



KEY MESSAGES

UPDATED: March 04, 2020

Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

COVID-19 and its risk to the Canadian drug supply

- We are not aware of any increase in drug shortages to-date specifically linked to COVID-19 in Canada. The number that we are seeing reported is consistent with what we saw at the end of 2019. However, it is something we are watching for and hearing concerns about.
- Like other global industries, pharmaceutical companies have consolidated many drug development and manufacturing processes in countries like China and India, where ingredients and manufacturing can be sourced at lower costs.
- The Canadian drug supply is highly dependent on manufacturing processes and the movement of goods to and from China and other countries.
- It is imperative that drug manufacturers, drug plan managers and governments have contingency plans in place in order to guarantee the supply of medications during a pandemic, natural disaster or other disruption.

How Canadians can keep themselves safe

- The best way to prevent the spread of a disease like COVID-19 is to:
 - Wash your hands often with soap and warm water for 20 seconds. Hand sanitizer may be used when soap and water are not available.
 - Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
 - Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue or arm. Do not cough or sneeze into your hand.
 - Stay home if you are sick, especially if you are coughing, sneezing or have a fever.
 - Stay away from hospitals or long-term care centres if you are sick.
 - Get your flu shot. The flu virus is still circulating in the community.
 - Monitor yourself for fever, cough and difficulty breathing. If you believe you have symptoms of the coronavirus, isolate yourself from others as quickly as possible and call a health care professional or public health authority.
- Face masks bought in pharmacies and retail locations do not provide total protection against airborne viruses like COVID-19, and most people use them incorrectly, reducing their effectiveness even further.
- Face masks are not recommended to be used by the general population in an attempt to prevent COVID-19. Masks can be helpful if worn by people who are sick, but once used a mask should be discarded immediately.
- There is no known risk of coronaviruses entering Canada on parcels or packages coming from affected regions.



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How Canadians can be prepared

- Canadians who require medication on a regular basis should ensure their prescriptions are up to date. We do not recommend stockpiling medications since this could trigger drug shortages.
- When there is a disruption in the supply of medications, pharmacists manage their stock carefully to ensure that all their patients can receive a quantity of the medication to meet their immediate needs. Unnecessary stockpiling of medication can create unintended shortages and puts other patients' health at risk.
- If you have any concerns about your medications or if you are sick at home and in need of your medications, call your pharmacist. Many pharmacies offer a delivery service to help patients get their medications when they can't leave their home.
- We would advise Canadians review their home first-aid kit. Make sure you also have common nonprescription medications for cold, fever and allergies on hand.
- For more information and updates about COVID-19, visit [Health Canada's COVID-19](#) webpage or that of your local public health authority.

People most at risk for coronavirus are those who...

- Become ill with fever and/or respiratory symptoms within 14 days of having travelled to an impacted area
- Have been in close contact with someone who has a respiratory illness who has travelled to an impacted area within 14 days prior to their illness onset
- Become ill with fever and/or respiratory symptoms after being in close contact with a confirmed or probable case of COVID-19

People most seriously affected by the coronavirus are those who...

- Are older
- Have pre-existing health problems, such as chronic diseases

Recommendations for pharmacists

- Pharmacists are the most accessible health care providers and have a critical role to play in identifying, reporting and managing potential cases of COVID-19.
- As the health care providers most often in contact with members of the public, pharmacists should have access to personal protective equipment (PPE).
- All patients should be screened over the phone before arriving at the pharmacy whenever possible. A voice recording communicating screening criteria should be implemented.
- Active screening over the phone should include questions about symptoms and travel/exposures.
- If a patient screens positive over the phone:



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- The patient should be advised to get someone from outside of their household to pick up their medications; or
- The pharmacy should arrange for the delivery of medications, if this service is available.
- No direct contact should be made with the patient in either scenario.
- A patient who screens positive over the phone should be advised to call their local public health unit. The pharmacist should also report to the local public health unit.
- An asymptomatic patient with travel history to an affected area should be advised to stay home/self-isolate and contact their local public health unit for further direction on activity restrictions.
- A patient who presents at a community pharmacy and self-identifies as meeting the screening criteria for COVID-19 needs to be separated from other patients and staff so that they are at least 2 meters apart (use a separate room where available) and given a surgical/procedure mask.
- Pharmacy staff should avoid close contact with a patient who screens positive for COVID-19.
- Pharmacy staff should call their local public health unit about any patient suspected of having COVID-19 and to arrange for patient travel for COVID-19 testing.
- Patient-contact surfaces (i.e., surfaces within 2 meters of the patient who has screened positive) should be disinfected as soon as possible.
- Pharmacies should have written measures and procedures for worker safety, developed in consultation with the joint health and safety committee or health and safety representative including measures and procedures for infection prevention and control.
- In addition to the consistent application of routine practices, pharmacies should follow contact and droplet precautions. This includes the appropriate selection and use of all the following PPE:
 - Gloves
 - A long-sleeved gown
 - Facial protection, such as surgical/procedural mask and eye protection, face shield, or surgical/procedural mask with visor attachment
- Hand hygiene should be performed whenever indicated, paying particular attention to during and after removal of PPE.

For more information, consult the website of your local public health authority, provincial ministry of health or the Public Health Agency of Canada's [Information Page for Health Professionals](#)

The above messaging was sourced and adapted from the Public Health Agency of Canada, Ontario Ministry of Health and Ottawa Public Health. We will continue to update this information as the situation evolves.