**STATE OF CALIFORNIA**

**DEPARTMENT OF INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS**

**DIVISION OF WORKERS’ COMPENSATION**

**NOTICE OF PROPOSED EVIDENCE-BASED UPDATE TO THE MEDICAL TREATMENT UTILIZATION SCHEDULE**

**NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN** that the Administrative Director of the Division of Workers’ Compensation (hereinafter “Administrative Director”), pursuant to the authority vested in him by Labor Code section 5307.27, subdivision (a), proposes an evidence-based update to the Medical Treatment Utilization Schedule (MTUS) contained in Article 5.5.2 of Chapter 4.5, Subchapter 1, Division 1, of Title 8, California Code of Regulations, section 9792.24. This proposed evidence-based update to the MTUS incorporates by reference the most recent American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine’s (ACOEM) Coronavirus (COVID-19) Guideline.

**PROPOSED EVIDENCE-BASED UPDATE TO THE MTUS**

The Department of Industrial Relations, Division of Workers’ Compensation, proposes an evidence-based addition to the following section of the MTUS, contained in Article 5.5.2 of Chapter 4.5, Subchapter 1, Division 1, of Title 8, California Code of Regulations:

§ 9792.24.7 Coronavirus (COVID-19) Guideline

**AUTHORITY AND REFERENCE**

The Administrative Director is undertaking this evidence-based update to the MTUS pursuant to the authority vested in him by Labor Code section 5307.27, subdivision (a). Reference is to Labor Code sections 4600, 4604.5, 5307.3, 5307.4, and 5307.27.

**EXEMPTION FROM ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURE ACT**

Pursuant to Labor Code section 5307.27, subdivision (a), the amendment of these regulations are exempt from Labor Code sections 5307.3 and 5307.4 and the rulemaking provisions of the Administrative Procedure Act (APA) (Chapter 3.5 (commencing with Section 11340) of Part 1 of Division 3 of Title 2 of the Government Code).

**INFORMATIVE DIGEST/POLICY OVERVIEW/STATEMENT OF REASONS**

Labor Code section 5307.27 requires the Administrative Director to adopt the MTUS that incorporates evidence-based, peer-reviewed, and nationally-recognized standards of care of all treatment procedures and modalities commonly performed in workers’ compensation cases. Labor Code section 4604.5 states, “the recommended guidelines set forth in the medical treatment utilization schedule…shall be presumptively correct on the issue of extent and scope of medical treatment.” This presumption is rebuttable and may be controverted by a preponderance of scientific medical evidence establishing that a variance from the guidelines is reasonably required to cure or relieve the injured worker from the effects of his or her industrial injury.

The Administrative Director established and adopted the MTUS on June 15, 2007. The MTUS was subsequently amended over the years, under the rulemaking provisions of the APA. At the end of 2017, amendments to the MTUS were made for the first time pursuant to Labor Code section 5307.27, subdivision (a), authorizing evidence-based updates to the MTUS by an Administrative Director order exempt from Labor Code sections 5307.3 and 5307.4, and the rulemaking provisions of the APA. This amendment to Labor Code section 5307.27, subdivision (a), was made to ensure medical treatment is based on the latest scientific research and to ensure that outdated guidelines in the MTUS are replaced by up-to-date treatment guidelines.

The MTUS is the primary source to determine the standard of care in California’s workers’ compensation system. Recommendations found in the MTUS guidelines are presumptively correct on the issue of extent and scope of medical treatment. Although the MTUS’ presumption of correctness may be rebutted by a preponderance of scientific medical evidence, it is important that the treatment recommendations found in the MTUS accurately represent the current standard of medical care. MTUS treatment guidelines that comprehensively incorporate recommendations supported by the best available, up-to-date scientific studies provide guidance for new medical treatments, drugs, or diagnostic tools and instill confidence that the standard of care is accurately represented. On the other hand, if the guidelines are outdated, the recommendations will likely be subject to frequent attempts to rebut the presumption of correctness, resulting in delayed delivery of medical care to injured workers and an increase in frictional costs to treating physicians and employers.

Accordingly, this Administrative Director order makes evidence-based updates to the MTUS by replacing an outdated guideline with the most recent ACOEM treatment guideline supported by the latest scientific research. Updates to the current codified MTUS are shown in strikethrough to indicate deletions and underscore to show additions.

The proposed evidence-based update to the MTUS to implement Labor Code section 5307.27 is as follows:

**§ 9792.24.7. Coronavirus (COVID-19) Guideline.**

This section contains the guideline for the evaluation, treatment, and prevention of the novel coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19). This acute respiratory infection caused by a new strain of coronavirus has spread worldwide and has reached pandemic proportions. The MTUS currently contains guidelines addressing respiratory conditions or diseases experienced by injured employees. (See Occupational/Work-Related Asthma Guideline and Occupational Interstitial Lung Disease Guideline). This section addresses another respiratory disease that is impacting injured employees. The Coronavirus (COVID-19) Guideline is being added so that the evaluation, treatment, and prevention of COVID-19 represent current evidence-based medical recommendations.

**TIME AND PLACE OF CONFERENCE CALL PUBLIC HEARING**

As a result of the stay-at-home order issued by the Department of Public Health on December 4, 2020 in light of the surge in COVID-19 cases in California, a conference call public hearing has been scheduled in lieu of an in-person public hearing to permit all interested persons the opportunity to present oral statements or arguments with respect to the proposed evidence-based update to the MTUS on the following date:

**Date: February 18, 2021**

**Time: 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., or until conclusion of business**

**Call: 1-866-390-1828; then access code 5497535; then press #**

Alternate formats, assistive listening systems, sign language interpreters, or other types of reasonable accommodation to facilitate effective communication for persons with disabilities, are available upon request. Please contact the Statewide Disability Accommodation Coordinator, Maureen Gray, at 1-866-681-1459 (toll free), or through the California Relay Service by dialing 711 or 1-800-735-2929 (TTY/English) or 1-800-855-3000 (TTY/Spanish) as soon as possible to request assistance.

**Please note that public comment will begin promptly at 10:00 A.M. and will conclude when the last speaker has finished his or her presentation or 5:00 P.M., whichever is earlier. If public comment concludes before the noon recess, no afternoon session will be held.**

The Administrative Director requests, but does not require, that any persons who make oral comments at the conference call public hearing also provide a written copy of their comments. Equal weight will be accorded to oral comments and written materials.

**WRITTEN COMMENT PERIOD**

Any interested person, or his or her authorized representative, may submit written comments relevant to the proposed evidence-based update to the MTUS to the Department of Industrial Relations, Division of Workers’ Compensation. The written comment period closes on February 18, 2021.The Division of Workers’ Compensation will only consider comments received at the Department of Industrial Relations, Division of Workers’ Compensation by that date. Again, equal weight will be accorded to oral comments presented at the conference call public hearing and written materials.

Submit written comments concerning the proposed regulations prior to the close of the public comment period to the DWC contact person:

Maureen Gray

Regulations Coordinator

Department of Industrial Relations

P.O. Box 420603

San Francisco, CA 94142

Written comments may be submitted via facsimile transmission (FAX), addressed to the above-named contact person at (510) 286-0687. Written comments may also be sent electronically (via e-mail) using the following e-mail address: dwcrules@dir.ca.gov.

Ms. Gray must receive all written comments no later than 11:59 p.m. on February 18, 2021.

**CONTACT PERSON**

Inquiries concerning this action, such as requests to be added to the mailing list or requests for copies of the text of the proposed regulations may be directed to the contact person:

Maureen Gray

Regulations Coordinator

Department of Industrial Relations

Division of Workers’ Compensation

P.O. Box 420603

San Francisco, CA 94142

E-mail: mgray@dir.ca.gov

Telephone: (510) 286-7100

**CONTACT PERSON**

In the event the contact person is unavailable, inquiries may be directed to:

John Cortes

Division of Workers’ Compensation

P.O. Box 420603

San Francisco, CA 94142

Email: jcortes@dir.ca.gov

Telephone: (510) 286-7100