YOUR CARE COALITION
Expanding Access THROUGH Pharmacy Services

Frequently Asked Questions
"TEST and Treat"?

What is "Test and Treat"?

"Test and Treat" is a public health strategy that aims to provide timely and convenient access to diagnostic testing, assessment, and treatment for routine illnesses at the point of care. Specifically, pharmacists initiate appropriate treatment based on test results and findings from their assessment of the patient. Pharmacists closely follow current, evidence-based clinical guidelines and protocols to initiate the most appropriate treatment or provide a referral as needed. This approach is particularly effective in managing illnesses like influenza ("flu") and strep throat where sooner treatment means sooner recovery. "Test-and-Treat" policies help improve health outcomes, prevent hospitalizations, and reduce the spread of common respiratory conditions.

What is the role of pharmacists in "Test and Treat"?

As leaders of the pharmacy team, pharmacists oversee all activities performed within the pharmacy and by the pharmacy team comprised of pharmacy technicians and pharmacy interns. In "Test-and-Treat" programs, pharmacists conduct patient assessments, oversee the administration of tests and the interpretation of results, counsel and educate patients on test results, initiate or prescribe treatment, and refer patients to further care as needed. When initiating treatment based on test results, pharmacists strictly adhere to current, evidence-based clinical guidelines that reflect the most appropriate treatment.

How does "Test and Treat" improve public health?

Enabling more accessible testing, assessment, and treatment for routine illnesses through community pharmacies can significantly reduce the spread of illnesses, offer the public additional options to receive timely care, provide treatments that reduce symptoms, and improve individual health outcomes. Early treatment can also lead to cost savings by avoiding more expensive care required for more serious stages of diseases. For example, flu treatment should be started within 48 hours of symptom onset to be most effective in faster recovery and reduce chances of hospitalization.

Can "Test-and-Treat" policies address health disparities?

Yes, "Test-and-Treat" services provided by pharmacists have the potential to help address health disparities by enhancing access to care in vulnerable or underserved communities or more broadly for people with transportation barriers or unique work hours. Pharmacists are the most accessible healthcare providers, particularly in rural and underserved areas. With 60,000+ community-based pharmacies across the country, nearly half of Americans live within 1 mile of pharmacy, while 89% live within 5 miles, and 97% live within 10 miles.[i] Pharmacies also frequently offer extended hours beyond the typical nine-to-five weekday schedule, providing additional care opportunities after work and school hours. Additionally, 85% percent of adults in the U.S. say pharmacists are easy to access.

By facilitating easier and quicker access to care, pharmacy-based testing and treatment can help bridge the gaps and provide timely access to healthcare for conditions that can be quickly diagnosed and managed in a cost-effective manner. Ultimately, pharmacy-based testing and treatment contributes to more equitable health outcomes across diverse communities.

Why does "Test and Treat" matter for seniors and families?

"Test and Treat" is beneficial for seniors, who may have limited mobility or face transportation challenges that make accessing traditional healthcare settings difficult. By providing "Test-and-Treat" services in pharmacies, which are often more accessible than doctor's offices or hospitals, seniors can more easily receive timely care. Studies show that Medicare patients visit pharmacies significantly more often than primary care providers – 13 visits per-year compared to seven visits per-year. In rural communities, the difference is more significant – 14 visits compared to five visits annually.[ii] Seniors are also at higher risk of serious outcomes, like death and hospitalization, from illnesses like flu and COVID-19 if not detected and treated early.[iii]

For busy families, "Test-and-Treat" services are vital because they offer timely and convenient access to healthcare, offering flexibility with extended pharmacy hours and more locations to suit busy schedules. Pharmacists can also offer guidance on over-the-counter remedies to manage symptoms, ensure safe medication use, and advise when to seek further medical attention.

Are there any legal or regulatory considerations for implementing "Test and Treat" in pharmacies?

State statutes and regulations, including the state pharmacy practice act, dictate the authority pharmacists have in the state where they are licensed to perform activities within the practice of pharmacy, including the ability to order and administer point-of-care tests and initiate treatment based on test results and patient assessments.

When administering diagnostic tests, pharmacies must also comply with Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments (CLIA) regulations and must use FDA-approved tests. For their ease of use, CLIA-waived, point-of-care tests are often used. To perform CLIA-waived testing, a CLIA Certificate of Waiver must be obtained by CMS.[iv] These tests are safe to administer, and have clear, actionable results, such as rapid tests for flu and strep throat. They are the same tests that are routinely administered across many healthcare settings including physicians' offices, urgent care clinics, community-based clinics, and hospitals.

Also, state regulations, including state-specific insurance codes, govern coverage requirements for their respective Medicaid program and Commercial plans. These rules can dictate what healthcare providers are eligible for billing Medicaid and Commercial plans in the state, such as pharmacists, and often determine what services must be covered by health plans, such as test and treat services.

How are privacy and confidentiality handled in pharmacy-based "Test-and-Treat" programs?

Pharmacies have long adhered to strict privacy rules required since 2003 under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) regulations to protect patient health information. In implementing "Test-and-Treat" programs, pharmacies ensure that test results and patient assessments are conducted in a private manner and that patient data is securely stored and shared only in accordance with healthcare privacy laws. Increasingly, pharmacies are designating space for private rooms near the pharmacy to conduct patient assessments, tests, vaccinations, and other healthcare services.

What do pharmacists think about "Test and Treat"?

Pharmacists are dedicated to the health of the people and communities they serve. "Test-and-Treat" services help improve access to care by bringing essential health services directly to the community, close to where people live and work. Many pharmacists are eager to engage more directly with their patients in providing healthcare services. In fact, a recent survey found that more than 80% of pharmacists want to expand their clinical services.[v,vi]

[i] Berenbrok LA, Tang S, Gabriel N, et al. Access to community pharmacies: A nationwide geographic information systems cross-sectional analysis. *Journal of the American Pharmacists Association*. 2022;62(6). doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.japh.2022.07.003

[ii] Berenbrok LA, Gabriel N, Coley KC, Hernandez I. Evaluation of Frequency of Encounters With Primary Care Physicians vs Visits to Community Pharmacies Among Medicare Beneficiaries. *JAMA Network Open*. 2020;3(7):e209132. doi:https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2020.9132

[iii] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Underlying Medical Conditions Associated with High Risk for Severe COVID-19: Information for Healthcare Providers. February 2020. https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/clinical-care/underlyingconditions.html

[iv] Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments (CLIA) How to Obtain a CLIA Certificate of Waiver. https://www.cms.gov/regulations-and-guidance/legislation/clia/downloads/howobtaincertificateofwaiver.pdf

[v] Levy S. EnlivenHealth survey finds pharmacists support expanding clinical services, but challenges exist in getting paid. Drug Store News. Published October 19, 2022. https://drugstorenews.com/enlivenhealth-survey-finds-pharmacists-support-expanding-clinical-services-challenges-exist-getting

[vi] Nguyen E, Owens CT, Daniels T, Boyle J, Robinson RF. Pharmacists' Willingness to Provide Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Services and the Needs to Support COVID-19 Testing, Management, and Prevention. *Journal of Community Health*. 2020;46(4). doi:https://doi.org/10.1007/s10900-020-00946-1