

Respiratory Viral Illness Season

Resource Kit for Texas Children's Health Plan Providers



We are rapidly approaching respiratory viral illness season, in which viruses like influenza, COVID-19, and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) more widely circulate in our patient populations. There are relevant Quality Measures (HEDIS) pertaining to respiratory viral illness season:

- Avoidance of Antibiotics Treatment for Acute Bronchitis/Bronchiolitis (AAB)
- Antibiotic Utilization for Respiratory Conditions (AXR)
- Appropriate Testing for Pharyngitis (CWP)
- Appropriate Treatment for Upper Respiratory Infection (URI)

Respiratory conditions caused by viral infections do not require antibiotic treatment. Too often, antibiotics are inappropriately prescribed. Proper testing and treatment of respiratory conditions help prevent the spread of sickness, while reducing the unnecessary use of antibiotics. *Antibiotic stewardship remains crucial.*

High-Priority Best Practice Recommendations and Population Health Management Strategies:

- **Perform a rapid strep test for Group A *Streptococcus*** and/or a throat culture to confirm the patient's diagnosis before prescribing antibiotics.
- **Educate members on the difference between bacterial and viral infections.** Explain that antibiotics are not effective to treat respiratory viral infections.
- **If antibiotics are prescribed,** educate members on the importance of finishing the entire course of the antibiotic as prescribed, even if their symptoms start to improve.
- **Provide specific instructions** on symptom relief without antibiotics (e.g. extra fluids, rest, nasal spray for congestion, use throat spray/lozenges for sore throat, over-the-counter medications, etc.).
- **Educate members on infection prevention** by washing hands frequently, disinfecting toys and surfaces, and keeping distance from others until symptoms have improved.
- **Consider providing virtual visits,** extended hours, or same-day appointments and testing to avoid potentially preventable emergency department visits (PPVs).
- **Educate members and caregivers on making appropriate decisions** about where and when to seek medical care, including when to recognize a true medical emergency that requires immediate care at an emergency department and where to seek non-emergency care after hours. Please review and share this helpful link with your patients: [Skip the ER! You Have Options](#)
- **Encourage members to maintain ongoing communication** and relationships with their PCP to promote consistent and coordinated health care.
- **Document and code accurately** if antibiotics are prescribed for another condition.
- **Employ a population health approach** to promoting vaccinations: Texas Children's Health Plan encourages providers to proactively identify and follow up with members to ensure that they are scheduled for all timely and appropriate vaccination appointments. *It remains vitally important to assess all patients at each visit during this respiratory virus season, to learn their flu, RSV, and/or COVID-19 vaccination status.*
- **Please reference the updated HEDIS Toolkit** on Respiratory Conditions and Antibiotics Stewardship [here](#).
- **The Texas Children's Health Plan website** has excellent information to help you educate our members and your patients about cold and flu season. See these links:
[Flu Information](#)
[Healthy Rewards - Pregnancy Flu Prevention Reward](#)