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Canadian
Pharmacists
Association
Association des
pharmaciens
du Canada

The Weekly

Bringing the world of pharmacy together

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CPhA

CPhA: Canadians must have reasonable access to contraceptive medications and abortion services

CPhA reaffirmed its position to protect reproductive rights and access to abortion [in a statement](#) released on May 5. "While abortion is a safe, common and legal health procedure in Canada, we need to actively uphold this right and continue to work to improve the accessibility of abortion resources and care, which varies significantly across Canada. Pharmacists are front-line health-care providers with an important role to play in providing accessible care in our communities, including in the area of reproductive health and medical abortion," the statement reads. CPhA has long called for measures to address gaps in care and enhance patient access to abortion services, particularly in rural or remote communities. This includes support for pharmacist dispensing of the medicated abortion drug Mifegymiso and providing equitable, universal access to medical abortion across Canada. CPhA not only believes in the sexual and reproductive rights of Canadians, but that all Canadians must have reasonable access to contraceptive medications and abortion services.

Earn up to 9.75 CEUs at the Canadian Pharmacy Conference

The Canadian Pharmacy Conference: Pharmacy Rising is coming to Ottawa in one month! You can earn up to 9.75 CEUs while coming together with pharmacy colleagues from across Canada. Registration is already over 75% sold out, but it's not too late to secure a spot. Take a peek at

this year's [program](#) to find what we have in store for you, June 10-12. [Register now](#).

Provincial

Alberta expands access to COVID-19 treatment, with new test criteria and more prescribers, including pharmacists

The Alberta government has expanded its efforts to get the COVID-19 treatment Paxlovid to eligible Albertans by loosening its testing criteria and expanding the number of health-care professionals who can prescribe it, [CBC reports](#). The requirement for eligible Albertans to have a positive PCR test result to get a prescription for Paxlovid has been changed. Now in some circumstances, a positive result on a rapid test will be acceptable, Health Minister Jason Copping announced last week. As well, the treatment can now be prescribed by physicians, nurse practitioners and some pharmacists. "This change will make it faster and easier to access the drug and begin treatment," Copping said. Paxlovid is a treatment given to adults with mild to moderate symptoms of COVID-19, but who are at higher risk of hospitalization or death.

Kids' cold medicine in short supply in SK

Pharmacists Association of Saskatchewan CEO Michael Fougere says pharmacies across the province are experiencing a shortage of over-the-counter children's cough and cold medication under brands such as Tylenol, Advil and Buckley's. "Over the past couple of years there haven't been a lot of colds and flu around, so manufacturers have shifted their production to other products and now we're getting into a different era of COVID so hopefully they'll be ramping up production to meet the demand for children," Fougere [told CTV](#). Fougere advises parents to check with the pharmacy team if they are not seeing their regular cold medication because an alternative can be recommended in most cases.

Quebec facing province-wide shortage of pharmacists

According to the Ordre des pharmaciens du Québec (OPQ), there is an estimated shortage of between 400 and 600 pharmacists across the province, even in major centres, [Radio-Canada reports](#) (in French). The shortages also include pharmacists working in hospitals. Retirements, the aging population and the government's request for pharmacists to do more are the main drivers of the labour shortage. But OPQ added there are a number of possible solutions that could be implemented, including admitting more students into pharmacy programs, recruiting foreign graduates and training more pharmacy technicians to support pharmacists. "We will discuss very soon with the government to try to plan this as best as possible to meet the needs of the population and above all to succeed in carrying out everything that the government entrusts to us," said Bertrand Bolduc, president of the OPQ.

National

Shut out from COVID-19, influenza appears to be making a comeback

Flu infections are increasing in Canada—an unusual trend for this time of year when cases

typically are in decline, [Global News reports](#). Since the beginning of April, detections of influenza have “sharply increased,” the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) said in its latest [FluWatch report](#). The report, which documented flu activity between March 13 and April 16, shows all indicators of influenza activity have risen in recent weeks—a time of the year when, historically, average flu cases are declining in the country. “Detections of influenza have sharply increased, from an average of 40 detections a week in March, to 492 detections in the most recent reporting week,” the report reads. About 1287 laboratory detections were reported and a majority of cases with detailed age information were in Canadians under 45 years of age. When the COVID-19 pandemic began in 2020, the flu was virtually non-existent in Canada due to protective measures put in place to limit the spread of the novel pathogen. PHAC recorded 69 influenza detections in the 2020-21 flu season. Normally, around 52 000 cases are detected each year.

Calls for schools, pharmacies to boost lagging HPV vaccination rates for kids

Medical experts are concerned about the impact of missed HPV vaccinations in kids due to pandemic school closures, [CBC reports](#). HPV is one of the most common sexually transmitted infections, and it is estimated that more than 70% of sexually active Canadian men and women will have a sexually transmitted HPV infection at some point in their lives. Most HPV infections occur without any symptoms and go away without treatment. However, in some people, HPV infections can persist. This is especially dangerous if the persistent infection is a cancer-causing type, as it's the major cause of cervical cancer. That's why experts are calling for schools and pharmacies to step up and ensure kids get their HPV vaccinations to protect them against cancer later in life. “We have the vaccine sitting in fridges and we need it in arms,” said Port Coquitlam, BC, pharmacist Ajit Johal.

Loblaw completes acquisition of Lifemark Health Group

Loblaw has [completed the previously announced acquisition](#) of Lifemark Health Group from Audax Private Equity. Lifemark is a provider of outpatient physiotherapy, massage therapy, occupational therapy, chiropractic services, mental health support and other ancillary rehabilitation services in Canada. With this acquisition, Loblaw, through its wholly owned subsidiary Shoppers Drug Mart, adds a network of health and wellness solutions, accessible in-person and digitally, to its growing role as a health-care service provider.

International

Nearly 15 million people died in first 2 years of COVID-19 pandemic, new WHO study finds

The first 2 years of the COVID-19 pandemic has killed nearly 15 million people around the world, a new detailed estimate from the World Health Organization (WHO) has found. The latest estimate, focusing on direct and indirect mortality caused by the pandemic, is nearly triple the official count of 5.4 million deaths in the same period, [the Globe and Mail reports](#). Deaths since January were not included in the study. WHO said the world has vastly underestimated the true toll of the pandemic. Official statistics have undercounted the deaths caused directly by COVID-

19, while also missing the millions of deaths from indirect effects, such as those who died of other causes when they were turned away from hospitals filled with COVID-19 patients. The new study was produced by a technical advisory committee of experts on “excess mortality”—the difference between the actual number of deaths and the number of deaths that would normally be expected if a pandemic had not occurred. More than 40 international experts were involved in the study.

US: Pharmacy staff at a breaking point, survey suggests

Findings from the [2021 National State-based Pharmacy Workplace Survey](#) from the American Pharmacists Association and the National Alliance of State Pharmacy Associations show that pharmacy workplaces were so stressful in 2021 that personnel were unable to fulfill both clinical and nonclinical duties. These stressful conditions are contributing to employee burnout, the report notes. The majority of pharmacy workplaces have cultures for patient safety, but pharmacy personnel are at a breaking point when adjustments to team training, roles and responsibilities are not able to be made quickly enough to adapt to change and meet all of their responsibilities. Time allocation, workflow, staffing, policies, payment, and patient expectations and demands are contributors to workplace situations that increase the risk of medication errors or near-misses, creating threats to patient safety. Most of the factors of concern that were identified by the survey relate to work systems and processes of care, which are under the direct control of the employer and management. For the profession, the stress and workplace conditions explored in the survey findings are having a negative impact on the ability to recruit, train and retain pharmacy personnel.

US: Pharmacy chains should pay \$878 million for opioid epidemic role, Ohio counties say

A lawyer for 2 Ohio counties said that CVS Health Corp., Walgreens Boots Alliance and Walmart should fund a US\$878 million plan to address the opioid crisis there, as a first-of-its-kind trial got underway to determine the pharmacy chains’ contribution, [Reuters reports](#). A federal jury decided in November, during the first trial the pharmacy chains faced over the crisis, that the companies created a public nuisance by flooding Ohio’s Lake and Trumbull counties with addictive prescription pain pills that wound up on the black market. CVS, Walgreens and Walmart have denied the counties’ claims and said they would appeal the November verdict. The companies have offered to fund a 1-year program to buy back unused prescription opioid drugs in the 2 counties. They argue that Ohio’s public nuisance law only requires them to stop the nuisance identified by the jury—an oversupply of prescription drugs—and not to address all of its harmful effects on the communities.

UK: Pharmacy staff should follow COVID-19 infection control procedures

The Royal Pharmaceutical Society (RPS) has recommended that pharmacists and pharmacy staff should follow COVID-19 infection control procedures including self isolation, [according to Pharmacy Business](#). The recommendation comes after the Pharmacists’ Defence Association (PDA) raised concern last month over Well Pharmacy’s policy of allowing COVID-19 positive staff to work in pharmacies, risking the health of colleagues and patients. “Pharmacies are health

care environments which are accessed by patients who may be vulnerable to COVID-19 infection. It is essential that mitigations are observed to prevent the spread of COVID-19 by both the public and by pharmacy staff in all health care environments, including community pharmacies and other patient-facing pharmacy services such as in general practices and hospitals,” RPS said. “Pharmacists and pharmacy staff have a professional responsibility to follow infection control procedures to protect patients. This includes self-isolating if they have tested positive for COVID-19, or have symptoms of a respiratory infection and high temperature. Equally, the public should continue to wear face coverings in pharmacies.”

Australia: Pharmacies to assist in vaccination of 80 000 teens who missed school shots

Almost 80 000 teenagers across New South Wales have missed out on vaccines for diseases such as whooping cough and HPV during 2 years of pandemic lockdowns, [according to the Sydney Morning Herald](#). This has prompted authorities to offer routine shots for the first time in pharmacies as part of a major catch-up effort. Julie Leask, a vaccine expert and professor at the University of Sydney, said pandemic restrictions and school closures have triggered a dramatic rise in the number of children missing vaccinations against HPV, meningococcal and diphtheria-tetanus-whooping cough boosters. Under new regulations that took effect on May 7, hundreds of pharmacies across New South Wales will offer the shots to adolescents. Pharmacists have previously been restricted from offering vaccines to children, but COVID-19 shots became available to kids in pharmacies in September 2021. Children aged 12 and over will be able to receive the HPV and diphtheria-tetanus-whooping cough vaccine, and the meningococcal vaccine will be available to children aged 14 and up.

In Depth

Abortion pills stand to become the next battleground if the Supreme Court overturns Roe v. Wade

Medication abortion—a 2-drug combination that can be taken at home or in any location and is authorized for use in the first 10 weeks of pregnancy—has become more and more prevalent and now accounts for more than half of recent abortions in the United States. If the federal guarantee of abortion rights disappears, medication abortion would likely become an even more sought-after method for terminating a pregnancy—and the focus of battles between states that ban abortion and those that continue to allow it. [The New York Times examines](#) the issue.

This weekly update is compiled by the Canadian Pharmacists Association. Please note that this publication is meant to inform and is not a comprehensive list of information available. Be sure to check with your provincial regulatory authority or advocacy association for province-specific information. While we aim to ensure all information contained in this update is accurate, the situation is evolving rapidly and CPhA does not take responsibility for the content provided by other organizations and sources.

Canadian Pharmacists Association
1785 Alta Vista Drive, Ottawa, ON K1G 3Y6

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