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Walk-in clinics say they don't replace family doctors

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CheckUps chief touts convenience of Wal-Mart sites

The chief executive of CheckUps encourages consumers to maintain a "pediatric home" for their children, though he said "it's better to have a place" they can seek medical care, particularly when pediatrician offices are closed.

"We're just expanding the convenience in general for young patients" as well as older patients, said Jack Tawil, the chairman and CEO of CheckUps.

CheckUps is opening 14 new nonemergency walk-in medical clinics today in leased space in Wal-Marts - including stores at 6140-A University Drive and 11610 S. Memorial Parkway in Huntsville. Clinics also will open in Wal-Marts in Hartselle and Athens.

The American Academy of Pediatrics has issued a policy statement opposing the use of retail-based clinics as a source for medical care of infants, children and adolescents. The academy contends that the clinics don't support its commitment to the "medical home model of providing continuous, coordinated and compassionate care for which the pediatrician shares responsibility with the family."

"Not every child has a pediatric home," said Tawil, who will be in Huntsville today for the CheckUps clinics' grand openings.

Eight of the new CheckUps opening today are in Alabama, five are in Louisiana and one is in Mississippi. CheckUps already operates eight clinics in Wal-Marts in Florida and Mississippi.

Another clinic will open in Mobile in a couple of weeks, Tawil said. He expects more than 200 additional clinics will open in Wal-Marts and other retailers by the end of the year.

Nurse practitioners at CheckUps clinics diagnose and treat common ailments such as strep throat and ear and sinus infections and provide routine pediatric care, blood screenings and immunizations. CheckUps nurse practitioners, under supervision from local physicians, can write prescriptions and e-mail them to a patient's preferred pharmacy.

"We're looking to work with pediatricians as well as family care physicians as we expand," Tawil said.

The company says visits usually take less than 15 minutes, and no appointments are necessary. A routine visit for a medical problem such as a cold or flu costs \$65, while

routine child and adolescent health care ranges from \$30 to \$50, according to the CheckUps Web site, which lists charges for its various medical services.

The clinics opening today are offering free "Good for Your Heart" screenings through next Wednesday.