



Canadian
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Association

Association des
pharmaciens
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The Weekly

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CPhA

Amoxicillin shortage an “international issue”: CPhA

Some products containing a commonly used antibiotic are in short supply, according to Health Canada. The regulator [told Global News](#) on November 4 that 4 pharmaceutical companies—Sanis Health Inc., Apotex Inc., GlaxoSmithKline Inc. and Teva Canada Ltd.—are reporting shortages of drug products containing amoxicillin, an antibiotic commonly used for ear infections and sometimes pneumonia. The reported shortages come as the US Food and Drug Administration also listed a shortage of amoxicillin in an oral powder on October 28. Australia has noted a shortage of the antibiotic, as well. Dr. Barry Power, the editor-in-chief of CPhA, said the shortage is an “international issue.” He has heard of the beginnings of shortages of a few children’s antibiotic products in Canada that he said will eventually hit the whole country and that are just starting to show at the pharmacy level here. CPhA’s Chief Pharmacist Officer Dr. Danielle Paes also appeared on [CTV Your Morning](#) to discuss the shortage and how pharmacists are working to mitigate the impact on their patients.

Health Canada temporary allowing compounding of children’s and infants’ acetaminophen/ibuprofen without prescription

Over the past several weeks, CPhA has raised concerns with Health Canada surrounding the conflicting information circulating about compounding over-the-counter (OTC) medications. Given the significant impact the shortage of children's acetaminophen and ibuprofen is having on our health system, Health Canada is temporarily allowing compounding of acetaminophen and ibuprofen without a prescription for the duration of the shortage. As a rule, federal regulations require a prescription for compounded medications, even OTC medications. The [guidance from Health Canada](#) states that compounding of these products must be done within a patient–health-care professional relationship and recommends that, at the pharmacy level, appropriate documentation is maintained to demonstrate a patient–health-care professional relationship.

Pharmacy Check-in: Meet Nafisa Merali

November is [Diabetes Awareness Month](#), and we recently caught up with Certified Diabetes Educator Nafisa Merali to discuss the role pharmacists play in the prevention, screening and management of diabetes. “Pharmacists play an important role in diabetes management given that we have more than 11 million people living with diabetes or pre-diabetes,” she said. “We know that prompt diagnosis, lifestyle changes and the right pharmacotherapy can minimize or delay complications that uncontrolled diabetes can cause.” [Read more about Merali](#) and her work in diabetes care.

Tools and resources to help pharmacists this flu season

Pharmacists play a vital public health role, administering nearly half of all flu shots delivered across Canada each year. The results of CPhA's [annual national flu survey](#) point to a possibly concerning decrease in flu shot demand compared to the last 2 years, while pharmacy continues to grow as the top location where Canadians want to get a flu shot. To help pharmacists safely and effectively provide influenza immunizations to patients, CPhA's [influenza webpage](#) has been updated with tools and resources for the 2022–23 flu season. These resources include a [patient information infographic](#) on the common cold and influenza, [answers to common questions](#) about the flu shot, and the latest clinical information in the [CPS “Influenza” chapter](#). The webpage and resources are also available in [French](#).

Pharmacy on the front lines

Amoxicillin shortage has pharmacists looking for alternatives

Pharmacists are adapting treatment plans because some drug companies in Canada are reporting shortages of antibiotics commonly used to treat children, [the Canadian Press reports](#). Melanie MacInnis, a pharmacist and the clinical pharmacy co-ordinator at Halifax's IWK children's hospital, said amoxicillin is a "go-to" drug when treating a range of illnesses in children. "It's the initial choice for many common infections . . . we use it a lot," she said, noting the drug is often used to treat pneumonia, bronchitis and ear infections. MacInnis said the hospital is keeping a close eye on its inventory, and pharmacists are making alternative medication plans in consultation with doctors to manage supply of the drug. "When your main tool is taken out of your toolbox, you have to improvise and think about it a little more to get to the same end point," she said. Alternative treatments, MacInnis added, depend on what type of infection is being addressed and the age of the patient. If a child is dealing with a chest infection, for example, doctors and pharmacists could look to a different class of antibiotic. That could include drugs like azithromycin or clarithromycin, which are in the macrolide class of medication and work "in a slightly different way, but are just as effective," MacInnis said.

Provincial

Ontario considering letting pharmacists prescribe Paxlovid for COVID-19 ahead of 'triple threat' winter

Ontario is considering allowing pharmacists to prescribe the COVID-19 treatment drug Paxlovid in order to expand access, the province's top doctor said. Chief Medical Officer of Health Dr. Kieran Moore said recently that the health system will see a "triple threat" of COVID-19, a bad flu season, and the resurgence of a childhood respiratory virus this fall and winter. Finding ways to ensure greater availability of medication to keep people with COVID-19 out of the hospital is of particular importance for more rural communities, he said. Justin Bates, CEO of the Ontario Pharmacists Association, [told the Canadian Press](#) that his group has been pushing for pharmacists in the province to be able to prescribe Paxlovid, as colleagues in many other provinces already can.

“Given our experience in point-of-care testing, our knowledge of medications—particularly complex medications like Paxlovid, where there’s a lot of drug-to-drug interactions—and more, I would say, in-depth consultation that’s required with patients, pharmacists are well-positioned to provide that as a turnkey solution,” Bates said. Having pharmacies as another avenue for prescriptions will enable quicker access and therefore keep more people out of the hospital this winter, he added.

Flu shots down 40% in New Brunswick compared to last year, figures show

About 43 000 fewer New Brunswickers have gotten their flu shot, compared to the same time last year, despite warnings about a more severe season, following the lifting of COVID-19 measures, [CBC reports](#). A total of 66 488 influenza vaccines have been administered as of November 3, figures released by the Department of Health show. That’s down from roughly 110 090 last year. But the administration of influenza vaccines started about a week later this year, said department spokesperson Adam Bowie. A growing number of pharmacies have also started asking people to book an appointment for the flu shot, either online or by phone. They’re busier than before, administering COVID-19 vaccines and providing additional services, Jake Reid, executive director of the New Brunswick Pharmacists’ Association, has said. They also want to ensure they have the enough staff and inventory in place. In an updated statement, Reid said pharmacists are hearing anecdotally that some people are holding off on getting their flu shot until they’re eligible for their next COVID booster so they can get both shots at the same time. “We understand people may be experiencing a bit of vaccine fatigue, but we encourage everyone to book an appointment for a flu vaccine,” he said.

National

Children’s pain and fever medicine en route to hospitals from Australia, US to alleviate shortage

Canada has waived bilingual labelling rules and other requirements to bring tens of thousands of doses of children’s pain and fever medicine into the country to help tackle a nationwide shortage, [the Globe and Mail reports](#) (subscriber access only). Some of the medications have already arrived and

will be heading to hospitals across the country in the coming days, according to Health Canada's chief medical adviser. The medications, imported from the US and Australia, are being sent to hospitals first, where the sickest children are and the need is greatest, Dr. Supriya Sharma said on November 4. But the government is awaiting proposals from pharmaceutical companies willing to ship more product into the country for individuals to purchase over the counter. While there were some supply issues earlier in the spring, Sharma said it wasn't until mid-August that Canada experienced an unusual and significant surge in demand for children's medication. Other countries with similar virus seasons, namely the US and western Europe, did not experience the same purchasing increase at that time, suggesting that panic buying may be a major contributor to shortages here, Sharma said.

Sobeys-owned pharmacies struggle to fill prescriptions due to computer problem

A computer problem at Sobeys and Lawtons pharmacies across the country is making it difficult for customers to get their prescriptions filled, [CBC reports](#). Calls by CBC News to several Sobeys and Lawtons pharmacies throughout the Maritimes on November 6 confirmed the system-wide outage had been happening for at least 2 days. Pharmacy staff at some locations said they weren't able to access their computers, but could supply customers with a few days worth of pills if they presented their empty bottles. Some of the chain's pharmacy locations were completely closed with signs indicating that they could not open because of technical difficulties. Empire Company, which owns 1500 stores across Canada, including Sobeys, Lawtons, IGA, Safeway, Foodland, Needs and other grocery outlets, [said on November 7](#) that an "information technology systems issue" was causing some of its pharmacies to experience difficulty fulfilling prescriptions. The company has not released any further information about the issues affecting the chain and as the silence drags on, some experts say a ransomware attack could be behind the issues.

Minister links chronic pain with toxic drug overdoses, commits \$5M to pain network

The federal government is putting \$5 million toward chronic pain resources in what Minister of Mental Health and Addictions Carolyn Bennett said is part of an effort to help stop people with untreated pain from seeking relief through toxic street drugs, [the Canadian Press reports](#). Bennett said up to \$4.5 million over 5 years will go toward expanding the Pain Canada Network, enhancing

national collaboration, scaling up best practices and expanding resources for those living with chronic pain. Another \$520,000 will support a project to improve access to services for LGBTQ residents in BC, as well as those in Chinese, Punjabi and Arabic-speaking communities living with chronic pain. Bennett said the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated challenges for those living with pain, including access to adequate health services and support. Her announcement came as the BC Coroners Service said 171 people died in September from the toxic drug crisis, putting the province on track to surpass 2000 overdose deaths for another year.

Fewer than 7% of Canadian kids 5 and younger have gotten a COVID-19 vaccine

It has been more than 4 months since Health Canada approved the first COVID-19 vaccine for children under 5, but national uptake has been low, [CBC reports](#). The latest numbers from the Public Health Agency of Canada show, as of October 9, 6.5% of kids under 5 have received 1 dose of vaccine, while 1% have received 2 doses. By comparison, 86.9% of Canadians 5 and older have received 1 dose, while 84.2% have received 2 doses. “Coverage for COVID vaccination for kids under 5 is quite strikingly low,” said Shannon MacDonald, a nursing professor at the University of Alberta who leads the university’s applied immunization research team. MacDonald said that parents have different approaches to their older kids than their younger kids. “We’ve seen that, with COVID vaccines, that what you’re willing to do with a 12-year-old is different from what you’re willing to do with a 5-year-old, [and that’s] different than a 2-year-old,” she said. MacDonald said access also plays a role, noting that vaccinations rolled out across the country by age, and that means families may have already made multiple trips to clinics.

Provinces, federal government fail to make progress on health-care funding

After more than 2 days of meetings, provincial health ministers and the federal health minister have been unable to come up with next steps on health-care funding, [Global News reports](#). In a statement from the Council of the Federation, which was released while the ministers were still meeting, the organization representing premiers expressed disappointment with the lack of a federal response on the critical issue of sustainable health funding. The provinces have been asking the federal government to agree to a meeting that would include Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and the premiers. The premiers

say despite “repeated invitations” and efforts by premiers to engage with the prime minister, he has not engaged in a meaningful dialogue. Currently, the federal government covers 22% of health-care spending, and the provinces are asking for this to increase to 35%. “Provinces and territories are working hard to improve the health services that Canadians rely on that have been under heavy strain through the COVID-19 pandemic,” the statement from the Council of the Federation reads. “Substantive resources are required to support and accelerate this essential work, and provinces and territories need a predictable federal funding partner.”

International

US: Pharmacy teams delivered more than 270 million COVID-19 vaccinations, averting more than 1 million pandemic deaths

Community pharmacists and their teams administered more than 270 million COVID-19 vaccinations in community pharmacies through September 2022, [according to new research from the American Pharmacists Association \(APhA\)](#). That number has since increased to more than 282 million through early November. The peer-reviewed study, published in the *Journal of the American Pharmacists Association*, also found that pharmacists provided care for more than 5.4 million patients hospitalized with COVID-19, administered more than 42 million COVID-19 tests and provided more than 100 000 monoclonal antibody treatments for COVID-19. Pandemic efforts by pharmacists and their team members helped avert more than 1 million deaths in the United States, more than 8 million hospitalizations, and US\$450 billion in health-care costs, the study estimates. “This is the first peer-reviewed study which documents the incredible impact that pharmacy had on the health and well-being of our nation, across the entire spectrum of potential patient interventions,” said Ilisa Bernstein, the interim CEO of APhA. “There’s only 1 conclusion to draw from this impressive report—the work of pharmacists during the pandemic has been heroic.”

Australia: Community pharmacies hit 9M COVID-19 vaccine milestone

Nearly half of all Australians getting their COVID-19 shots are now getting them administered by pharmacists, [according to the Australian Journal of Pharmacy](#) (subscriber access only). Since pharmacists were brought into the

vaccine rollout in July 2021, 9 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines have been administered at community pharmacies. A total of nearly 64 million COVID-19 vaccine doses have been administered nationally, with 51 700 reported in the last week. The Pharmacy Guild of Australia (PGA) noted that, according to Department of Health data, the percentage of COVID-19 vaccinations delivered through community pharmacies has risen steadily since the sector was brought into the program. “In August last year, soon after community pharmacies were given the green light to provide the vaccines, the number of Australians receiving their COVID-19 vaccination in a community pharmacy was about 8%,” PGA National President Trent Twomey said. “Fast forward to late October this year and the data shows that about 47% of Australians were choosing community pharmacies as the place to go to have their vaccinations.”

Australia: Paracetamol sale ban will affect millions, pain advocates warn

Chronic pain advocates have criticized proposals to impose further restrictions on the sale of paracetamol—known as acetaminophen in Canada—saying the move would disadvantage millions of Australians, [the Sydney Morning Herald reports](#). The Therapeutic Goods Administration is considering limiting over-the-counter purchases of the painkillers to 2 packs per person and restricting sales to adults, following recommendations of an independent expert report on rising rates of intentional paracetamol overdose. A University of Sydney study found rising rates of poisoning among young people reported to the NSW Poisons Information Centre and its Victorian counterpart, with a 98% increase between 2006 and 2016. The proposed restrictions are designed to prevent stockpiling of paracetamol in homes and limit access to stronger formulations.

Submissions to the medicines regulator by mental health groups, doctors and pharmacists have been broadly supportive of the potential changes put forward amid concern about adolescent girls using paracetamol to self-harm. “Allowing the purchase of 2 packs of 10 tablets is reasonable and will reduce the tendency for large stockpiles to be kept in the home,” the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners wrote in a submission. The college also supports making modified-release paracetamol prescription only, while Pain Australia and the Pharmacy Guild both expressed concern about making this change before the impact of placing the drug behind the counter at pharmacies, which began in June 2020, has been properly evaluated.

In Depth

Bivalent vaccines are here: What it means for people who are pregnant

Appointments for bivalent COVID-19 boosters have opened up across Canada. Yet, vaccination rates among people who are pregnant trail the general population, and people at all stages of pregnancy have questions about what the new vaccine formulation means for them. Dr. Deborah Money, a professor in the department of obstetrics and gynaecology at the University of British Columbia (UBC), is leading a pan-Canadian study to monitor the safety and efficacy of COVID-19 vaccines in pregnant and lactating individuals. [UBC News](#) spoke with Money about what expecting patients need to know about vaccinations this fall.

Worth Repeating

“Let’s be clear: [the ‘immunity deficit’] theory is made-up nonsense, perpetuated by the same people who opposed COVID mitigation measures” — the *Globe and Mail* columnist André Picard [on the theory](#) that children are getting sick now because they weren’t exposed to viruses during lockdowns and school closings

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.

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