

# What Can Pharmacists Do Under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act (CDSA) During the COVID-19 Pandemic?

In order to support the continuity of patient care during COVID-19, Health Canada made [several temporary exemptions to the CDSA](#) that allow pharmacists to extend/renew, transfer, delegate deliveries and accept verbal orders for prescriptions of opioids or other controlled substances.

Most jurisdictions have incorporated these activities into their pharmacists' scope of practice, and some have also now authorized the ability for pharmacists to adapt prescriptions for controlled substances (already permitted under the CDSA).



**Extend/Renew Prescriptions**



**Adapt Prescriptions**  
(adjust dose, regimen or formulation; taper or stop)



**Transfer Prescriptions**




**Direct Pharmacy Staff to Deliver Prescriptions**



**Accept Verbal Orders for Prescriptions**


\*Please refer to CPhA's latest "[COVID-19 and CDSA chart](#)" for an overview of authorized activities by jurisdiction.

## EXAMPLE: Extending a Prescription in Newfoundland & Labrador



**Jane is a pharmacist in Newfoundland & Labrador, who practices in a community setting.**

AE, one of Jane's patients, is a 22-year old female on methadone 80 mg PO daily. Jane witnesses AE's methadone dose ingestion daily except weekends when AE receives carries.



**Jane and AE notice that she only has one more week of her prescription, but the prescriber cannot see AE for another month. How will AE receive her methadone?**

**Under the CDSA exemptions and provincial regulation, Jane can now continue methadone and buprenorphine-naloxone prescriptions as originally prescribed. To extend the prescription, Jane:**



- Ensures AE is under her professional care
- Identifies any potential drug related problems (i.e., appropriateness of dose)
- Informs the original prescriber of the plan
- Reviews safe opioid storage and disposal with AE

### Outcome:

- Jane extends the original prescription for one week and continues to witness AE's methadone ingestion daily
- The prescriber calls Jane a week later to discuss the prescription. After collaborative decision making, the prescriber faxes a new prescription to the pharmacy for more methadone for AE
- Jane documents her actions including extending of the prescription and witnessed dose



**AE can now obtain her methadone in a convenient and safe manner.**



### Before the CDSA Exemptions:

- ☒ Pharmacists were not permitted to extend opioid agonist therapy
- ☒ Patients would need to contact their prescriber for a new or renewed prescription



### After the CDSA Exemptions:

- ☒ Pharmacists are permitted to extend opioid related prescriptions as originally prescribed
- ☒ Patients can now have their prescriptions extended or renewed in circumstances where they are unable to visit their prescriber



**Please note: the CDSA exemptions are subject to provincial or territorial legislation.**

*Pharmacists in Newfoundland and Labrador are not permitted to accept verbal orders.*

For more information, please consult with your Provincial Regulatory Authority or local ministry of health and/or visit the [CPhA website](#) for resources.