



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
CHAIN DRUG STORES

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:

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

Current Key Areas of Focus

Health Disparities in Focus

An unmistakable fact about the current state of pandemic response is that it is occurring alongside a revived and much-needed conversation about social justice. The latter, of course, is the result of the horrific killing of George Floyd and others. At the intersection of these two story lines is the realization that Black Americans are affected disproportionately by COVID-19.

Discussion and action on health disparities are essential – a point that NACDS has made prior to recent tragedies and a point to which NACDS has recommitted itself. The report that we issued on May 15, titled "[Pharmacies: A Vital Partner in Reopening America](#)," details recommendations for meeting the needs of the medically underserved in the areas of COVID-19 testing and ensuring access to COVID-19 treatments and vaccines when available. Because COVID-19 has illuminated broader needs in the care of chronic conditions faced by underserved and disadvantaged communities, NACDS is emphasizing the ways in which pharmacies and pharmacists help to fill the void in care deserts.

In fact, NACDS has been highly engaged in these efforts in recent years, in recognition of NACDS members' commitments. We have engaged in the World Health Care Congress to help elevate the discussion of social determinants of health. We also have partnered with federal agencies, with the American Public Health Association, and with others on initiatives specific to diabetes and hypertension, immunizations and more. This is consistent with NACDS member companies' forward-thinking initiatives.

NACDS' consistent and ongoing commitment to addressing health disparities will only increase.

Advancing Scalable, Sustainable COVID Testing

NACDS has been highly engaged at the federal and state levels to ensure pharmacies and pharmacists can help meet their communities' needs for COVID-19 testing. This work is essential for building on the tremendous work of NACDS member companies participating in public-private partnerships that have helped to ramp up COVID-19 testing since the early days of the pandemic.

In May, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services acted on a request by NACDS, member companies and individual pharmacists. The Department stated powerfully that federal law, along with Executive Branch actions, "preempts any state or local requirement that prohibits or effectively prohibits a pharmacist from ordering and administering a COVID-19 diagnostic test that the Food and Drug Administration has authorized." This action reinforced prior guidance from the federal government. In addition, more than 40 individual states – at the urging of NACDS, member companies and state partners – have taken significant action to help remove barriers to pharmacist-provided testing.

It is imperative as well to secure fair reimbursement for pharmacies providing COVID-19 testing. Recognition of pharmacists as providers under Medicare is among the means to that end. Put simply, the degree to which government leaders succeed in addressing this issue will figure significantly in their success in building a sustainable and scalable approach to testing.

Further, the time is now to ask the question: thinking beyond the COVID-19 crisis, why would a state want to roll back the level of pandemic preparedness that has been achieved? It is important to make permanent a proactive approach to protecting individuals and communities.

After all, pharmacist-provided testing for various conditions is not a new concept, and is entirely consistent with the public health opportunities presented by the accessibility and education of pharmacists. Pharmacists currently provide a variety of CLIA-waived tests to patients for flu, HIV, hepatitis C, tuberculosis, strep throat and other illnesses in more than 40 states. In addition, pharmacists also provide tests to monitor chronic conditions, such as diabetes, to assist patients in achieving better control of these conditions. In 17 of those 40 states, pharmacists can initiate treatment for flu and strep among other minor ailments.

Just as states enhanced their preparedness after the 2009 H1N1 pandemic by making permanent enhanced vaccination authority for pharmacists, states now should preserve and build on additional coronavirus testing preparedness by looking to pharmacists and pharmacies.

Now is the Time to Prepare for COVID Vaccines, Treatments

COVID-19 testing has demonstrated vividly the complexities of health policy and the length of time that is needed to change it. The lesson for government leaders at the federal and state levels is that now is the time to ensure pharmacists are able to provide treatments and vaccines for COVID-19 as they become available.

NACDS and the public health community are well-equipped with lessons from pharmacy's effectiveness during the 2009 H1N1 pandemic, including studies that show the importance of pharmacies and pharmacists in the deployment of vaccines and treatments. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

researchers found that 80 percent of the nation can be vaccinated seven weeks sooner when neighborhood pharmacies are included in the vaccination deployment model. It is important to remember: there is a pharmacy within five miles of 90 percent of Americans.

It will be extremely important for pharmacists to have the ability to initiate treatment with an antiviral therapy, when available, based on a positive COVID-19 test. It also will be critical for pharmacists to be empowered to be in a “ready, set, go” status to prevent delays in adequately protecting Americans with vaccines.

In addition to ensuring pharmacists’ vaccination authority, the government must prioritize pharmacies to be recipients of the vaccine early on. The most accessible healthcare providers should not be placed at the back of the line. Further, as is the case with COVID-19 testing, fair reimbursement must be secured, and recognition of pharmacists as providers under Medicare is among the means to that end.

Ensuring Flu Vaccine Readiness

The demand for flu vaccines – including those provided in neighborhood pharmacies – is expected to soar this season and is expected to occur in a compressed timeframe of mid-August to October. In addition, pharmacies must remain well-positioned to meet patients’ diverse health and wellness needs for a variety of conditions, particularly given the challenges that could be faced by the entire healthcare delivery system when COVID-19 collides with the flu and allergy seasons.

As a result, states should maintain, and in many cases make permanent, the flexibilities that they have initiated to help keep pharmacies open, to help protect patients and pharmacy staff, and to help patients stay on their medication therapies. These policies involve remote supervision, emergency dispensing, mobile vaccination programs, remote claims processing, relaxed audit protocols, and enhanced engagement of pharmacy technicians.

NACDS already is working with the Department of Health and Human Services to coordinate on critical issues related to preparedness for the flu season. That collaboration must continue.

Here are some of the strategies that NACDS members are employing to help meet the needs of patients for the upcoming flu vaccination season:

- off-site vaccination clinics (i.e., away from the pharmacy) -- some of these may be held in smaller venues such as local community centers, senior centers, government facilities, libraries - - or in larger venues such as sports arenas
- parking lot drive-up clinics at pharmacy locations
- in-store access presented in a manner consistent with physical distancing -- including the use of safety equipment and enhancements to the physical space that provide extra levels of protection
- informing patients ahead of time about preparations that can be made to improve efficiency and physical distancing -- such as, scheduling vaccination appointments, checking in for appointments digitally and waiting to be called in, preparing screening questionnaires ahead of time, and - for walk-in appointments, publicizing physical distancing guidelines and requirements for facemasks
- following Centers for Disease Control and Prevention policies for vaccinating
- maximizing overall patient wellbeing by conducting temperature screening and asking screening questions before the vaccination.

Please note the significant steps that retail pharmacies took to facilitate physical distancing throughout the pandemic -- they will bring this same innovative approach to the flu vaccination season.

In addition, NACDS members have a tremendous role to play in educating all Americans about recommended vaccines, and getting back onto the regular vaccination schedule. Due to the physical distancing recommendations at the height of the pandemic, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention called a "time out," urging a break from regularly scheduled vaccines. In the interest of public health, it is important to resume the recommended schedule of vaccines.

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: Product Supply

Some of the most frequently asked questions relate to the supply of various products. Some products that are currently in extremely high demand obviously will 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.

Pharmacies' Response: Medication Supply

Regarding medications, NACDS is closely monitoring reports of the Food and Drug Administration and other trusted sources. Given the evolving global COVID-19 pandemic, we ask states to proactively plan for a potential drug shortage situation – and remove needless administrative barriers to ensure access to medications for patients.

Pharmacies' Response: Flow of Information

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

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has provided [guidance to pharmacies](#) – which provide guidance for activities such as filling and dispensing medications, and for close-contact pharmacy care services. This information, and more, is available at [NACDS.org/Prepared](#).

Regarding social distancing, examples of companies' efforts to aid in this practice include 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.

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.

Information about NACDS member companies' COVID-19 efforts can be found at [NACDS.org/COVID-19](#).