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HHS Approves Pharmacy COVID-19 Testing & Sets Testing Priorities

Announcer:

You're listening to *The Drug Report* on ReachMD, hosted by Linda Bernstein, Pharm.D., Clinical Professor on the Volunteer Faculty of the School of Pharmacy, University of California, San Francisco.

Dr. Bernstein:

Welcome to *The Drug Report* with a special focus on the COVID-19 pandemic.

This week the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health issued new guidance under the Public Readiness and Emergency Preparedness Act authorizing licensed pharmacists to order and administer COVID-19 tests that the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has authorized. The statement read:

"Pharmacists, in partnership with other healthcare providers, are well positioned to aid COVID-19 testing expansion. Pharmacists are trusted healthcare professionals with established relationships with their patients. The vast majority of Americans live close to a retail or independent community-based pharmacy. That proximity reduces travel to testing locations, which is an important mitigation measure. Pharmacists also have strong relationships with medical providers and hospitals to appropriately refer patients when necessary."

HHS Secretary Alex Azar stated:

"Giving pharmacists the authorization to order and administer COVID-19 tests to their patients means easier access to testing for Americans who need it. Pharmacists play a vital role in delivering convenient access to important public health services and information."

HHS Assistant Secretary for Health Brett P. Giroir, M.D. issued the following statement:

"In an effort to expand testing capabilities, we are authorizing licensed pharmacists to order and administer COVID-19 tests to their patients. The accessibility and distribution of retail and independent community-based pharmacies make pharmacists the first point of contact with a healthcare professional for many Americans. This will further expand testing for Americans, particularly our healthcare workers and first responders who are working around the clock to provide care, compassion, and safety to others."

As described in a follow-up article in *Drug Topics* on April 9th, this was welcome news to a coalition of national and local pharmacy organizations who praised the decision.

Expanding testing for the COVID-19 virus is "a critical component in our nation's efforts to reduce the number of cases, ease burdens on our over-utilized hospitals and clinics, and protect the safety of our communities," the Pharmacists for Healthier Lives coalition said. Adding, "Our nation's pharmacists stand ready to continue our fight against COVID-19 and are dedicated to do all they can to ensure we come out of this pandemic as strong as possible."

The coalition is made up of several organizations, including ASHP, NCPA, the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy, among others.

The US Public Health Service has set forth priorities for testing patients with suspected COVID-19 infection. Given the COVID-19 symptoms of fever, cough, and shortness of breath, the following priorities have been set forth for testing:

Priority 1- To ensure optimal care options for all hospitalized patients, lessen the risk of healthcare-associated infections, and maintain

the integrity of the US healthcare system.

- Hospitalized patients
- Healthcare facility workers with symptoms

Priority 2- Ensures those at highest risk of complication of infection are rapidly identified and appropriately triaged.

- Patients in long-term care facilities with symptoms
- Patients 65 years of age and older with symptoms
- Patients with underlying conditions with symptoms
- First responders with symptoms

Priority 3- As resources allow, test individuals in the surrounding community of rapidly increasing hospital cases to decrease community spread and ensure health of essential workers.

- Critical infrastructure workers with symptoms
- Individuals who do not meet any of the above categories with symptoms
- Healthcare facility workers and first responders
- Individuals with mild symptoms in communities experiencing high numbers of COVID-19 hospitalizations

For more information see coronavirus.gov or cdc.gov.

For *The Drug Report*, I'm pharmacist Dr. Linda Bernstein.

Announcer:

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