

Pharmacy Benefit Dimensions®

DIMENSIONS NEWSLETTER • EXPERTISE & SOLUTIONS

WINTER 2026

Breathe Easier this Winter

Tips for Managing Asthma in Cold Weather: For asthma sufferers, winter can be the most difficult time of the year. The colder months can be a recipe for flare-ups, with severe asthma symptoms that can become uncontrolled. The cold, dry air can irritate the airways causing coughing, wheezing and shortness of breath. When you have asthma, your airways are always a little swollen, but triggers can cause the swelling to increase and extra mucus to be produced, making it hard to breathe. Though winter brings its challenges, by being prepared you can learn to manage your symptoms and avoid triggers so you can enjoy this time of year. At Pharmacy Benefit Dimensions, we know your health and wellness are a top priority. We want to remind you about the benefits from using your maintenance inhaler as prescribed. Maintenance inhalers are medications used daily to minimize symptoms and reduce disease flare-ups. Unlike rescue inhalers, which are used as needed for immediate relief, maintenance inhalers are important for the long-term management of your respiratory health. Taking your maintenance inhaler as prescribed will help prevent disease progression, flare-ups, and hospitalizations. In addition, regular maintenance inhaler use may help reduce how frequently you need to use your rescue inhaler. If you have questions regarding your treatment plan, including your maintenance inhaler, we encourage you to talk with your doctor at your next visit. *Here are some things to consider to help you manage your asthma during the winter:*

Cold Air and Your Lungs: Everyone's airways are protected by a layer of fluid that, when you breathe in dry air, evaporates faster than it can be replaced. This dryness can cause the airways to become irritated and swollen, a major problem for people with asthma. People's airways are also lined with protective mucus, which helps capture unhealthy particles. Unfortunately, cold weather causes your body to produce more mucus, that is also thicker and stickier than normal, further impeding breathing. This process occurs in everyone, even people without lung disease. People with asthma, who already experience inflamed airways and overproduction of mucus have a particularly hard time.

Exercising Outside with Asthma: Regular exercise is part of a healthy lifestyle, especially for people with chronic lung diseases like asthma. Unfortunately, their lung diseases may make it harder to participate in certain exercise and activities. This is especially true for people with exercise-induced asthma (EIB). For these people, their asthma symptoms are triggered by the rapid inhalation of cool, dry air through the mouth that happens when you exercise. This problem can be worsened by the cold, which is why, though many people enjoy exercising outdoors, for those with asthma the drop in temperature can become concerning. People with EIB find that their already inflamed airways are worsened by the cold, which can leave them short of breath or cause a tight or burning feeling in their chest.

Winter and Indoor Allergies: When the weather is cold, you are more likely to spend long periods of time indoors with the windows closed and the heat on. This can mean a higher risk of exposure to indoor allergens, irritants and respiratory viruses. Common asthma triggers like dust, pet dander, and pests may be more likely to accumulate. Vacuuming and dusting your home frequently, washing your sheets and blankets with hot water frequently and using an air cleaner are all good ways to reduce indoor triggers. In addition, winter is respiratory virus season, when colds, flu, RSV, COVID-19 and many other viruses tend to circulate. For people with asthma, these infections can lead to more inflammation and symptoms. Being up to date with your vaccines, trying to avoid large gatherings or sick individuals, practicing good hygiene habits such as washing your hands and masking when necessary, and drinking plenty of fluids are good ways to prevent catching an infection and causing an asthma flare-up.

Dramatic Rise in Flu Cases

Flu activity this winter continues to intensify across the United States as hospitalizations surge, according to newly released data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The percentage of outpatient visits for respiratory illnesses has now reached the highest level ever recorded. Roughly 8% of all visits to health care providers were attributed to flu-like illness — a rate that exceeds any seen since 1997, the earliest year for which comparable data is available. Flu-like illness is defined as having a fever along with a cough and/or sore throat. Children and young adults account for a large share of these visits. About 35% of outpatient visits for respiratory illness involved people under 24 years old, while children younger than 5 represented approximately 20% of cases. The CDC estimates that there have been at least 11,000,000 illnesses, 120,000 hospitalizations, and 5,000 deaths from flu so far this season.

The "Super Flu" Variant: The current surge is primarily driven by the subclade K variant of the flu — H3N2 virus. This strain circulated in Australia over the summer and then in the United Kingdom and Canada later in the fall. Since early December, H3N2 subclade K has been the dominant flu strain in the U.S. Because of how rapidly subclade K has spread, some people have dubbed subclade K a "super flu." Some of the most common symptoms include: high fevers (up to 105.5 degrees), intense body aches, severe coughs, shaking and chills.

Connect

We're Here to Help

Please reach out with any questions you may have. To best assist you, choose from the following:

Members with questions about your pharmacy benefits: Contact **Member Services**, 1-888-878-9172.

Pharmacists or providers with questions about a claim: Contact our **Pharmacy Help Desk**, (716) 635-3578.

Brokers or employers with questions about partnering with PBD: Contact our **Sales Department**, (716) 860-0743.

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The CDC recommends that everyone 6 months and older who has not yet been vaccinated this season get an annual flu vaccine, saying that the shot will still help protect them against severe illness. Pharmacy Benefit Dimensions will continue to cover flu vaccines, when administered at a network pharmacy, as part of the Affordable Care Act.

At-home tests for the flu and/or COVID-19 are widely available over the counter, and some pharmacies offer rapid on-site testing if a person doesn't want or need to seek care at a health care facility or emergency room. Testing can help guide treatment, especially to distinguish between COVID-19 and the flu, which have different treatments. After testing, please contact your doctor to discuss appropriate treatment options, including prescription treatment, if needed. There are three FDA-approved prescription antiviral drugs recommended by CDC to treat flu this season that are on our formulary: oseltamivir phosphate, Relenza®, Xofluza®.

Maintaining a Healthy Weight

The beginning of a new year offers a powerful moment to reset habits and refocus on health. As 2026 begins, Pharmacy Benefit Dimensions encourages you to make maintaining a healthy weight a priority — for overall well-being, energy, and longevity. A healthy weight supports heart health, mobility, mental clarity, and confidence, and it is best achieved through balance, consistency, and mindful choices, not drastic changes. Nutrition plays a central role in maintaining a healthy weight. Choosing nutrient-dense foods, paying attention to portion sizes, and developing a healthier relationship with food can make a lasting difference. Rather than dieting or deprivation, sustainable eating habits focus on fueling the body properly — enjoying meals that are satisfying, balanced, and supportive of long-term health. Regular physical activity is another essential component. Exercise helps regulate weight by boosting metabolism, building strength, and supporting overall body function. Whether it's walking, strength training, stretching, or structured workouts, movement doesn't need to be intense to be effective — it simply needs to be consistent. People who are overweight may be at increased risk for many serious health conditions compared to those with a healthy weight. These may include but are not limited to: high blood pressure (hypertension), high cholesterol, type 2 diabetes, coronary heart disease, stroke, osteoarthritis (a breakdown of cartilage and bone within a joint), sleep apnea and breathing problems.

Letting go of habits that interfere with healthy weight management is equally important. Smoking, for example, places significant strain on the body and can complicate metabolism and overall health. Quitting smoking is a major step toward restoring balance and supporting the body's ability to function at its best. As 2026 unfolds, maintaining a healthy weight becomes less about perfection and more about progress. Small, steady choices — made day after day — lay the groundwork for lasting change. This year is an opportunity to listen to your body, honor its needs, and commit to habits that support a healthier, stronger, and more confident life.

The Pharma-Scene

Pharmacy Benefit Dimensions Drug Formulary Update

Abbreviation Key:	PA: Prior Authorization	SP: Specialty Formulary	NPB: Non-Preferred Brand
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Here are the quarterly changes to the PBDRx drug formulary. The following medications were added to the formulary:

Drug	FDA-Approved Indication	Tier	Comments
Inluriyo® tablets	For the treatment of a specific type of ER-positive, HER-2 negative, advanced or metastatic breast cancer	NPB	PA, SP
Komzifti® capsules	For the treatment of adult patients with a specific type of relapsed or refractory acute myeloid leukemia (AML)	NPB	PA, SP
Dawnzera® subcutaneous injection	For the prevention of attacks of hereditary angioedema (HAE) in patients 12 years of age and older	NPB	PA, SP

The following new generic medications are available:

Brand	Generic	FDA-Approved Indication
Endometrin®	progesterone 100mg vaginal insert	For the treatment of infertility
Premarin®	conjugated estrogen tablets	For the treatment of moderate to severe vasomotor symptoms due to menopause
Ravicti®	glycerol phenylbutyrate liquid	For the chronic management of hyperammonemia in patients with urea cycle disorders
Rytary®	carbidopa-levodopa extended-release capsules	For the treatment of Parkinson's disease
Saxenda®	liraglutide solution for injection	For the treatment of obesity and maintenance of weight management
Tracleer®	bosentan tablet for suspension	For the treatment of pulmonary hypertension

The following medications were reviewed and will remain non-formulary:

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| • Lynkeut® capsules | • Jascayd® tablets | injection | • Enbumyst® nasal spray |
| • Wayrilz® tablets | • Clotic® otic solution | • Kygevvi® powder for oral | • Subvenite® oral suspension |
| • Lasix ONYU® subcutaneous | • Palsonify® tablets | solution | • Bondlido® topical patch |
| • Rhapsido® tablets | • Forzinity® subcutaneous | • Zolybus® ophthalmic gel | • Javadin® oral solution |