

## **Your Guide to Allergy Treatment this Season**

1. Nasal irrigation and saline sprays — Nasal irrigation(lavage) is useful for treating drainage down the back of the throat (post nasal drip), sneezing, nasal dryness, and congestion. This helps by rinsing out allergens and irritants from the nose.
  - a. Available over-the-counter products include: bulb syringes, Neti pots, and bottle sprayers which may be used to perform nasal irrigation.
2. Nasal glucocorticoids — Nasal steroids delivered by a nasal spray are the first-line recommended treatment for the symptoms of allergic rhinitis. These drugs have minimal side effects and effectively relieve symptoms in most people. Studies have shown that nasal steroids are more effective than oral antihistamines for symptom relief.
  - a. Covered medications for Medicare include: fluticasone, flunisolide, and Veramyst. Commercial plans include coverage for: fluticasone, flunisolide, and Veramyst
  - b. Over-the-Counter Nasonex, Flonase, Nasacort Allergy 24HR is available without a prescription.
3. Antihistamines — Antihistamines relieve the itching, sneezing, and runny nose of allergic rhinitis, but do not relieve nasal congestion.
  - a. Oral medications covered on the formulary include loratadine (Commercial plans only) and levocetirizine
  - b. Nasal sprays such as azelastine and Patanase (Commercial Plans only) are prescription nasal antihistamine sprays covered on the formulary that can be used daily or when needed to relieve symptoms of postnasal drip, congestion, and sneezing.
  - c. Over-the-Counter Claritin (loratadine), Zyrtec (cetirizine), and Allegra (fexofenadine) are available without a prescription.
4. Combination of nasal glucocorticoid and antihistamine — A prescription combination of the nasal steroid fluticasone and the nasal antihistamine azelastine, (Dymista) appears to improve symptoms of allergic rhinitis better than either drug alone in three clinical trials. Dymista is covered on the commercial formulary after failure of individual agents of a nasal steroid and a nasal antihistamine.
5. Mast Cell Stabilizer — cromolyn sodium prevents the symptoms of allergic rhinitis by interfering with the ability of allergy cells to release natural chemicals that cause inflammation. This drug is available over-the-counter as a nasal spray (Nasalcrom and generic equivalents) and must be used prior to the initiation of symptoms.
6. Leukotriene modifiers – montelukast and zafirlukast are covered on the formulary and can be very useful in patients with asthma and allergic rhinitis. However, nasal steroids are more effective than leukotriene modifiers for treating allergic rhinitis.