump. If you did not receive your Aeroflow breast pump before giving birth, contact your community health worker or visit Aeroflow to register for your breast pump.

Welcoming Baby can also connect members with breastfeeding support and educational resources. Eligible Medicaid members may earn:

- \$150 Healthy Incentive gift card for completing a prenatal visit.¹ New members must complete the visit within 42 days of enrollment, and existing members within the first trimester (12 weeks) of pregnancy.
- \$150 Healthy Incentive gift card for completing a postpartum visit between 7 and 84 days after delivery.¹

Healthy incentives and screenings

Ask a nurse care manager: Why do I need to complete my health screenings?

Health screenings can include breast cancer screenings, colon cancer screenings, or diabetic A1c tests.

Why are these important?

Health screenings can help find health issues early. When problems are found early, they may be easier to treat. This can help you stay healthier and may help prevent emergency room visits.

Rewards for completing screenings

Sentara Health Plans wants you to be your healthiest self. When you complete certain screenings, you can earn rewards. All you need to do is complete your screening and we will handle the rest!

Some of the health screenings you can complete for rewards are listed in the table below.

Health Screening	Reward	Who is eligible?
Breast cancer screening	\$15	All members
Colorectal cancer screening	\$15	All members
Diabetic HbA1c testing	\$10	All members with diabetes
Diabetic eye exam	\$25	All members with diabetes

This link talks more about Healthy Incentives and the ways to earn gift card¹

What should you do next?

- Schedule and complete your recommended screenings.
- Let your care manager know when they are done.

A few screenings can make a big difference in helping you stay healthy and feel your best.

Making everyday life easier with your flex card benefits

Your Sentara Medicaid Flex Card can help you take advantage of benefits available through your plan. Whether you're activating a new card or learning more about what's available to you, NationsBenefits® provides an easy way to access benefit information and get started.

Your Flex Card gives you access to healthy foods and other eligible items available through your plan. To learn more about available benefits, activate your card or visit the NationsBenefits® portal.

Need help getting started?

- Visit SentaraMedicaid.NationsBenefits.com
- Call **1-888-223-1228 (TTY: 711)**, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., seven days a week.

Take a few minutes to learn more about your Flex Card and the benefits available to you.



Managing chronic conditions

Heart management checklist: Small steps, big impact

Living with congestive heart failure (CHF) can feel overwhelming, but daily habits can help you manage symptoms and support your heart health. Please speak with a physician about these recommendations and determine the best plan for your health.

Your checklist to help with monitoring potential symptoms:

- **Blood pressure**
- **Confusion or impaired thinking** – Family and friends may notice this before, so consider asking people around you for feedback.
- **Daily weight** – Contact your provider if you have sudden weight gain.
- **Heart rate**
- **Shortness of breath** or extra fatigue while moving through your daily routine – Contact your provider if you have difficulty breathing when lying flat or have sudden and severe shortness of breath during sleep
- **Swelling in your body** (e.g., ankles, lower legs, and feet)
- Your provider may also ask you to monitor your appetite, sleep, oxygen, and more.

Stay active

In addition to monitoring your health, aim for regular, doctor-approved physical activity. Even a short daily walk can help. As a Sentara Health Plans member, you have access to **multiple well-being programs**, including the MoveAbout Program and Healthy Habits, Healthy You.

Remember

Managing heart failure is a daily commitment, but small, consistent actions can help you feel better and stay healthier. Always follow your healthcare provider's recommendations for your specific needs.

Sources:

heart.org/en/health-topics/heart-failure/what-is-heart-failure



Pharmacy focus

How do I get rid of unused or expired medications?

Safe ways to dispose of unused medications

Old medications can be harmful if they are found by children, pets, or other family members. Follow these steps to safely dispose of the medications you no longer use.

1. Drop off medications at a drug take-back location

One of the safest ways to dispose of old medications is to take them to a medication drop box or drug take-back site. Many pharmacies and police stations have secure drop-off locations. You can find an approved drug take-back location near you using the [DEA Diversion Control Division's website](#).

2. Use a drug mail-back program

Many pharmacies offer special envelopes that allow you to mail in old medications for safe disposal. Check with your local pharmacy for available options.

3. Dispose of medications at home

If take-back or mail-back programs are not available, follow these FDA recommendations:

- Flushing medications safely
 - Some medications can be flushed down the toilet if the label instructions or pharmacist says it is safe to do so. If you are not sure, ask your pharmacist. You can check the [FDA Flush List](#) for a current list of medications that are safe to flush.
- Safe disposal in household trash:
 - **Step 1:** Remove the medication from its original container and mix with dirt, cat litter, or used coffee grounds. Do not crush tablets or open capsules.
 - **Step 2:** Place the mixture in a sealed plastic bag or a disposable container with a lid.
 - **Step 3:** Remove or scratch out your name and other personal information from the empty medication bottle.
 - **Step 4:** Throw the sealed container in your household trash and recycle the empty medication bottle if possible.

Remember: Taking a few simple steps now can help protect your family and others. If you have questions about how to dispose of medication, talk with your pharmacist.



Caregiver corner

Small acts, big impact

Do you help a loved one manage their health? Whether it's a ride to an appointment, a reminder to take medication, or simply checking in, you may be serving as a caregiver.

Caregivers play an important role in helping loved ones stay healthy. Your support can provide encouragement, help them stay on track with their care, and make a meaningful difference in their overall well-being.

Different ways to support a loved one are:

- Calling or visiting to see how they are doing
- Offering to help with errands or transportation
- Reminding a loved one about an upcoming appointment
- Helping organize medications or health information

Remember, caregivers need care, too. Take time to rest, ask for help when needed and connect with others who can support you. When caregivers stay healthy, they can better support the people they care about.

Take time this week to check in with a loved one, offer support or help them stay on track with their health. Your care can make a meaningful difference.





Healthy eats

Cooking smarter, not harder

Cooking can sometimes feel like a lot of work. The good news is healthy meals can be made simple. A few easy swaps and helpful tools can make cooking quicker and easier.

Easy swaps:

- Choose pre-cut fruits and vegetables instead of whole produce.
- Buy smaller produce, like baby carrots or mini potatoes.
- Use frozen vegetables that are already washed and ready to cook.

Simple protein options:

- Rotisserie chicken
- Pre-cooked shredded chicken
- Frozen meatballs
- Canned tuna or salmon

Helpful kitchen tools:

- Instant Pot
- Slow cooker (crockpot)
- Microwave
- Sheet pan for one-pan meals

Healthy tip: Try making extra food when you cook. Save the leftovers in the refrigerator for a meal later in the week, or freeze them for another day. Having ready-to-eat meals can help you spend less time cooking. For more meal-prep ideas and easy recipes, explore the **Eating for Life program** on sentarahealthplans.com.

One-pan salmon dinner

This healthy meal can be made without cutting, chopping, and minimal preparation.

Ingredients:

- ½ pound of mini potatoes
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1-2 teaspoons of all-purpose seasoning
- 1 pound salmon filets
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- 1 tablespoon of pre-minced garlic
- 3 tablespoons of olive oil
- 1 ½ teaspoons or all-purpose seasoning
- ½ teaspoon of onion powder
- ½ teaspoon of smoked paprika
- frozen broccoli, thawed

Tools:

- Sheet pan
- Meat thermometer
- Small bowl
- Spoon

Step 1: Heat the oven

1. Preheat your oven to 400 degrees.

Step 2: Prepare the potatoes

1. Rinse the potatoes.
2. Put the potatoes on the sheet pan.
3. Drizzle them with 1 tablespoon of olive oil.
4. Sprinkle 1-2 teaspoons of all purpose seasonings.
5. Toss the potatoes until coated.
6. Bake for 15 minutes.

Step 3: Make the seasoning mix

1. In a bowl, combine the following ingredients:
 - 3 tablespoons of olive oil
 - 2 tablespoons of lemon juice
 - 1 tablespoon of garlic
 - 1 ½ teaspoons of all purpose seasoning
 - ½ teaspoon of onion powder
 - ½ teaspoon of smoked paprika
2. Stir well

Step 4: Season the salmon

1. Pour the seasoning mixture over the salmon.
2. Spread it evenly to cover the top of the salmon.

Step 5: Add the broccoli and salmon

1. Carefully remove the sheet pan from the oven.
2. Move the potatoes to one side of the pan.
3. Place the broccoli on the empty side of the pan.
4. Place the salmon on top of the broccoli.
5. Return the pan to the oven.
6. Bake for 10-15 minutes.
7. Check the salmon with the thermometer. The salmon is done when it reaches 145 degrees.
8. Place the potatoes, salmon, and broccoli on a plate and enjoy!

For more meal-prep ideas and easy recipes, explore the Eating for Life program on sentarahealthplans.com.



Summer safety tips

Snake bites in summertime

Summer means more time outdoors, but it can also mean more encounters with snakes. Sentara emergency department doctors are reminding people to stay alert for snakes.

Sentara hospitals usually see an increase in snake bites during the summer months.

Not all snakes are venomous, but there are some in warmer areas that can be dangerous.

What to do after a snake bite

If a snake bites you, move away from it immediately to avoid being bitten again.

Sentara doctors suggest keeping the area still and remaining as calm as possible. If you can do it safely, take a picture of the snake to help medical teams identify it. Do not try to catch the snake.

Symptoms following a snake bite can vary, but may include:

- Pain and swelling around the bite
- Numbness, tingling, muscle weakness, or paralysis
- Rash, shortness of breath, dizziness, or lightheadedness

Be careful of common myths about treating snake bites. Actions that are not recommended are applying a tourniquet, cutting the wound, attempting to suck out venom, or placing ice on the bite.

Instead, gently wash the area and call 911 or go directly to the nearest emergency department or urgent care.

Not all snake bites leave obvious fang marks. If you think a snake may have bitten you, get medical help right away.

It is always best to seek medical attention. Emergency physicians and poison control experts can help determine the safest next steps.

For more information about snakebite prevention and treatment, contact your healthcare provider or local poison control center.



Beat the heat: Easy ways to stay healthy this summer

Summer is a great time to enjoy the outdoors. As temperatures rise, it's important for everyone to take simple steps to stay safe while spending more time outside. These tips can help you stay cool, protect your skin, and enjoy the season with confidence.

Stay cool and hydrated. Dehydration can happen quickly when spending time outdoors in the summer. Drink water throughout the day and don't wait until you feel thirsty. If your doctor has given you limits on how much fluid to drink, ask how to stay safely hydrated during hot weather.

Know the signs of heat stroke. Heat stroke can happen when the body becomes overheated. Watch for symptoms like extreme fatigue, a high body temperature, nausea, muscle cramps, dizziness, confusion, or fainting. Recognizing these signs early can help you respond quickly and seek care when needed.

Wear loose, lightweight, light-colored clothing. When possible, wear clothing with built-in ultraviolet protection factor (UPF). Try to plan activities during the cooler morning or evening hours.

Sun safety and sunscreen are important for everyone. No matter your skin tone, sunscreen helps protect you from harmful sun rays that can contribute to skin cancer. Use sunscreen with SPF 30 or higher and reapply every two hours or after swimming or sweating. You can also protect yourself by wearing a wide-brimmed hat or sitting in the shade.

Check your medication. Some medications can increase sensitivity to heat or sun. Ask your doctor or pharmacist whether any medications you or a loved one take may raise this risk.

Plan your day. Try to avoid the hottest parts of the day by checking the forecast, using air conditioning or fans during extreme temperatures, and taking breaks in shaded or indoor areas.

Keep kids safe in the heat. Summer fun is better when everyone stays safe. Children can get overheated faster than adults, so keep these tips in mind:

- Never leave a child alone in a parked car.
- Offer water often and take breaks in the shade.
- Use sunscreen and protective clothing.
- Limit outdoor activities during extreme heat, especially if your child is sick.
- Watch for signs of heat illness, such as dizziness, nausea, confusion, or unusual tiredness.

If your child shows signs of heat illness, move them to a cool place right away, offer water if appropriate, and seek medical care if symptoms worsen.

Take action when it matters most. If you or a loved one may be experiencing signs of heat-related illness, seek care right away or call 911. You can also use the Sentara Health Plans mobile app to find a provider near you.

A few small steps can make a big difference. Stay cool, stay protected, and enjoy a safe, healthy summer.

Sources:

sentara.com/healthwellness/articles/summer-safety-tips-for-seniors

sentara.com/healthwellness/articles/tips-for-a-safe-and-fun-filled-summer





Member resources

A portal into your care

A patient portal lets you manage your health information in one place. It can help you stay connected, keep track of appointments, and be more involved in your health.

A patient portal, like **Sentara MyChart** gives you easy access to your health information and care team. Depending on your provider you may be able to:

- Schedule, view, reschedule, or cancel appointments
- Receive reminders
- Complete online check-in before your visit, such as Sentara eCheck-In
- View test results such as lab work or X-rays; request prescription refills
- Send messages to your provider

Downloading the **Sentara MyChart app** can make it even easier to use these tools on your phone. You can check appointment details, view reminders, read messages, and access other helpful features at home, at work, or on the go.

Studies show that having easy access to your health information can help you better understand your care and feel more confident managing your health. Patient portals can also help you stay on track with medications, preventive care, and important appointments. If you have an ongoing health condition, a patient portal can make it easier to review tests, stay organized, and stay connected with your care team between visits.

Ask your care team if they offer a portal, how to sign up, and what tools are available to help manage your care.

Sources: pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9816956/, healthit.gov/patient-access-to-health-records/individuals/, sentara.com/patientguide/medical-records/sentara-mychart, sentara.com/patientguide/medical-records/sentara-mychart/sentara-mychart-app

Important Medicaid updates

Sign in today and stay connected to your health

At the doctor's office and need your member ID card? Want to check what a test or procedure may cost? Sign in and get the information you need when you need it.

The Sentara Health Plans member portal and mobile app give you secure access to important health plan information. After you register and sign in, you can:

- View and share your member ID card.
- Check benefits and balances.
- Track claims and authorizations.
- Find in-network providers and facilities.
- Schedule virtual consults.

Get instant access to your health plan anytime you need it. [**Sign in**](#)

Don't have the mobile app yet? You can download it from the Apple App Store or Google Play. Your member portal username and password work for the mobile app too.

[**Learn more**](#)

Upcoming Medicaid eligibility changes for some noncitizen adults

Later this year, a federal law will require changes to Medicaid eligibility rules for certain noncitizen adults.

These changes are scheduled to begin October 1, 2026.

If you are a **non-pregnant adult**, Medicaid eligibility rules related to immigration status will become more limited. To qualify for full-benefit Medicaid after October 1, 2026, non-pregnant adults will need to be a U.S. citizen or national or be a Lawful Permanent Resident, Cuban or Haitian Entrant, or a Compact of Free Association migrant and meet all other Medicaid requirements, such as income limits.

Virginia Medicaid will review current members who may be affected and will send notices with more information before any changes take place. These notices will explain what the new rules mean and whether any action is needed.

No changes are happening yet. Coverage continues under current rules through September 30, 2026.

[**Review eligibility changes**](#)

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Footnotes

¹Some incentives have restrictions and limits.