

American Board of Family Medicine  
COVID-19 Pandemic: How it Affects Board Certification  
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In March 2020 our nation, as we know it, was turned upside down with the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus. This virus has changed the way that Americans live, with the majority of the country being on lockdown, prohibiting many from being able to work. Unlike other professions, physicians are on the frontlines, being tasked with taking care of those in need. The work that Family Medicine physicians are doing to take care of the victims of this virus is nothing short of amazing! Many of you have been forced to rapidly adapt and change the way you practice medicine. Virtual office visits have become a common solution in many environments, to ensure your health and safety and that of your staff while still providing much routine and acute care that patients need. With all that you are being faced with, your certification requirements should be the least of your worries at this time. ABFM recognizes this and wants you to know that we understand and support you, so that you are able to focus on taking care of your patients, your families, your staff and yourself. As of this writing, ABFM has made the following accommodations to the deadlines for participation in Family Medicine Certification:

1. All Diplomates with a three-year stage ending in 2020 will have a one-year extension on completing all stage requirements.
2. For Diplomates participating in FMCLA, the Quarter 1 deadline has already been extended through June 15, 2020; we anticipate extending completion guidelines further for subsequent quarters. For first year participants, we will adjust the meaningful participation guidelines.
3. Any Diplomate in Year 10 of their certification cycle who opted for the one-day examination will have an additional year to meet their examination requirement.
4. Any board-eligible family physician with an eligibility end date in 2020, or anyone participating in the Re-Entry process with an end date in 2020, will have an additional year to obtain their certification.
5. Any Diplomate who also holds a Certificate of Added Qualification with an examination deadline in 2020 will have the option for an additional year to complete the examination requirement.
6. For those facing financial hardship as the result of the pandemic, we will establish a method for delaying 2020 payments. This will take a short time to be implemented online, but once available, Diplomates will find information about this in their [Physician Portfolio](#).

Each area of certification has been considered in this process. Specifically, we encourage you to report on what you are doing to adapt your practice – however and wherever you care for patients – in response to the pandemic as a way to meet your performance improvement requirement. COVID-19 has necessitated many practice changes, including virtualizing office visits, creating screening protocols for who to see in person, establishing mechanisms for screening COVID-suspect patients, working with health system or community leaders to gain necessary PPE, and even efforts to support your practice financially or to attend to the health and mental health needs of your staff. Anything that you are being faced with today in response to COVID-19 can be submitted under a COVID-specific Self-Directed Performance Improvement Activity, which will be available in your Physician Portfolio by the middle of April. Instructions on what information is needed will be clearly outlined. ABFM hopes to learn from all of these submissions in order to create a summary of the types of changes and best practices emerging from this global crisis. This has the opportunity to inform future practice efforts in both normal times and times of unprecedented change.

If you need assistance with submitting your performance improvement activity, contact the American Board of Family Medicine Support Center at 877-223-7347 or email the PI program manager, Ann Williamson at [awilliamson@theabfm.org](mailto:awilliamson@theabfm.org). COVID-19 has made an unwelcome and indelible impact on our nation. Family physicians have risen to the occasion and acted with professionalism and grace. We are most grateful for your service.