

US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) announced that testing, treatment, or preventive care for Coronavirus (COVID-19) will not be considered as part of public charge decisions. Here's what you need to know.

Coronavirus Symptoms

Symptoms for this illness may include:

- Fever
- Cough
- Difficulty breathing
- Sore throat (in some patients)

What is Public Charge?

A new public charge rule went into effect on February 24, 2020. Public charge is used by immigration officials to decide whether a person can enter the U.S. or get a green card. Officials look at all of a person's circumstances, including income, employment, health, education or skills, family situation and whether a sponsor signed a contract promising to support the person. Officials can also look at whether a person has used specific benefit programs, including Medicaid (MaineCare).

It is important to know that public charge does NOT apply to all immigrants and does NOT affect green card holders when they apply for citizenship. Learn more about public charge at www.ilapmaine.org/public-charge.

Testing, Treatment, or Preventive Care for Coronavirus WILL NOT Impact Public Charge

It is important that everyone who needs medical care to treat or prevent Coronavirus (COVID-19) gets that care. If you have symptoms and need to seek medical treatment, you should get it even if it will be paid for by Medicaid. USCIS states that testing and treatment for Coronavirus will not negatively affect any future public charge decision. If preventive care (like a vaccine) becomes available, you will be able to access that care as well.

If I Cannot Work Because of Coronavirus, Can I Get Help with Food, Housing, or Health Care?

Many workplaces and schools may close so that people can stay home and help stop the spread of the virus. If you have symptoms of the virus, you will be asked to self-quarantine (stay at home). It is important that people follow these guidelines. If you need to use public benefits such as General Assistance, food assistance, housing assistance, or Medicaid (MaineCare) to meet your basic needs during this public health emergency, USCIS states that you will be able to submit an explanation and documentation to have the emergency taken into consideration for your public charge decision. Remember there are many other supports – school nutrition programs, Emergency Medicaid, Medicaid or CHIP for children and pregnant women, shelters, and food pantries – that are not considered under the public charge rule.

For more information on immigration, public benefit programs, and community support: