

HB20-1411**COVID-19 Requires Enhanced Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment Training & Services**

COVID-19 has caused a dramatic increase in depression, anxiety, and substance use. The duration of this circumstance is unknown. Even before this crisis occurred, alcohol use was the third leading cause of preventable death. Data has shown that the isolation and anxiety around this crisis has increased the use of alcohol and other substances. Health and mental health care providers are in need of a strategy to mitigate alcohol and other drug use. COVID-19 is exacerbating an already significant health issue. Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment, SBIRT, is an evidence-based intervention and is key to addressing the increase in substance use resulting from COVID-19. These interventions allow individuals to examine how substance use may be affecting their health. Funding is needed to support training for health professionals to implement screening, to conduct brief interventions for those patients with risky alcohol use, and refer patients for further assessment and resources when indicated.

Screening

- Coloradans are not seeking or are avoiding care because they don't feel safe; when they do reach out for help, practitioners should implement SBI so that we can know how they are coping with COVID-19. Continued training and information helps professionals to see the value of prevention. SBIRT training allows for education for the patients and the practitioner.
- Routine screening normalizes conversations about alcohol and other substance use which leads to decreased stigma. Stigma is a significant and sometimes fatal barrier to the access of prevention, intervention, and treatment services. An average of 1600 Coloradans die every year from alcohol related causes. Many more experience injury, serious health issues, and social consequences as a result of alcohol use. Just as treatment services are vital for those struggling with a substance use disorder, early intervention and prevention are indispensable in mitigating harm even with low levels of use. We know that there is increased alcohol use due to the stress and isolation of COVID-19, making the need for screening and brief intervention even more crucial.

Brief Intervention

- Since the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, the United States and Colorado have seen a substantial increase in alcohol sales and subsequent use, as well as increased utilization of mental health crisis services. Public health professionals are concerned that the crisis will exacerbate the opioid epidemic and cause further barriers to prevention and treatment resources for all substances. The overarching imperative is to maintain the SBIRT status quo through continued training and technical assistance for providers who work day to day to address the behavioral and physical health issues of their patients.
- SBIRT is positioned well for telehealth delivery. Validated tools are available as files or PDF fillable forms, to make it easy for the client or patient to complete and return to their clinician. SBIRT billable criteria have been established by Colorado Medicaid and CMS.

Referral to Treatment

- Most people respond well with multiple brief interventions. However, results from screening tools and the brief negotiated interview may indicate the need for substance use treatment.
- Data indicates that approximately 5% of individuals need a higher level of care. These levels would be consistent with ASAM criteria. The SBIRT process allows a clinician to identify appropriate resources and referral for further assessment or treatment.