

November 2011

Walgreens to leave network January 1, 2012

In October, we wrote to you about contract talks between Express Scripts, the company that manages the pharmacy network for us, and Walgreens. We're writing today with an update so that you have the very latest news affecting members.

Despite ongoing talks, it appears the two parties won't reach an agreement before the end of the year. Absent a last minute agreement, Walgreens will leave the network on January 1, 2012.

We will send one more mailing to members that have used Walgreens within the last 90 days. This mailing urges members to take action to move their prescriptions to another in-network pharmacy before December 31, 2011. We will also make automated phone calls to many impacted members in an effort to help raise awareness of this issue, and to encourage members to transfer their Walgreens prescriptions before December 31, 2011. Where appropriate, members will receive information about the opportunity to switch their medications to the Express Scripts home delivery pharmacy.

Also attached is an [FAQ](#) that may help answer questions you may have.

Answers to commonly asked questions regarding Walgreens network status

Q. Walgreens is asking members to contact their health plan or HR department about keeping Walgreens available to members. What is Empire BlueCross BlueShield (Empire) doing to keep Walgreens in the provider network?

A. We have expressed our desire to both Walgreens and Express Scripts that they reach a deal that balances costs with access and allows Walgreens to continue as a network pharmacy. However, Express Scripts works on behalf of us and our customers to keep prescription medications as affordable and accessible as possible. We remain committed to keeping prescription drugs affordable and accessible for our members. Regardless of the outcome, we will continue to offer broad access to pharmacies across the country.

Q. What if this issue is not resolved by the end of the year?

A. If Walgreens and Express Scripts do not reach a deal by the end of the year, then beginning January 1, 2012 Walgreens will no longer be in the Express Scripts pharmacy provider network.

Q. If members can't use Walgreens anymore, where are they supposed to get their prescriptions filled?

A. Even without Walgreens, there are more than 56,000 pharmacy locations within the pharmacy provider network nation wide, so access to other retail pharmacies should not be an issue. On average, there is another network pharmacy within one-half mile of a Walgreens pharmacy. If a new agreement with Walgreens cannot be reached, Empire will mail members who have used a Walgreens pharmacy within the last 90 days the names and locations of convenient, nearby pharmacies. Members can always check the list of participating pharmacy providers online to see if a particular provider is in-network by visiting empireblue.com.

Q. Is Walgreens still in Empire's network?

A. Yes. Through December 31, 2011 Walgreens is still a participating pharmacy in their network; however the Walgreens contract with Express Scripts will expire on December 31, 2011, unless a new agreement is reached.

Q. What if a new agreement is reached?

A. If a new agreement is reached after member notification occurs, we will inform our members that Walgreens is in the network for 2012 and they will be able to obtain coverage for their prescription drugs at Walgreens.

Q. Will there be a change in price?

A. Member benefits are not changing as a result of Walgreens exiting the pharmacy provider network. Sometimes, using a different pharmacy can result in a modest change in what the member will pay, since pharmacies contract with Express Scripts at different rates. This normally only happens when the member has a percentage copay or when the cost of the drug is less than the members' flat copay.

Q. What is the likelihood that this situation will be resolved?

A. Unfortunately, we are not in the position to comment directly on the Walgreens and Express Scripts negotiations. Beginning January 1, 2012, Walgreens will no longer be in the Express Scripts pharmacy network, unless an agreement is reached by December 31, 2011. Even without Walgreens, members have access to other convenient retail pharmacies in our network. On average, there is another network pharmacy within one-half mile of a Walgreens pharmacy. We will provide members with the names and locations of convenient, nearby pharmacies if a new agreement with Walgreens cannot be reached.

Q. Are there other pharmacies affected by this situation or only Walgreens?

A. Only Walgreens-owned pharmacies in our network are affected. Walgreens operates under various names, such as OptionCare, Duane Reade and Happy Harry's. All other pharmacies in our network remain eager to serve our members.

Q. Can members still use Walgreens?

A. Yes. Walgreens continues to be part of our network through December 31, 2011. On average, there is another network pharmacy within one-half mile of a Walgreens pharmacy, ready and eager to help members with all their prescription needs in the event Walgreens exits the pharmacy provider network.

Q. Can members get their prescription filled at a nonparticipating pharmacy?

A. If members use a nonparticipating pharmacy, in most cases they will pay the full price for their prescriptions. Members should check their certificate of coverage for more information.

Q. What if a member currently gets their prescriptions by mail from Express Scripts. Will this change?

A. Any existing home delivery prescriptions from the Express Scripts Pharmacy are not affected by this change.

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Q. What if a member has a specific brand of medicine – how can they find out if another pharmacy carries this brand?

A. All major pharmacies generally carry the same brand-name medicines. Members can check with their new pharmacy when they transfer their prescription, but in all likelihood, they will be able to receive their medication at any of our convenient, quality network pharmacies.

Q. What about members who have their prescription mailed from Walgreens – can they get it from another walk-in pharmacy?

A. Yes. It's easy to transfer a new prescription to another pharmacy, and some pharmacies may be willing to mail prescriptions if that is the service a member is currently receiving from Walgreens. Keep in mind that all pharmacies in our network are willing to assist members with their prescription needs, and specific services do vary from pharmacy to pharmacy.

Q. How is 24-hour access affected?

A. There are other convenient 24-hour pharmacy choices, often just down the street in the same neighborhood as Walgreens. In the event 24-hour access is needed for an emergency fill and no other pharmacy offers 24-hour service in the member's area, the member can use a Walgreens pharmacy, pay full price for their prescription, and then submit a claim for reimbursement if their plan allows.

Q. Some Walgreens stores operate "Take Care Clinics". Can members continue to visit a Take Care Clinic for certain health care services?

A. In most cases, services provided by a Take Care Clinic are covered by the member's medical insurance benefit; therefore, members can continue to access a Take Care Clinic. Since prescriptions are covered by the member's prescription drug benefit, if prescription medications are prescribed by the attending physician, they cannot be filled at the Walgreens pharmacy counter.

Q. I've heard that some plans that have Express Scripts as their Pharmacy Benefit Manager have been able to retain Walgreens within their pharmacy network. Why can't you do this?

A. Every plan has different contracts with their pharmacy benefits managers. We continue to work with Express Scripts and Walgreens to resolve these issues in the best interests of our members to keep Walgreens within the pharmacy network.



Express Scripts, Inc. is a separate company that provides pharmacy services and pharmacy benefit management services on behalf of health plan members.

A health plan with a Medicare contract. Services provided by Empire HealthChoice HMO, Inc. and/or Empire HealthChoice Assurance, Inc., licensees of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association, an association of independent Blue Cross and Blue Shield plans.