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Canadian
Pharmacists
Association

Association des
pharmaciens
du Canada

The Weekly

Bringing the world of pharmacy together

February 22, 2023

CPhA

February 23 is National Kids and Vaccines Day

To celebrate [National Kids and Vaccines Day](#) on February 23, Children's Healthcare Canada and the Canadian Association of Science Centres' ScienceUpFirst initiative are hosting a free [national town hall](#) event where health-care leaders and experts will answer questions about the importance and safety of routine vaccinations, as well as influenza and COVID-19 vaccines, as we continue to face a surge in infection caused by both. The [panel of experts](#) includes CPhA's Chief Pharmacist Officer, Dr. Danielle Paes. The town hall event will take place tomorrow at 8:00 pm ET via Zoom.

Pharmacy Appreciation Month kicks off next week

March is Pharmacy Appreciation Month (PAM) in Canada—the annual national campaign that shines a spotlight on all things pharmacy and celebrates the growing role pharmacy professionals play in our health-care system. From caring for our communities through the pandemic, helping patients navigate care amidst the current health-care crisis, managing ongoing drug shortages and everything in between, the contributions of Canada's pharmacy teams have been remarkable! Join us in celebrating PAM and all the reasons

pharmacy professionals are so special. Check out our [PAM webpage](#) for information, resources and ways to celebrate. Want to be featured in our PAM campaign? Send us a photo of you or your pharmacy team that we can feature in our materials this March. Please include the name and location (city and province/territory) of your pharmacy and the full names of any team members in the photo. Email us at socialmedia@pharmacists.ca to participate.

February is Black History Month

February 2023 marks the 28th official [Black History Month](#) in Canada. This month, CPhA is focusing on celebrating Black pharmacy professionals in Canada, amplifying their voices and raising awareness about Black health in Canada. Primarily, we are pleased to support and promote “A Black History to Remember 2023: The Canadian Pharmacy Edition.” This campaign was fully developed and launched by Mary Adegboyega, and an incredible group of Canadian Black pharmacy professionals have worked tirelessly to create the content. The campaign celebrates and recognizes Black pharmacy professionals in Canada and shares more about how we can all better support Black patients. Be sure to follow along on [LinkedIn](#) and [Instagram](#) for daily updates. This month, CPhA also caught up with some of our Black pharmacist colleagues to talk about diversity, creating safe spaces and why pharmacists play a key role in advocating for inclusive health care. Meet [Afomia Gebre](#), [Christine Amoko](#) and [Helen Ali](#).

Reminder: Upcoming webinar on the pharmacist’s role in head and neck cancer prevention

Calling all licensed health-care professionals! Join us on Tuesday, February 28 from 7:00–8:00 pm ET to learn about the pharmacist’s role in preventing HPV-related head and neck cancer among Canadians by integrating a sustainable immunization program into a busy community pharmacy practice. The speakers will also review vaccination and access to care opportunities created during the COVID-19 pandemic and discuss strategies for alleviating some of these pressures. *This webinar is being hosted by CPhA on behalf of Merck Canada Inc. and is not accredited.* [Register now.](#)

It’s all fun and games: Improving the vaccination experience with CARD

Check out the newest *Canadian Pharmacists Journal* supplement: [Improving the vaccination experience in community pharmacies with CARD](#). This series of articles on the CARD (Comfort Ask Relax Distract) vaccine delivery system looks at the scientific evidence behind it and the tools pharmacists can use to integrate the system in their own practice settings. Want to learn more? [Register here](#) for a free webinar on February 28 at 1:00 pm ET, hosted by Immunize.org, on reducing immunization-related pain and anxiety for children and adults.

Pharmacy on the front lines

Bringing PrEP prescribing into community pharmacies: Dal Health professor leads first-of-its-kind project in Canada

Dalhousie University's Dr. Kyle Wilby is leading a first-of-its-kind project in Canada that will see 50 patients in Nova Scotia prescribed pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) for HIV by pharmacists from 10 different pharmacies. The project is part of a 6-month long study that aims to improve access to care and identify other potential links to services needed for reaching those at high risk of HIV. Researchers will ensure the pharmacists can care for their patients in partnership with the Halifax Sexual Health Centre. At the end of the study, the team will apply to add this to the government-funded prescribing authorities that pharmacists have in Nova Scotia, which already includes birth control and antibiotics for urinary tract infections. Wilby, an associate professor in the College of Pharmacy, [told Dal Health News](#) that having pharmacists prescribe PrEP brings it into the communities and reduces the amount of contact time with the health-care system, as patients receive the prescription and medication during 1 visit. He says it will also relieve burden on primary care. When asked about the need for this project, Wilby outlined the barriers to access and stigma. "I'm a PrEP user myself, and it can be really difficult to get it in Nova Scotia because of the waitlists and limited access to family doctors and nurse practitioners," he said. "It's also stigmatized because of the populations that are accessing it."

'This is a safe space': Regina pharmacy putting care before profit

It may look like any drug store, but the Queen City Wellness Pharmacy also serves as a community hub for those in need. People looking for shelter from

the cold can grab a cup of coffee and spend the day. The store is located at the edge of Regina's downtown, an inner city neighbourhood where people have diverse needs. Pharmacist Sarah Kozusko explained that the pharmacy acts as a resource and a safe haven for those not only in the downtown core, but across the city. "This is a safe space and we will meet you wherever you are, with whatever you need," [she told CTV News](#). "If somebody comes in without shoes, we help them find shoes. If somebody comes in and they need new clothes, we'll find them something to wear. If they don't have anywhere to live, we'll help them find shelter." There's a phone to use and a place to wash up. The store provides space for 12-step programs and a room for public health nurses to tend to medical needs. The pharmacy relies on revenue from customers filling their prescriptions to keep the programs going. "So we keep doing the right thing and hopefully people see that and support it," Kozusko said.

Provincial

8 Alberta pharmacies to offer STI testing as part of U of A research study

The University of Alberta (U of A) is working with 17 local pharmacists in 8 pharmacies across the province to make sexual health testing more accessible, [CTV News reports](#). The [APPROACH 2.0 research study](#) will provide Albertans with free and confidential testing for sexually transmitted infections like HIV, hepatitis C and syphilis via a blood test. The goal is to make testing easier for people who may not know they have an infection or feel comfortable seeking a test in a traditional setting. "We certainly know through COVID-19, there was reduced access to testing for sexual transmitted and blood-borne infections," said Christine Hughes, the interim dean of the Faculty of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences at U of A and the Alberta lead for the study. "So this is just an opportunity to again reach groups that might be at risk and hopefully improve both individual health but also reduce spread in the community." The Alberta launch of the study follows launches in Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia last December.

Quebec pharmacies might not distribute free COVID-19 rapid tests beyond March 31

Quebec is working on a plan to distribute the 63 million rapid tests stored in its warehouses, but it's unclear if it will continue to hand out the kits via pharmacies after March 31, [according to the *Montreal Gazette*](#). The province is "currently defining its strategy for (distributing the) rapid tests remaining in its inventory," Health Ministry spokesperson Robert Maranda said on February 20. "There is no change at the moment" in how Quebec will distribute the tests, Maranda said, but he did not answer when asked what will happen after March 31. That's the day a distribution deal between the government and an association of Quebec pharmacists is set to expire. Negotiations to possibly renew that agreement are continuing, said a spokesperson for the Association québécoise des pharmaciens propriétaires, which represents the owners of 1900 pharmacies across the province. The spokesperson referred questions to the Ministry of Health. Until at least March 31, Quebecers 14 and older can receive a box of 5 tests every 30 days at local pharmacies.

National

Health Canada approves Moderna's Omicron-targeting bivalent booster for kids and teens

Health Canada has authorized one of Moderna's Spikevax Omicron-targeting bivalent COVID-19 boosters for use in children and teens aged 6 to 17 years, [CTV News reports](#). The booster targets the Omicron variant BA.1 and was previously only approved for people aged 18 and over. Moderna's Omicron-targeting bivalent booster for variant BA.4/5 has not yet been approved for use in children and teens under 18. "We are pleased with Health Canada's authorization of our bivalent booster for children and adolescents and our continued collaboration to provide boosters to help protect all Canadians from current and future COVID-19 variants of concern, especially as this virus continues to circulate across the country and around the world," Shehzad Iqbal, the country medical director of Moderna Canada, said in a [media release](#) issued on February 17. Moderna announced in November that its bivalent Omicron-targeting booster candidates for variants BA.1 and BA.4/5 triggered a stronger antibody response than a booster dose of the company's original COVID-19 vaccine in Phase 2 clinical trials.

New kids' pain medicine approved for import as Canada battles shortages

Health Canada has granted temporary exception to Genexa—a “clean medicine” company—to import limited amounts of children’s pain and fever medication as the country continues to grapple with shortages, [Global News reports](#). The Kids’ Pain & Fever (acetaminophen 160 mg per 5 mL oral suspension) medication from Genexa will be available on a “temporary basis” at major retailers across Canada, the company said in a statement on February 16. The medication, which is being imported from the United States, is meant for children aged 2 to 11 and will be available at retailers including Walmart, Rexall, Costco, Sobeys and Loblaws, among others, according to the company. The medication is meant to temporarily reduce fever and provide temporary relief from a range of cold and flu symptoms, according to the company’s statement. It contains some inactive ingredients, including organic agave syrup, organic blueberry flavour, purified water, natural citric extract and natural flavour. As of February 7, over 2 million units of children’s pain and fever medication have been imported into Canada for hospitals, community pharmacies and retail outlets, according to the government, from countries including the US and Australia.

International

US: CVS, Walgreens caught in political crossfire over abortion pill

Democratic state attorneys general are ratcheting up pressure on Walgreens Boots Alliance Inc. and CVS Health Corp. to follow through on plans to dispense the abortion pill over warnings from Republican-led states, [BNN Bloomberg reports](#). In a letter to executives on February 16, they urged the companies to ignore threats of legal action from the Republican states. The back-to-back letters come as abortion rights advocates and foes battle over access to the abortion pill—a fight that took on new urgency after the US Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, sharply limiting or effectively barring the procedure in many states. “In a time when access to abortion is under attack—now more than ever in the past 50 years—we stand in full support of pharmacies like Walgreens and CVS becoming certified by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to dispense and mail these essential medications and to make them available as broadly as possible,” the Democratic states, led by California, said in their letter. The nation’s biggest pharmacy chains announced last month that they plan to seek US certification to sell the pills used in medication abortion, after the FDA loosened restrictions on where the

drugs could be dispensed. Previously, they could be distributed only in health-care settings.

Ireland: Pharmacists prescribing for minor ailments would help keep patients out of hospital

Irish pharmacists have accused the government of letting emergency department patients suffer by failing to allow them to prescribe for minor ailments, such as conjunctivitis and urinary tract infections (UTIs), [the Irish Examiner reports](#). Expanding the services that local pharmacies can provide would cut down on around 1 million general practitioner visits each year, which in turn would give doctors extra capacity to care for those with more severe needs and would prevent patients from ending up in hospital emergency departments. The Irish Pharmacy Union (IPU) has been calling for an expansion of the services since 2014. Pharmacists believe that they should be allowed to prescribe for a range of minor issues including UTIs, dermatitis, conjunctivitis, shingles and even pain management. “Doctors, by their own admission, are absolutely on their knees, they are really under pressure,” said Kathy Maher, the chair of IPU’s Pharmacy Contractors Committee. “It seems timely and appropriate for a really hard look to be taken [at] implementing something like a minor ailments scheme or triage service that eases pressure off the GP system.”

Australia: NSW pharmacists able to renew oral contraceptive prescriptions and prescribe antibiotics for UTIs in major health-care overhaul

Patients in New South Wales (NSW) will soon be able to access their oral contraceptive prescription from pharmacies without having to see a doctor, [Sky News reports](#). Patients who have previously received a prescription for the contraceptive pill will be able to have their prescription renewed by a pharmacist. Starting April 1, pharmacists will also be able to prescribe antibiotics for urinary tract infections (UTIs). The changes are coming as part of a 1-year trial to help ease pressures on the state’s buckling health system, which is struggling with a chronic shortage of general practitioners. NSW will become the first state to allow pharmacists to renew contraception prescriptions; however, Queensland is also looking at a similar trial. Victoria Premier Dan Andrews also made a similar pledge as part of his re-election platform last year, and the South Australian parliament has set up a committee to explore how pharmacists could provide medication for some UTIs. The

Pharmacy Guild of Australia's national president Trent Twomey welcomed the change, noting that pharmacist prescribing programs go toward repairing a health-care system with a "broken model."

New Zealand: Pharmacists worked through cyclone by candlelight to get meds to patients

When Cyclone Gabrielle hit New Zealand's North Island on February 12 and the power failed in Napier, pharmacist Susie Farquhar and her husband, Richard, jumped in the car, grabbed medicines that were ready and drove them out to people they could reach. "If people don't have medicines, some people will die, that's the fact of it," Susie Farquhar, owner and pharmacist at Napier's Unichem Greenmeadows Pharmacy [told Stuff](#). "Pharmacists just have to find a way to make it work." The morning after floodwaters inundated Hawke's Bay homes, Farquhar's pharmacists were turning pill bottles into candleholders and writing medicine orders on scraps of paper so Farquhar's husband-turned-delivery driver could source them from a nearby wholesaler.

In Depth

Norovirus: What to know about the 'extremely common' bug as cases rise in Canada

The very contagious norovirus that's known for causing inflammation of the stomach and intestines is rising across the country—but it's not uncommon during this time of the year, according to the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC). The number of cases of norovirus has been on the rise "both at the national level and within several provinces" since January, PHAC confirmed to Global News in an email on February 15. Infections have increased in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario and New Brunswick as well as in Newfoundland and Labrador, the agency said. [Global News explains](#) the symptoms, how it's spread and why cases are on the rise.

Worth Repeating

“Through the pandemic we never closed our doors once . . . It’s a testament to how accessible we were as health care providers to the communities that we’re in. It really kind of cemented the value of pharmacies in communities as health care hubs.” —Port Colborne, Ontario, pharmacist Aaron Boggio [reflecting on the role pharmacists played throughout the pandemic](#), as his pharmacy celebrates 11 000 COVID-19 vaccinations

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
851 Industrial Avenue, Mailbox M035
Ottawa, ON K1G 4L3
[Contact Us](#)