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CPhA

COVID Conversations webinar recordings

In case you missed them, all of CPhA's COVID Conversations are openly available in our recording library. This webinar series is designed to support pharmacists during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our most recent sessions include virtual care, the role of pharmacy in public and population health and opioid stewardship under the new CDSA exemptions. Watch the recordings and download other additional resources on our website.

CPhA's COVID-19 web pages are being updated regularly at www.pharmacists.ca/covid19 and www.pharmacists.ca/covid19fr.

Provincial

OPA seeking member feedback on COVID-19 testing

The Ontario Pharmacists Association (OPA) is seeking member feedback and opinions on polymerase chain reaction (PCR) and serological testing of asymptomatic patients for COVID-19 in pharmacy and the profession's readiness should the Ontario government seek involvement of pharmacy professionals to help strengthen the capacity of the health care system in performing COVID-19 testing. Pharmacy professionals in other provinces across Canada and in the United States are authorized to provide some types of tests for COVID-19. The Ontario government has reached out to OPA and other health stakeholders with some very general but non-committal inquiries to better understand and explore health system capacity through a potential community-based testing strategy. Pharmacy staff can complete the survey here; pharmacy managers and owners here.

Ontario considering COVID-19 testing in pharmacies

Ontario Premier Doug Ford says the province is in discussions with Shoppers Drug Mart to offer COVID-19 testing at their pharmacies across the province, according to CTV News. Ford made the comments on August 24 during an announcement at Queen's Park. He said the government is currently talking with the retail pharmacy chain about COVID-19 testing for people who are not showing any symptoms of the coronavirus.

Made-in-Canada COVID-19 vaccine effort slowed by manufacturing delay

Regardless of the encouraging signs of having a vaccine ready to manufacture for targeted groups by March 2021, researchers at the University of Saskatchewan's Vaccine and Infectious Disease Organization-International Vaccine Centre (VIDO-InterVac) were always at the mercy of external factors like global politics and manufacturing capacity, says CBC News. The timeline for a VIDO-InterVac vaccine being ready to manufacture, if it's successful, has been delayed by both. Before it can proceed to human clinical trials, the facility needs to complete more studies using higher-grade materials than what they needed for their early animal studies. But waiting for busy manufacturers to provide them is holding up the process.

National

Canadians' confidence in vaccines a key priority heading into fall, Canada's top doctor says

Responding to a new survey by Statistics Canada, Dr. Theresa Tam commented that increasing awareness of the reliability of vaccination not only against the fast-approaching seasonal flu but also COVID-19 is a top priority for her team moving forward, reports CTV News. Results of the survey show that about 1 in 7 Canadians is either somewhat unlikely or very unlikely to get the COVID-19 vaccine when it's made available. "Every concern is a valid concern and we do need to address them in more detail, especially as we are working very hard in the provision of a safe and effective vaccine or vaccines for Canadians," she told reporters in Ottawa on August 25.

Canadian emergency room visits dropped 25% in early stages of pandemic: report

Emergency room visits dropped by 25% between January and March during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic when compared to the previous year, reports CTV News. The new data, released August 24 by the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI), suggests that emergency departments had a decrease of 318,000 visits between January 1 and March 31 when governments and health agencies began implementing measures to control the spread of the novel coronavirus.

MPs and medical experts urge Ottawa to green-light vaccine trials that would deliberately infect healthy volunteers with COVID-19

Canadian health authorities should allow controversial human "challenge" trials of unproven COVID-19 vaccines to speed up the global search for a vaccine that works, says a group of MPs and Canadian medical experts. Nearly a dozen infectious disease specialists and members of Parliament — some also physicians — signed an op-ed, published August 24 in the *Toronto Star*, urging Ottawa to give the green light to human "challenge trials" that would deliberately expose healthy volunteers to the coronavirus after being injected with as-yet unapproved vaccines.

Home COVID-19 tests could help find people while they are contagious, experts say — Health Canada isn't convinced

Cheap, rapid COVID-19 tests simple enough to use anywhere could help us climb out of the pandemic disaster, says infectious diseases specialist Dr. Andrew Morris in the *National Post*. Just spit into a tube or swab your nose, wait a few minutes for the stripes to change colour — results available within minutes. With no vaccines or "fantastic therapies" for COVID, the best we can do is keep infected people out of buildings to prevent them from unknowingly spreading the virus, says Morris. Which is why he finds it "absurd" that Heath Canada says the risks of home or self-testing kits outweigh the benefits and that it will reject applications for such devices "without compelling new evidence to the contrary."

International

Pharmacy associations ask governors for COVID-19 immunization authority

Community pharmacists and pharmacies must be considered a key stakeholder when it comes time for mass distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine, according to 3 US industry associations. The American Pharmacists Association (APhA), National Alliance of State Pharmacy Associations (NASPA) and the National Community Pharmacists Association (NCPA) have written to the National Governors Association (NGA) with the recommendation that governors and their public health departments grant pharmacists immunization authority for all FDA approved or authorized COVID-19 vaccine to patients 3 years and older. The memorandum also says, "Pharmacists' locations and relationships within the communities they serve makes them uniquely qualified to identify gaps and opportunities, as well as facilitate communication to the public and provide data to help tailor ongoing distribution effort."

Pharmacy union issues warning over unlicensed COVID-19 medicines

The Irish Pharmacy Union (IPU) has warned people that unproven, unlicensed or fake COVID-19 medicines being sold online could be extremely damaging to health, reports the *Irish Examiner*. The IPU has also warned against buying tests for the diagnosis of COVID-19. Community pharmacist and IPU executive committee member Caitriona O'Riordan says it is vitally important that all testing for COVID-19 is centralized under the direction of the National Public Health Emergency Team and conducted in the National Virus Reference Laboratory to ensure that the test results are trustworthy.

Community pharmacies have an even bigger role during COVID-19

Community pharmacists' scope of practice is widening during COVID-19, with more patients seeking care from pharmacists and more pharmacies anticipating increased point-of-care testing and expanded immunization services, according to APhA. "We are getting more OTC questions than any other time in my 27 years as a pharmacist," says Nadia Rasul from Kroger Pharmacy in the Columbus, OH, area. She notes that community pharmacists are the new urgent care professionals when patients are afraid to go to medical offices. A recent survey from the NCPA highlights how the COVID-19 pandemic is changing community pharmacy practice. The respondents noted the pandemic may result in more pharmacies offering point-of-care testing (61.3%) and immunizations (52.1%), and more pharmacies seeing a scope of practice expansion (56.9%). The majority (61%) also said the pandemic will result in an increased consumer demand for online products and availability.

Pharmacists in all 50 US states can now administer childhood vaccines

As part of its ongoing COVID-19 response effort, the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has granted any state-licensed pharmacist the authority to administer childhood vaccines, reports Canadian Healthcare Network (subscriber access only). The change, announced last week, is an amendment to the *Public Readiness and Preparedness Act* designed to increase childhood vaccination during a time when parents may be hesitant about visiting physicians' offices and public health clinics. APhA welcomed the move as "a major win." "We have long advocated that pharmacists are uniquely positioned to address this public health emergency, and we worked with HHS to develop this strategy to engage all pharmacists," says Scott Knoer, CEO of APhA. APhA and NCPA are jointly advocating for the COVID-19 vaccine to be available for administration by pharmacists when it becomes available.

US campaign launched to "Keep up the Rates"

The National Foundation for Infectious Diseases (NFID) has launched a national campaign to encourage all individuals to receive recommended vaccines that may have been delayed during the pandemic. The multi-media campaign engages national experts and leading public health organizations to reach populations most at risk of delaying vaccinations or experiencing complications from vaccine-preventable diseases. APhA, along with 85 other health care organizations, has thrown its support behind the campaign.

FDA, under pressure from Trump, authorizes blood plasma as COVID-19 treatment

The US Food and Drug Administration authorized the use of blood plasma from patients who have recovered from COVID-19 as a treatment for the disease, STAT reports. The decision to issue an emergency use authorization, which President Trump's press secretary heralded ahead of time as a "major therapeutic breakthrough," likely falls far short of that description and could generate intense controversy inside the administration and the broader scientific community.

FDA head apologizes for mistake in describing benefits of convalescent plasma

On August 24, Dr. Stephen Hahn, commissioner of the FDA, tweeted an apology for making a mistake in describing the benefits of convalescent plasma during a public appearance the previous day with President Trump. "What I should have said better is that the data show a relative risk reduction not an absolute risk reduction," he tweeted. His initial remarks prompted confusion and criticism, given his background and credentials as a physician, and led to concern that the FDA was being politicized by Trump ahead of the election.

WHO cautious on COVID-19 plasma treatment as US issues emergency authorization

The World Health Organization (WHO) is cautious about endorsing the use of recovered COVID-19 patients' plasma to treat those who are ill, saying evidence it works remains "low quality" even as the United States issued emergency authorization for such therapies, says Reuters. So-called convalescent plasma, which has long been used to treat diseases, has emerged as the latest political flashpoint in the race to find therapies for COVID-19. On Sunday the FDA authorized its use after President Trump blamed the agency for impeding the rollout of vaccines and therapeutics for political reasons.

Trump considers fast-tracking UK COVID-19 vaccine before US election

The Trump administration is considering fast tracking an experimental COVID-19 vaccine developed at Oxford University in the UK for use in the US, the *Financial Times* reports (subscriber access only). One option being explored to speed up the availability of a vaccine would involve the FDA awarding emergency use authorization in October to a vaccine developed in a partnership between AstraZeneca and Oxford University. The move would be highly unusual and would most likely prompt concerns about whether the administration is cutting corners on approvals for political purposes.

Fauci says rushing out a COVID-19 vaccine could jeopardize testing of others

The top US infectious diseases expert is warning that distributing a COVID-19 vaccine under special emergency use guidelines before it has been proved safe and effective in large trials is a bad idea that could have a chilling effect on the testing of other vaccines, reports Reuters. Scientists and health experts have expressed concern that President Trump will apply pressure on the FDA to deliver a vaccine before November to boost his chances of re-election. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, declined to comment on the president, but said there are risks in rushing out a vaccine despite the urgent need.

Newsworthy

The dangerous politicization of the scientific process

Another week, another miracle cure. On August 23, President Trump was at it again, claiming a "historic breakthrough in our fight against the China virus." This time he was touting convalescent plasma, issuing an emergency authorization that allows for it to be used without having to go through the normal regulatory process to demonstrate it is safe and effective. Mr. Trump has done this twice before during the pandemic, with hydroxychloroquine and remdesivir, neither of which proved to be even remotely as beneficial as he claimed, writes Andre Picard in *the Globe and Mail*.

This weekly COVID-19 update is compiled by the Canadian Pharmacists Association. To unsubscribe, please reply to this email with "Unsubscribe" in the subject line.