

Louisiana 2 Step Looking for Team Players

Companies, clubs, families and even groups or departments within larger organizations can now form **Louisiana 2 Step Teams** and help each other take steps to better health.

The Louisiana 2 Step is the innovative wellness program from Blue Cross and HMO Louisiana that encourages members to take two small steps to improve their health and fitness: *eat right and move more.*

Getting in shape and improving your diet is a lot easier when you're not doing it alone. That's why any group of people can set up a 2 Step Team to encourage healthy lifestyles among members. The free program at www.Louisiana2Step.com offers tools to encourage participation, set goals and promote friendly competition among group members.

When a team signs up at www.Louisiana2Step.com, its manager or representative can set team goals and order 2 Step materials to encourage participation. Individual team members can see their team's goals and statistics on their personal 2 Step pages.

More than 8,000 individuals already are registered Louisiana 2 Step members. Any individual or group wanting to join the movement is encouraged to sign up any time for free at www.Louisiana2Step.com. So grab some friends or a few of your coworkers and Do the 2 as a team, today!

Leading Our State in Wellness, Diversity

Blue Cross and HMO Louisiana received two recent awards recognizing our leadership in workplace wellness and diversity.

The Louisiana Health Care Alliance (LHCA) gave Blue Cross its 2007 Well Workplace Award for large Louisiana employers in recognition of the company's Healthy You, Healthy Blue employee wellness program.

Each year, the LHCA recognizes employers that champion the health of their employees, work to create a culture of physical activity in the workplace and inspire change by looking beyond the criteria to new and innovative ways to inspire health.

Blue Cross' commitment to recruiting and supporting employees with disabilities won the company the title of 2007 Employer of the Year from the Governor's Office of Disability Affairs. The governor's annual Disability Community Action and Leadership Award Ceremony honors organizations and individuals who show an outstanding commitment and service to persons with disabilities in Louisiana.

wellness
diversity
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diversity

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Generic Drugs: Quality and Value

As the patents for more and more brand-name medications expire, less expensive options are becoming available to healthcare consumers. If you've been hesitant to try a generic medicine, you may be comforted to know that generic drugs, like brand-name drugs, must follow the same strict standards imposed by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

- Generic drugs must be *bioequivalent* to their brand-name counterparts, which means they should be absorbed into the bloodstream at the same rate and reach the same blood levels within a specified period of time.
- Manufacturers of both brand and generic drugs must follow good manufacturing practices enforced by the FDA.
- The FDA inspects manufacturing plants and monitors drug quality for brand and generic drugs.

Requiring these strict standards ensures that generic drugs contain exactly the same ingredients as the brand-name drug and are just as safe and effective. You can learn more at the FDA's website, www.fda.gov.

If you are interested in trying a generic drug, talk to your physician or pharmacist. By choosing a generic alternative, you can save a significant amount of money and maintain the quality of healthcare you receive.

Source: U.S. Food and Drug Administration

More Choices for Allergy Sufferers

Spring can be a downright miserable time for people who suffer from seasonal allergies. Fortunately, some recent FDA actions have given consumers more choices for dealing with allergy symptoms without taking a huge hit in the wallet.

Most recent is the approval by the FDA of Zyrtec[®], the leading prescription medicine for relieving indoor and outdoor allergy symptoms, as an over-the-counter (OTC) product. This approval means that you can buy the original 24-hour, full-prescription-strength Zyrtec products without a prescription in stores wherever OTC products are sold.

Two other antihistamines, OTC Alavert[®] and OTC Claritin[®], have also been shown effective for temporary relief of hay fever and allergy symptoms. New OTC drugs and those being switched from prescription to OTC form are evaluated and regulated by the FDA, much like prescription drugs; you can read more about this process at www.fda.gov.

If you are currently taking a brand-name prescription drug for allergy symptoms, talk with your doctor about whether your prescription has a lower-cost generic equivalent or an OTC alternative. You may be able to save money while getting the same level of quality care you've come to expect.

See p. 2 for some tips for drug-free allergy relief.

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New Prescription Copayments in Place

To ensure that we offer our customers a responsible and cost-effective drug benefit, HMO Louisiana, Inc., updates our preferred medication list or *formulary* each year.

Where to find the latest drug copayment information

The latest preferred medication list is always available for you to read or download on our website at www.bcbsla.com/pharmacy. Customers also may call the Express Scripts Customer Service Department toll-free at 1-866-781-7533 (which is also printed on your ID card) to request a printed copy by mail.

Save money with the power of choice

In many cases, you can minimize your out-of-pocket medication expenses by considering an alternative medication in a lower-copayment tier. Check the HMO Louisiana formulary or ask your

doctor to check whether a lower-cost brand-name medication or a generic drug would be clinically appropriate for you.

Highlights of recent formulary changes

The copayment tier for the following drugs changed from a Tier 3 copayment to a Tier 2 (lower) copayment level: Aptivus®, Avinza®, Duetact™, Emtriva®, Epzicom™, Exelon® Patch, Letairis™, Lexiva®, ProAir® HFA, Pulmicort Flexhaler™, Revatio™, Reyataz®, Selzentry™, Seroquel XR™, Symbicort®, Tindamax®, Truvada®, Tykerb®, Tyzeka®, Yasmin®, Yaz® and Zolanza®.

The medications listed below have moved to a Tier 3 copayment level, but lower-cost alternatives are available that you can discuss with your physician.

Recent Pharmacy Copayment Tier Changes

Tier 3 Medication (Higher Copayment)	Tier 2 Alternatives (Middle Copayment)	Tier 1 Alternatives (Lowest Copayment)
Actonel®, Actonel® with Calcium		Alendronate
Genotropin®*	Nutropin®, Nutropin® AQ, Omnitrope®	
Lexapro®		Citalopram, fluoxetine, paroxetine, sertraline
Prevacid®		Omeprazole
Proventil® HFA	ProAir® HFA	
Ortho Evra®, Ortho Tri-Cyclen Lo®**	Yasmin®, Yaz®	More than 35 generic oral contraceptives available

*Please note: The Genotropin® tier change from Tier 2 to Tier 3 only applies to members with three-tier benefit plans. Genotropin®, Nutropin®, Nutropin AQ® and Omnitrope® will remain Tier 5 medications for members with five-tier benefit plans. If you're not sure whether your plan includes a three-tier or five-tier prescription drug program, check your Schedule of Benefits, ask your group leader, or call HMO LA Customer Service at 800-495-BLUE (2583).

**Check your Schedule of Benefits to find out whether oral contraceptives are covered under your specific plan.

Tips for Drug-free Allergy Relief

Your doctor may also suggest some ways you can find relief from seasonal allergies without medication. If your nose and/or sinuses are inflamed by allergies, try these tips:

- Avoid environmental irritants such as tobacco smoke and strong chemical odors.
- Breathe hot, moist air from a humidifier.
- Apply a warm compress to the sinus area.
- Rinse your nasal cavities with a saline spray or salt water.

Last but not least, *practice prevention*. Try to avoid the things you are allergic to, dust and vacuum often, and consider buying an air filtering device to reduce indoor allergens.

Sources: FDA.gov, American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology

Have a question about healthcare?
Click on the Answer Button
at www.bcbsla.com



FDA Recommends Parents Use Caution with Infant Cold Medicines

The Consumer Healthcare Products Association (CHPA) recently announced the voluntary withdrawal of several over-the-counter (OTC) infant cough and cold medications from store shelves. The withdrawal affected only specific OTC cough and cold medicines sold for use in infants and children under two years of age and did not affect any other children's medicines.

The voluntary withdrawal occurred as the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) was reviewing safety information on the use of these medicines in children two years and younger. After completing its review, the FDA recommends these drugs not be used to treat children in this age group because of the risk of serious and potentially life-threatening side effects.

FDA has not completed its review of information about the safety of OTC cough and cold medicines in children ages two through 11. Pending completion of this review, the FDA recommends that parents and caregivers who continue using OTC cough and cold medicines in children two years of age and older check the active ingredients on the Drug Facts label and avoid giving children more than one medicine that contains the same ingredient.

Harm from OTC medicines is extremely rare, and when it does occur, it is generally the result of a significant overdose or accidental swallowing. Safe use and safekeeping are key in the proper management of all medications. Parents are encouraged to talk to their children's pediatrician or to a pharmacist or other healthcare professional if they have questions about using cough and cold medicines in children. As the FDA continues its review and issues further commentary, parents can get more information at www.OTCSafety.org.

The Warning Signs of Stroke

Do you know how to tell whether you or someone around you is having a stroke? Surveys show that most people do not. Yet recognizing the warning signs of stroke and taking quick action could mean the difference between life and death or permanent disability.

If you know someone at risk for stroke, you should know three simple problems to look for. Ask the person to:

- smile
- raise both arms
- speak a simple sentence

If you or your friend has trouble with any of these three "tests," call 911 immediately. Don't wait to see if the symptoms go away!

For more information, including a list of risk factors for stroke, visit **Healthcare Advisor**SM, our convenient online tool that lets you research more than 150 common health conditions (and much more). Go to the Blue Cross website at www.bcbsla.com and click on Health Tools, then Healthcare Advisor.

Source: RealAge.com

*Healthcare Advisor is powered by Subimo, LLC, an independent company that provides healthcare information to HMO Louisiana customers.

Parents may lower the risks of using children's OTC cough and cold medicines by following these guidelines:

- Carefully follow the directions in the Drug Facts part of the label.
- Only use the measuring spoon or cup that comes with the medicine or those made specially for measuring drugs.
- Choose OTC medicines with childproof safety caps, when available, and store these medicines out of the reach of children.
- Do not use these products to sedate your child or to make children sleepy.
- Keep emergency numbers nearby, including the nationwide poison control hotline at 1-800-222-1222.

Source: U.S. Food & Drug Administration

FDA Issues Warning for Anemia Drugs Used by Patients with Cancer and Kidney Failure

HMO Louisiana has changed its official medical policy statement regarding the appropriate use of certain anemia medications by patients with cancer and kidney failure. This change is the result of Black Box warnings issued for Aranesp® (darbepoetin), Epogen® (epoetin) and Procrit® (epoetin), and the new guidelines are based on FDA recommendations issued in April and November 2007.

Black Box warnings are imprinted on package inserts for prescription medications when research has shown that a certain percentage of patients taking the drug may experience the serious side effects noted. These warnings are intended to advise patients of the possibility of side effects, though many patients respond well to the medications and experience no difficulties. Black Box warnings are so named because the warnings are surrounded by a black border.

If either you or a family member is taking one of these medications, please discuss potential serious side effects with your physician. Always consult your physician before discontinuing any prescription medication. A well-informed patient is the best advocate for his or her own good health. For additional information, go to the FDA website at <http://www.fda.gov>.