

Pharmacies plan to translate drug instructions

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(AP) -- Five major pharmacy chains agreed Tuesday to print drug instructions at their New York stores in five languages other than English and indicated that they plan to expand the option to other states.

The companies are Target, Wal-Mart, Costco, Duane Reade and A&P. The agreements will also require the companies to provide oral assistance in more than 150 languages.

The companies, which together have 700 stores in New York state, agreed with state Attorney General Andrew Cuomo to counsel and provide written translations in Spanish, Chinese, Italian, Russian and French.

The companies didn't agree to Polish translations, although other pharmacies agreed to that in previous deals with the attorney general.

Pharmacists in New York must personally provide information about prescription drugs to all patients, orally and in writing, and pharmacies are prohibited from conducting business in a way that discriminates against non-English speakers.

According to census data, more than a million New Yorkers do not speak English "well or at all."

Cuomo started investigating pharmacy policies and procedures after getting complaints from the organization Make the Road New York, a

Brooklyn-based nonprofit that supports New York City's low-income and immigrant population.

The investigation found that pharmacies routinely fail to advise non-English speaking customers in their own language about the purpose, dosage and side effects of their medications.

Cuomo reached similar agreements last year with Rite Aid and CVS pharmacies.

"Prescription information can literally be a matter of life and death," Cuomo said in a written statement.

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