



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jeffrey D. Klein

Senator Klein Gives Rite Aid Grinch Award For Worst Chain Pharmacy Asthma Drug Prices

JEFFREY D. KLEIN March 31, 2005

Bronx, NY – Senator Jeff Klein (D-Bronx, Westchester) today released a scathing report and survey on asthma prescription drug prices in New York City. Prices for asthma medications vary wildly among New York City pharmacies surveyed. Chain stores like Rite Aid were found to charge double the price of competitors for the same medication—without any apparent rhyme or reason to the difference.

We are in the middle of a national fight to get consumers the medicines they need at prices that they can afford,” said Senator Klein. “Part of that fight is enabling consumers to make smart choices on where to buy their prescription drugs. My report will serve to not only expose the fact that pharmacies do not adhere to state law, but that they rip off customers on a regular basis.”

Senator Klein began researching prescription drug prices when he was Chairman of the Assembly Committee on Oversight, Analysis and Investigation and has continued his work in the State Senate. His latest report is entitled [Shopping for Asthma Drugs: A Survey of Prices in New York City](#).

Asthma is the top health problem facing New York City. Children in the city are three times

more likely to suffer from asthma than the national average. Asthma rates in some areas of the Bronx are among the highest in the nation. In many instances, those areas also had higher prices. “When people cannot get the asthma medicine they need, they can lose workdays, schooldays, and even their very lives,” Klein said. “In the Bronx we are in the midst of an asthma epidemic and we must work to ensure that medication is accessible for all asthma sufferers.”

A survey of 149 drug stores’ prices for ten popular asthma drugs is the basis of the report. The pharmacies were located in all five boroughs and represented independent drug stores, as well as each of the four large pharmacy chains: CVS, Duane Reade, Eckerd/Genovese, and Rite Aid. The drugs were well known medicines such as Albuterol and Singulair, in their most commonly prescribed dosages.

A “market basket” of the ten asthma drugs averaged \$682.49 among all the pharmacies. The lowest priced basket was \$486.39 at an independent drug store in the Bronx. The highest priced was \$1080.50 at an independent in Manhattan.

Specific drugs had even more dramatic prices differences. For example, Combivent Aerosol could be purchased for \$52.36 at the independent Simelson Square Pharmacy in the Bronx, but cost \$141.99 in some Rite Aids. The price was 271% higher at those Rite Aids!

The best prices were generally found in independent pharmacies. Among the pharmacy chains, CVS averaged the best prices; Duane Reade and Eckerd/Genovese were in the middle; and Rite Aid had the highest prices. The press conference was held at a Rite-Aid Drugstore located on the corner of
Amsterdam Ave.

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The survey team used the New York State Drug Price List Law to collect price information. The law requires each pharmacy to provide any person with a price list of the 150 biggest selling drugs. Pharmacies' rate of compliance with the law was terrible—over a third of the surveyed pharmacies did not provide the required lists, which is in violation of the law.

“Some drug stores make it very difficult for consumers to comparison shop for the best prices,” said Senator Klein. “Asthma sufferers need to be aggressive and persistent in comparison shopping for the best prices, including the possibility of using internet pharmacies. Plus, we have to work towards creating a better way to enforce the Drug Price List law.”

“We need to hold the pharmaceutical chain stores accountable,” concluded Klein. “If drug prices are transparent, informed asthmatics will get the medication they need to survive at reasonable prices.”
