

Walgreen tests virtual doctor visits through app

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In this Wednesday, May 14, 2014 file photo, a customer walks toward the entrance to a Walgreens store, in Boston. Walgreen on Monday, Dec. 8, 2014 announced it is testing a new telemedicine service that lets patients see a doctor without leaving home or even visiting any of the drugstore chain's clinics. (AP Photo/Steven Senne, File)

Walgreen is testing a new telemedicine service that lets patients see a doctor without leaving home or visiting any of the drugstore chain's clinics.

The Deerfield, Illinois, company said Monday that [patients](#) in California or Michigan can now contact a physician around the clock through Walgreen's mobile application for smartphones or tablet computers.

The virtual visits cost \$49, and doctors can diagnose and treat problems that aren't emergencies and don't require a physical exam, such as pink eye or bronchitis. The physicians, who are licensed to practice in the patient's state, also can write prescriptions.

Drugstore chains like Walgreen Co. and CVS Health Corp. have been adding clinics to their stores for several years, muscling in on what has traditionally been the domain of primary care doctors as they expand their health care offerings. The new virtual visits add another layer to that competition. Health insurers like Anthem, big employers and hospital groups also offer virtual doctor visits.

The retailers are bulking up their health offerings in part to serve an aging baby boomer population and people who are gaining insurance coverage through the health care overhaul. The companies say they also are trying to answer a growing customer demand for convenience.

"The idea of convenience ... is really becoming a dominant theme in [health care](#)," said Walgreen Chief Medical Officer Dr. Harry Leider. He said the company believes the telemedicine service will help build brand loyalty with customers.

Walgreen, the nation's biggest drugstore chain with more than 8,200 locations, plans to eventually expand its program to additional states.

The virtual doctor visits are available through both iOS and Android versions of its [mobile application](#). The service, developed with MDLive, does not require that patients fill prescriptions from those virtual visits at Walgreen pharmacies.

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