

As flu season approaches peak levels, HomeTown Pharmacy locations across the state are offering free influenza and strep throat testing

Thirteen statewide HomeTown Pharmacy locations are now offering on-site testing and medications for treatment of influenza and strep throat as part of a collaborative patient care study.

HomeTown Pharmacy, based out of Newaygo, Michigan, is offering free influenza and strep throat diagnostic testing and treatment services to eligible patients at several locations across the state. With flu cases in Michigan and across much of the country reaching peak levels, participating Hometown Pharmacy locations are collaborating with the University of Nebraska Medical Center College of Pharmacy and Ferris State University in a pilot project to determine the cost-effectiveness and patient acceptance of rapid diagnostic testing in community retail pharmacies.

Select HomeTown pharmacists have been certificate-trained in a program developed by professors from each university conducting the study and sponsored by the Michigan Pharmacists Association. Eligible patients will be tested for either influenza or strep throat by a trained pharmacist, at the pharmacy, using noninvasive and FDA cleared rapid diagnostic tests. In the event of a positive test, the pharmacist is able to dispense the appropriate prescription medication to treat the condition, based on stringent protocol developed by the study's physicians. This protocol eliminates the need for the patient to schedule and attend an office visit, and allows them to begin treatment immediately. Immediate treatment of these illnesses (within the first 48 hours) is essential, and sometimes physician office visits are not available within this timeframe due to the high volume of patients. Emergency room and urgent care visits are more immediate, but are typically expensive. The study officials and collaborators feel this new in-pharmacy service will eliminate some of the hassles and obstacles patients often encounter, and allow them to receive more convenient testing and treatment.

Jeff Stull Pharm.D., Pharmacy Development Manager and project coordinator for HomeTown Pharmacy states: "We are not trying to compete with physician-based practices, as we are still referring the sickest of patients to their local physicians, but we do feel that our pharmacists can provide quality care that is accessible and more convenient to patients with possible flu or strep throat. We envision that, in the future, we will expand service provision which will be attractive to patients of all ages, particularly working parents. Instead of taking time off from work for an office visit, or making an expensive emergency room visit, parents could bring their children to our pharmacies and receive a quick test to determine if their child's illness is the flu or strep throat."

Services are currently available to patients meeting basic eligibility requirements: The patient must be 18 years or older, and must be experiencing typical flu or strep symptoms such as sore throat, fever, unexplained body aches, and/or cough. Upon meeting with the pharmacist, a brief assessment is conducted to determine eligibility for testing. Treatment is based solely upon a positive test result, and medication dispensing follows infectious disease guidelines.

These testing and diagnostic services are free through the pilot project year, and will continue to be available beyond the study (ends in August 2014). At that time the services will be available as a fee- for-service but exact costs have yet to be determined. "However, they will be similar to the cost of most office visit copays," says Stull. After August 2014, HomeTown Pharmacy is planning to expand services to include testing for children in addition to adults, as well as including additional pharmacy locations throughout the state.

The following are the current participating locations offering free testing services:

- Lawton Pharmacy, 350 North Main Street, Lawton, MI 49065
PH: (269) 624-2231
- Momber Pharmacy, 133 East Division Street, Sparta, MI 49345
PH: (616) 887-7323
- Haveman Pharmacy, 226 West River Valley Drive, Newaygo, MI 49337
PH: (231) 652-6914
- Oceana Pharmacy, 819 South State Street, Hart, MI 49420
PH: (231) 873-2540
- Shelby Pharmacy, 178 North Michigan Avenue, Shelby, MI 49455
PH: (231) 861-4341
- DeWitt Pharmacy, 128 South Bridge Street, DeWitt, MI 48820
PH: (517) 668-9299
- Hometown Pharmacy, Bellevue (Fruin Pharmacy), 117 North Main Street, Bellevue, MI 49021
PH: (269) 763-9521
- Young's Pharmacy, 120 South Clark Street, Albion, MI 49224
PH: (517) 629-2900
- Manchester Pharmacy, 128 East Main Street, Manchester, MI 48158
PH: (734) 428-8393
- Brady Drugs, 7835 Gratiot Road, Saginaw, MI 48609
PH: (989) 781-2370
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- HomeTown Pharmacy, Ann Arbor, 2355 E. Stadium Blvd, Ann Arbor, MI 48104
PH: (734) 747-8080
- HomeTown Pharmacy #26, 1144 North Monroe Street, Monroe, MI 48162
PH: (734) 242-2966
- Keefe's North Muskegon Pharmacy, 1900 Ruddiman, North Muskegon, MI 49445
PH: (231) 744-4718