

It's *Your* Benefit

Health insurance and other benefit programs for public employees and retirees



Developing and delivering quality benefits and services to members while safeguarding the integrity of the Trust Funds.

Changes Made to Formulary Coverage of Antihistamines

— by Navitus Health Solutions

Antihistamines can be used to decrease the symptoms associated with any allergy, although they are most commonly used to treat the symptoms of allergic rhinitis, more commonly known as “hay fever.” Recent changes affecting the coverage of antihistamines on the Navitus formulary have been made for participants covered under the state’s group health insurance program. Navitus is the program’s pharmacy benefit manager and the formulary is the list of preferred medications.

While other health insurance programs have stopped paying for antihistamines once they become over-the-counter (OTC) products, the Navitus Pharmacy and Therapeutics (P&T) Committee has not adopted this policy for what are called second generation antihistamines. Some second generation antihistamines are loratadine (Claritin), cetirizine (Zyrtec) and fexofenadine (Allegra). Specific changes to the formulary are covered near the end of this article.

Allergic rhinitis symptoms (including sneezing, watery eyes, runny nose, itchy nose

and eyes) are caused by your body’s immune response to the allergen—the agent causing the allergy. When allergic cells in the nose and eyes release histamine, the symptoms of hay fever result. Antihistamines work to block the histamine receptor, preventing the body from experiencing the effects of an allergy.

Background

In use since the 1930s, antihistamines continue to be the mainstay of drug treatment for allergic rhinitis. Modern antihistamines can be categorized into one of two groups: first generation and second generation. The groups are based not only on when they were invented, but also for their effect on the body. Although both are equally effective in treating allergic rhinitis symptoms, the first generation drugs have a greater tendency to cause unwanted side effects, such as sedation (feeling tired) and performance impairment (difficulty in performing physical and mental tasks).

Because of the side effects associated with

Antihistamines, continued on page 3

Complete a Health Risk Assessment (HRA) Today

Just as there are different kinds of wellness initiatives offered by our participating health plans (see the January 2008 edition of *It's Your Benefit*), there are also variations of one kind of initiative — the health risk assessment (HRA). An HRA is a tool to help you assess your health history and lifestyle choices in order to identify certain characteristics that may, over time, develop into diseases such as cancer, diabetes, heart disease and osteoporosis. Some HRAs are offered in-person and include screenings such as blood tests and blood pressure checks.

In this article, we look at the types of

HRAs that are primarily completed by taking a survey — either on-line, on paper or by telephone.

The chart on page two summarizes the survey-oriented HRAs offered by the health plans participating in the state’s group health insurance program. Typically, upon completion of the survey, the participant will receive from the health plan a personalized

HRA, continued on page 2



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Proper Disposal of Leftover Medications an Important Environmental Issue

Environmental and health problems caused by the improper disposal of leftover medications is a growing concern. You may have heard recent reports about a major Associated Press investigation charging that the drinking water supplies of at least 41 million Americans has been tainted with a vast array of pharmaceuticals, including antibiotics, anticonvulsants, and mood stabilizers.

We first introduced the importance of proper disposal of medications in the September 2007 edition of *It's Your Benefit* in "How to Safely Dispose of Leftover Medications." The article pointed out that wastewater treatment plans are not designed to remove medicines from wastewater and, therefore, you should never flush medications down the drain. We included information on medication "take-back" programs, where people drop off their unwanted and expired medications for safe, environmentally-responsible disposal.

Many local governments in Wisconsin are now collecting a wide range of unwanted medications at Clean Sweep sites or on separate medicine collection days. Please contact your local health department and/or local solid waste department to see if such services are available in your area.



- The University of Wisconsin-Extension Solid & Hazardous Waste Education Center publishes an online schedule of upcoming medicine collection days planned for various locations throughout the state. For more information and to view the 2008 medication collection schedule, go to: <http://www4.uwm.edu/shwec> and select "2008 Medicine Collection Days" on the lower left section of the page.

- For Dane County, the next "Med Drop" collection day is set for Saturday, June 7 in Madison at the City Transfer Station, 121 E. Olin Avenue (near the Alliant Energy Center and Goodman Pool). General information about the event can be found at <http://www.meddropdane.org>.

- In the Milwaukee area, go to <http://mmsd.com> to learn about any medicine collection days for residents of communities served by the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District.

For more information on the proper disposal of medicines, go to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Internet site, <http://dnr.wi.gov/org/aw/wm/pharm/household.htm>.

HRA, continued from page 1

report describing his or her risk factors and overall health. The goal of an HRA is to help members recognize whether they are at risk of disease and provide information on prevention and possible behavioral changes in order to improve the member's quality of life and, ultimately, reduce future health care costs for all.

If your health plan offers an HRA, we encourage you to complete it — check with the plan's customer service department for more information. For a complete list of health plan contact information, go to the "Related Links" section of our Internet site, <http://etf.wi.gov> or to the plan description pages in Section G of your *It's Your Choice* booklet.

Health Plan	Offers Online Version	Offers Paper Version	Offers Telephone-Based Version	Does NOT Offer HRA to Our Group
Anthem BCBS	X			
Arise Health Plan				X
Dean Health Plan				X
GHC Eau Claire	X			
GHC-SCW	X	X		
Gundersen Lutheran				X
Health Tradition				X
Humana	X	X	X	
Medical Associates				X
MercyCare Health Plan	X	X		
Network Health Plan				X
Physicians Plus	X			
Security Health Plan	X			
UnitedHealthcare	X			
Unity				X
WPS Patient Choice		X		

Antihistamines, continued from page 1

first generation antihistamines, the second generation drugs are the common choice of treatment for allergies. Prescription plans have typically only covered second generation antihistamines because of the clinical superiority of these drugs.

Combination products, which pair antihistamines with pseudoephedrine, may help relieve nasal congestion (stuffiness) better than antihistamines alone. If congestion is under control, the combination products may not be necessary. Combination products are often denoted with a “D” in the name, such as Zyrtec-D, Cetirizine-D, and Loratidine-D. These products, when compared to antihistamines alone, have a higher incidence of such side effects as headache and difficulty sleeping.

From prescription-only to OTC

In 2002, Claritin (loratadine) went directly from being a prescription-only drug to being available OTC. Only drugs that can be taken without the supervision of a health professional are considered for this conversion. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) rigorously reviews requests for a status change. The drugs must have a very good history of safety and effectiveness for consideration for such a conversion. Certain second generation antihistamines lend themselves well to the FDA’s standards. A recent example is the conversion of Zyrtec (cetirizine) from prescription-only status to OTC. Whether the makers of Allegra plan to apply for such a conversion remains unknown.

Patients who take these OTC covered drugs have the advantage of getting the same drug, at the same strength, dose, and dosage form as the former brand name prescription product at a reduced co-pay. For example, Zyrtec, which had been a Level 3 drug*, will now be replaced by Level 1 cetirizine (generic Zyrtec) OTC. This change amounts to a copay reduction of \$30 (from \$35 to \$5). Cetirizine is available on all ETF plans.

Formulary change

Beginning July 1, 2008, fexofenadine (generic Allegra) will be placed on Level 3 and Allegra-D will be removed from the formulary. Covered alternatives on your formulary include those listed in the chart below:

Drug Name	Covered Alternative	
	Tier 1	Tier 2
Fexofenadine	Loratadine (OTC) Cetirizine (OTC)	Claritin (OTC) Zyrtec (OTC)
Allegra-D	Loratadine-D (OTC) Cetirizine-D (OTC)	Claritin-D (OTC) Zyrtec-D (OTC)

In reviewing the various antihistamines covered by the Navitus formulary, the P&T committee determined that the less expensive generic and OTC allergy medications (listed in the chart above) can clinically do everything that fexofenadine and Allegra-D can. Nonetheless, the P&T Committee decided to maintain the availability of fexofenadine, as some members prefer to continue to use it.

Choosing which antihistamine is best is a matter for you and your prescriber to decide. Although all the covered medications relieve the symptoms of allergic rhinitis, trials of more than one agent may be required to determine which antihistamine works best for you and causes the fewest side effects.

The P&T Committee believes that the variety of antihistamines available on the formulary effectively provides relief from the symptoms presented by allergic rhinitis for the great majority of patients.

**Pharmacy benefits are administered with a three-level copayment structure. For drugs on the formulary, members have per-prescription copayments of \$5 for Level 1, \$15 for Level 2, and \$35 for Level 3.*



Dual-Choice Enrollment Period Set

The Group Insurance Board set the 2009 Dual-Choice enrollment period for **October 6-24, 2008**. During this period, currently insured participants may switch from one health plan to another plan and/or from single to family coverage without restrictions. All coverage changes are effective January 1, 2009. For news and information regarding specific health insurance program benefits and changes, check the September issue of *It's Your Benefit* and review your *It's Your Choice* booklet when it is published in late September. You may also check our Internet site at <http://etf.wi.gov>.

Card Helps Keep Track of Medications

It is important to write down and carry an accurate list of the medications you are taking. Safe Care Wisconsin offers a free wallet-sized card that will help you do just that. Find the card on Safe Care Wisconsin's Internet site at <http://safecarewisconsin.org> — go to the “List It. Don't Risk It.” project page.

Print a copy of the card for yourself and complete another to give to a friend or relative.



Keep Immunizations Up to Date

Recent confirmed cases of measles cases in Wisconsin are a reminder to us all about the importance of keeping current on immunizations. Vaccines prevent disease and protect those who come in contact with unvaccinated individuals.

The Wisconsin Division of Public Health Immunization Program offers a variety of useful information on its Internet site, including childhood and adult vaccine information and schedules, immunizations requirements for the next school year and useful links to other sites.

Go to <http://www.dhfs.state.wi.us/immunization/index.htm> or call the Wisconsin Immunization Program at (608) 267-9959.

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