Professional Notice

To: Pharmacy Practitioners
From: Nova Scotia College of Pharmacists
Date: May 3, 2018
Re: Rapid Strep Testing in Community Pharmacies

New information has raised concerns about pharmacists performing point of care Rapid Strep Tests in the absence of an initial diagnosis by a physician or nurse practitioner. The Emergency Department of the IWK has reported that a high volume of patients are presenting for follow-up care after receiving a positive strep test at community pharmacies, however upon examination, these patients are determined to have lacked the clinical indication for testing. In these cases, the positive strep test result was due to the patient being a carrier for strep rather than having strep pharyngitis. Approximately one in four individuals are carriers of the bacteria.

Information from the IWK and Clinical Practice Guidelines from the Infectious Disease Society of America indicate that although rapid strep testing should be performed to confirm the diagnosis of acute pharyngitis caused by Group A Strep, it cannot be used to diagnose in the absence of a thorough history and complete physical examination including assessing for cervical adenopathy, tonsillar swelling, tonsillar exudates, and palatal petechiae, as well as in consideration of other diseases.

The NSCP is exploring whether pharmacists can be prepared to perform the appropriate initial physical examination. In the meantime, the NSCP cautions that pharmacists should only conduct point of care testing, particularly in children, for Group A Strep after a patient has undergone an initial examination by a primary care provider such as physician or nurse practitioner and when the outcome of that examination is a recommendation that the patient receive a rapid strep test.