



## Is your patient's phone going to be shut off?

Phone companies are required to negotiate payment plans with customers who have a financial hardship. However, if the patient is unable to work out a plan, and needs a little more time to pay the bill, service can be protected for an additional period if your patient...

### 1. Has a serious illness

→ Protection up to a maximum of 90 days.

→ If the phone has already been switched off, then the phone company must switch the phone back on and not disconnect for this amount of time.

### 2. Has a personal emergency (Includes Domestic Violence)

→ Protection up to an additional 30 days.

### 3. Even if your patient doesn't have a serious illness or personal emergency, s/he may qualify for other protections:

→ *Is everyone in your patient's household 65 years or older? Special rules apply.*

→ *Does your patient receive TAFDC, EAEDC, SSI, MassHealth, Food Stamps or Fuel Assistance?*

If so, s/he will be eligible for Lifeline Service and can get a free Safelink cell phone with 80 minutes per month. (Safelink refers to the Lifeline cell phone program, NOT the domestic violence hotline.)

→ *Is your patient financially hardshipped, in need of reliable phone service, or trying to reach a goal like finding a job or housing? If so s/he may be eligible for the Community Voice Mail (CVM) program, which provides a special CVM phone number attached to a free voicemail account participants can check from any phone.*

## Serious Illness

**Patient qualifies if:** Someone in the household is under care for a medical condition.

**To get the protection:** A doctor (MD and DO only) can call the phone company to prevent the phone from being shut off for 7 days (if already off, will reconnect service). To extend the protection, the doctor should ask how to submit written certification. Certification must include: (1) name & address of the seriously ill person (2) nature of the illness (3) doctor's office address and phone number

**How long will the protection last?** Doctor letter protects service for 30 days and can be renewed twice, for a total of 90 days. The renewals must be used consecutively, and the protection can be used only once in a 12-month period.

**What happens after? Other Details:** The patient can use this protection back to back with a Personal Emergency Protection, for a total of 120 days. By the time the protection period ends, the patient must either pay off their bill or work out a payment plan with the company. *Call Department of Telecommunications and Cable (DTC) at 1-800-392-6066 or 1-617-305-3531 if the company has not met any of these requirements or is not accepting a reasonable payment plan offer.*

## Personal Emergency

**Patient qualifies if:** Patient has a "personal emergency" and is unable to pay their bills.

**To get the protection:** Patient must submit a written letter to the phone company stating the nature of their personal emergency and why they can't pay their bill. (If the phone has already been shut off, it will be reconnected.)

**How long will the protection last?** 30 day protection. According to the DTC this protection cannot be renewed and can only be used once in a 12-month period.

**What happens after? Other Details:** Same as serious illness

## All Household Members Over 65

**Patient qualifies if:** Everyone in the household is over 65. The phone company must get permission from the Department of Telecommunications and Cable (DTC) before they can switch off the phone.

**To get the protection:** The phone company must notify the patient when they ask DTC for permission to disconnect. DTC will only allow shut off if the company has: (1) given adequate notice (2) made a good faith effort to secure payment (3) not turned down any reasonable payment plan. What to do next? • Call the phone company and confirm everyone in the house is over 65.

**How long will the protection last?** As long as everyone in the household is over 65 the phone company must follow these guidelines before shutting off the phone. However, this does not mean that the phone company cannot disconnect, they just have to go through more steps.

**What happens after? Other Details:** Patients can choose anyone at anytime to be a 3rd party to be notified if there is a danger of shut off. Designating a 3rd party may help individuals better protect their rights. The 3rd party will never be held responsible for payment of any bills. *Call DTC if the company has not met any of these requirements, at 1-800-392-6066 or 1-617-305-3531*

## Eligible for Community Voice Mail (CVM)

**Patient qualifies if:** Demonstrated financial need, lack of reliable phone service, or pursuit of a goal for work, housing, healthcare, or domestic violence assistance.

**To get the protection:** Providers can refer a patient to a CVM host agency to set up an account. *To find a participating agency, visit <http://www.cvm.org/whatcvm/boston.htm>*

**How long will the protection last?** CVM phone numbers are generally distributed in 3 to 6 month increments. However, if a patient needs to extend this period of time, s/he can check with the agency that distributed their CVM number (either via phone message or in person) to extend the length of time their number is active.

**What happens after? Other Details:** In some cases, people who have reached their goals (for example, housing or finding a job) may elect to keep their CVM number for a while longer. Many CVM agencies will extend this courtesy at no charge. Some may charge a nominal fee – in most cases, this fee will not exceed \$10 for 3 months.



## Eligible for Lifeline Cell Phone – Safelink

**Patient qualifies if:** Patient receives TAFDC, EAEDC, SSI, MassHealth, Food Stamps or Fuel Assistance, no one in the household is already receiving lifeline landline service, and patient has a valid shipping address – no P.O. boxes.

**To get the protection:** If applying by phone, Safelink will mail an application that should be filled out and mailed back. Online applications will be processed 1-2 weeks faster than by mail. The free cell phone should ship in 5-7 business days. At the beginning of every month, 80 minutes will automatically be added to the phone as long as it is switched on. *Apply online at: <https://www.safelinkwireless.com/EnrollmentPublic/home.aspx> or by calling 1-800-977-3768*

**How long will the protection last?** 80 minutes per month of free service for as long as the patient is eligible for the qualifying benefit. If the patient wants more minutes, they can buy TracFone airtime cards at a retailer (Target, Wal-Mart, K-Mart, Radio Shack, CVS Walgreens, Rite Aid) or online.

**What happens after? Other Details:** Since this service includes no contract and no payment, a patient can get this phone to call doctors, etc and never accrue any debt, so the phone should never be shut off.