In-Store Clinics Should Not Replace Your Pediatrician

(NU) - In many states, shoppers at local drug or discount stores may find themselves standing next to a health care clinic. That’s right, amid the over-the-counter cold medications, greeting cards and vitamins, clinics that offer diagnoses of conditions such as swimmer’s ear and bladder and ear infections are popping up in drugstores, supermarkets and discount stores across the nation.

These in-store clinics, also known as retail-based clinics, are often staffed by physician’s assistants and nurse practitioners who, in a normal medical office setting, would practice alongside a physician. However, in the case of retail-based clinics, some states do not require that the supervising physician be on-site during the diagnosis and treatment of many illnesses.

Parents need to be cautious when considering seeking care for their children at in-store clinics. Professionals who staff these clinics might not be specially trained in pediatrics and are not aware of your child’s medical history. Whether it’s information about your child’s immunizations or allergies, having the patient’s medical record on hand is paramount to safe, effective treatment options – options that might best be decided by your child’s own pediatrician, who has access to this information.

Consistency is the Key to Proper Health Care

Consistency is also key to proper health care. With every visit and phone call, the pediatrician is learning about your child’s health care needs, enabling her to make decisions with complete knowledge and information. This is why children’s health care is ideally delivered or coordinated through the child’s “medical home,” the office of the primary-care pediatrician.

And while in-store clinics are accessible, convenient and, in some cases, less expensive, their staff has a limited number of conditions that they are permitted to treat, and they don’t offer the comprehensive medical evaluation and treatment that your child's pediatrician would.

So, the next time you stop into your local drugstore for an over-the-counter fever reducer for your child and spot a
health clinic, think twice before choosing this venue for your child’s treatment.

For more information about in-store clinics, contact the American Academy of Pediatrics at www.aap.org.