Statement: COVID-19

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NACDS’ Approach

Regarding COVID-19, the National Association of Chain Drug Stores (NACDS) is implementing our plan that involves four key goals:

- delivering value to NACDS members on topics related to COVID-19;
- contributing to the health and well-being of the public, of member companies’ pharmacists and other personnel, and of NACDS’ staff team;
- living up to pharmacy’s reputation of professionalism, trust and accessibility; and
- continuing to advance vigorously NACDS’ mission and 2020 Strategic Vision.

In short, NACDS is operating consistently with the urging of government authorities to prepare well, yet to continue on.

Collaboration with Government and Coalitions

NACDS recognizes and thanks the leaders and experts at all levels of government who are working for everyone’s well-being. We have been in active communication with federal agencies, including:

- the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC);
- the Department of Health and Human Services;
- the Federal Emergency Management Agency;
- the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry;
- the National Response Coordination Center; and
- the National Business Emergency Operations Center.

In addition to our ongoing collaboration, we appreciate that CDC has participated in a conference call with NACDS members to provide an update on the situation and to answer questions. In addition to our engagement with government entities, we also are collaborating with the private-sector Healthcare Ready coalition.
Pharmacies and Public Health Situations

The American people trust pharmacies and pharmacists for information about medications, and about other issues of health and wellness. The public appreciates the accessibility of pharmacies and pharmacists, and knows pharmacies and pharmacists have been there for them before. For example, especially during the H1N1 flu outbreak of a decade ago, consumers and authorities alike really came to appreciate the ability of pharmacists to serve as highly accessible sources for vaccinations. They also have appreciated in recent years the ability of pharmacies and pharmacists to help provide hard-to-find medications such as those used to treat the symptoms of the flu. Pharmacies also are known for their dedication amid natural disasters, from hurricanes to wildfires.

Pharmacies’ Response to COVID-19

NACDS members are implementing their company-specific plans that guide all aspects of their operations. This includes executing their valuable role in helping the nation, communities and individuals amid a public health situation like this.

Pharmacies’ Response: Supply

Some of the most frequently asked questions relate to the supply of various products. Some products that are currently in high demand may also be the subject of supply shortages. NACDS chain members are working closely with suppliers to manage these situations to best meet the needs of customers, and to consider alternatives when appropriate.

NACDS appreciates the efforts of government authorities to help inform the public about the nature of COVID-19 and what it means for some of the product-supply situations that have arisen, particularly with regard to facemasks. CDC was helpful in noting: “CDC does not recommend that people who are well wear a facemask to protect themselves from respiratory diseases, including COVID-19. Facemasks should be used by people who show symptoms of COVID-19 to help prevent the spread of the disease to others. The use of facemasks is also crucial for health workers and people who are taking care of someone in close settings (at home or in a health care facility).” The U.S. Surgeon General issued similar strong recommendations.

Pharmacies’ Response: Flow of Information

In this spirit, and because the empowering effect of information is vital in situations like this one, NACDS encourages public health officials to maintain the flow of the latest information. This information is very important to the public, and to the pharmacists and other pharmacy personnel who help to address patients’ questions and concerns.

Pharmacies’ Response: Pharmacy Procedures

One of the questions that we are being asked relates to the types of procedures that pharmacies are following to help minimize the spread of COVID-19 among customers and team members alike. We are grateful to be receiving this question, because answering it gives us a tremendous opportunity to help raise awareness of what is known about COVID-19 currently and to empower all people and businesses with information they can use to help foster health and wellness.
In some very important ways, the information regarding COVID-19 that is available through CDC and other authorities for businesses, healthcare providers and individuals alike is remarkably similar. It focuses on encouraging “respiratory etiquette and hand hygiene,” assuring that employees who are sick stay at home, and performing routine cleaning of surfaces – the directives that we are seeing so frequently now.

In addition, pharmacies are engaged in practices that are unique to their role in healthcare delivery. Pharmacies are coordinating closely with local and state health authorities, in addition to following guidance from federal agencies. Local and state health authorities are tremendously important in helping to guide the response to the unique situations in particular communities, and particularly those that have experienced higher rates of COVID-19. Pharmacies are using aspects of their stores and services to aid in social distancing, such as using drive-through windows and delivery to minimize the potential for contact, and using store design features to separate patients. As necessary, pharmacies are putting into practice their pandemic plans, which have been informed by prior experiences over the past decade, including H1N1 flu. They also are using resources that are available from global and national organizations that assist in evaluating the appropriate ways to engage with patients. Should pharmacies be notified that a patient who visited their location, or an employee, tested positive for COVID-19, they follow appropriate cleaning and personnel procedures.

Of course, member companies continue to monitor the situation and to engage with health authorities to obtain the latest information so that any new recommended procedures can be identified and implemented as more is learned about COVID-19 specifically.

Again, we hope that this is empowering to the public, as it demonstrates the important role that everyone can play.

**Flu and COVID-19: Similarities and Differences**

The efforts of federal officials to inform the public of ways to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 have been very helpful. While COVID-19 is not the flu, some prevention measures are very similar. These include appropriate hand-washing with soap and water, staying home when sick, and covering coughs and sneezes with a tissue.

Unlike the flu, there is no vaccine currently to protect against COVID-19. That said, NACDS affirms the wise actions of health experts and authorities who are taking this opportunity to urge individuals to be vaccinated for the flu, as well as to be up-to-date on other vaccinations. This is a smart course of action in any case, and a critical message to communicate now and for the future.