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The Weekly: CPhA's Pharmacy News Update for December 15

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Canadian
Pharmacists
Association
Association des
pharmaciens
du Canada

The Weekly

Bringing the world of pharmacy together

December 15, 2021

The Weekly is taking a holiday break and will return on January 5, 2022. From all of us, Season's Greetings and Happy New Year.

CPhA

CPhA in 2021: Take a look back

From unveiling a new brand, to launching our new strategic plan, 2021 was all about repositioning CPhA for what comes next while continuing to support pharmacists on the front line during the pandemic. It was a busy one. Take [a look back](#) at our activities and initiatives in 2021.

Resource Round-up: Childhood vaccination — 2 new practice tools available

With the COVID-19 vaccine now approved for children aged 5 to 11 in Canada, there's a lot of information and resources to wade through. Whether you're administering shots at the pharmacy or answering questions from parents about vaccination, our Resource Round-up brings together some helpful resources. It has been updated with 2 new practice tools—one for pharmacists on [setting up your pharmacy for success](#) and another outlining [5 key things you need to know](#) about COVID-19 vaccines for children. The resource page and practice tools are available in [English](#) and [French](#).

Pharmacists on the front line

Pharmacist, doctor team up on virtual medication reviews to help seniors in rural BC

Dr. Charles Helm and pharmacist Charissa Tonnesen are working together on virtual medication reviews in the isolated city of Tumbler Ridge, BC—and they’ve already seen a profound impact, [according to Canadian Healthcare Network](#). Together, they’ve found drugs that were causing dizziness and fainting spells, hypoglycemia and even dementia-like confusion. “Imagine the joy of being able to tell a patient in her 70s diagnosed with dementia, ‘We don’t think you have dementia. We think stopping the medication did the trick. Go out and enjoy your life,’” Dr. Helm said. About 2 people a week are being seen by Dr. Helm and Tonnesen. Working together offers benefits to both of them. “We have different skill sets that we bring to this,” he said. “There are times when this light bulb goes off for us and we think, ‘Wow, this medication is causing the problem. Why didn’t we think of it sooner?’ It’s because we’re both there that we put it together. You’d think that across Canada, physicians and pharmacists would be working together to address this. It’s logical, but it’s not the standard.”

Provincial

BC’s vaccination effort boosted by community pharmacies

More than 350 pharmacies in 80 communities throughout BC are now administering COVID-19 vaccines, with another 700 pharmacies expected to join by mid-January 2022. “We’re expanding the breadth of our effort and making it more convenient than ever for British Columbians to book a COVID-19 vaccine with their local participating pharmacies,” Adrian Dix, minister of health, said [in a news release](#). By early 2022, pharmacies will deliver the majority of booster shots for everyone eligible through the Get Vaccinated registration and booking system. “Pharmacies are located across British Columbia in communities both large and small. Pharmacists’ knowledge, training and ability to provide vaccinations means we can help provide British Columbians with that extra protection against COVID-19,” said Geraldine Vance, CEO, BC Pharmacy Association.

Alberta to distribute free rapid tests at pharmacies, AHS sites: Blue Cross

Alberta will distribute rapid tests through pharmacies and Alberta Health Services facilities starting in mid-December, according to a Blue Cross email sent to pharmacies, [CTV reports](#). The free testing kits will be available at participating pharmacies in Edmonton, Calgary and Red Deer, and at AHS facilities in other Alberta communities. Blue Cross asked pharmacies to sign up to become a distributor starting on December 10 and said shipments would start the week of December 13. Pharmacies are not allowed to give out testing kits until the Alberta government announces the program, Blue Cross added.

New award created to support pharmacy students from underrepresented groups

The Faculty of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences at the University of Alberta will be granting a new Safeway Award in Pharmacy, which is available for First Nation, Inuit and Métis, LGBTQ2s+, and gender and visible minority pharmacy students in any year of study, [according to U of A News](#). The award aims to better support the growth of equity, diversity and inclusion in pharmacy education and the profession of pharmacy as a whole. The award has been endowed,

so it will support student pharmacists in their training for many years to come. “Safeway Pharmacies believe that success comes from bringing diverse thoughts, experiences and perspectives to the table,” said Jim Johnston, vice-president of pharmacy operations at Sobeys. “We are proud to work with the University of Alberta to provide an award that emphasizes diversity, equity and inclusion in pharmacy education and the pharmaceutical field.”

Quebec to roll out rapid tests in pharmacies

Quebec will begin rolling out 10 million rapid tests in pharmacies across the province as of December 20, [CBC reports](#). Health Minister Christian Dubé said rapid tests will be made available to the general population through 1900 pharmacies. People will have access to 5 free tests every 30 days, he said. In [an interview with Le Journal de Montréal](#), Benoit Morin, president of Quebec’s pharmacy association, AQPP, called for patience for those who want to obtain rapid tests. “The demand is expected to be very high and difficult to manage. We’re already getting a lot of calls, and the tests haven’t even arrived,” he said in French. “We’re asking that those who already have tests through school and daycare, wait so that others can get them,” he added, noting that not all pharmacies will have huge quantities of tests.

New Brunswick pharmacists frustrated with provincial government’s mixed messaging

Pharmacists were blindsided by Premier Blaine Higgs’ December 5 announcement indicating New Brunswickers over 50 can get their booster shots 5 months after their last dose, rather than 6 months, as is recommended by the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI). Usually, pharmacists are informed of these decisions in advance, but this time they heard it the same way everyone else did—on the news. Jake Reid, executive director of the New Brunswick Pharmacists’ Association, [told Global News](#) that pharmacies were immediately inundated with calls. Staff, unaware of what had just been announced, were unable to answer questions from customers and were left scrambling to try to figure out what was going on. This confusion led to frustration from customers anxious to get their booster shot. Reid said many pharmacists told him customers would come in hurling verbal abuse at staff. He added there were also inventory concerns that came with the surprise announcement.

National

Tam underscores need for COVID-19 rapid tests, boosters to help control another wave as Omicron escalates

The country’s top doctor says Canada is about to experience a major surge in COVID-19 cases, and health officials need to step up the use of rapid antigen tests, booster shots and other public health tools in order to prevent closings, lockdowns and overwhelmed hospitals, [the Globe and Mail reports](#). “We need to use everything we have available,” Theresa Tam, Canada’s chief public health officer, said during a press briefing on December 13. Dr. Tam said she expects cases of the Omicron variant to “rapidly escalate” in the coming days. Mounting evidence suggests the new variant is highly transmissible and that it can readily infect people who have received 2 doses of a COVID-19 vaccine. While experts believe 2 doses will still protect against

severe illness in many cases, the contagiousness of the variant means there will be more cases, which will ultimately lead to a surge in hospitalizations among people who are unvaccinated or partially vaccinated.

Medical experts, parents consider shorter interval between vaccine doses for children

With rising COVID-19 case counts in schools, some families wonder whether getting their children fully vaccinated sooner than the 8 weeks recommended by NACI is a better choice. Pharmacist Kristen Watt of Southampton, Ontario, [told Global News](#) advising families who do not have strong feelings about the interval doses to “stick with the NACI guidelines,” but acknowledge many have chosen to receive their second dose sooner. “There are many families with parents who are exceptionally well-informed that are physicians or scientists who are opting for the 3-week interval in the interest of keeping their kids as safe as possible against COVID-19 at this time, especially with the Omicron variant,” she said. Watt has decided to give her children the second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine after 3 weeks. “If you want to have a conversation about an earlier dose interval and what the risks versus benefits are, we have that conversation with a parent and they feel that they understand that enough to make a decision to vaccinate earlier. That’s what informed consent is,” Watt added.

Prescribing abortion pill without restrictions is safe, new UBC-led study finds

A new study is shedding light on the impact of Canada’s decision to make one medical abortion pill more easily accessible, [according to CTV](#). The UBC-led study was published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* and looked into the trends that followed Canada’s removal of restrictions on prescriptions for the medical abortion pill mifepristone in November 2017. One of the key findings was that there was no increase in abortion-related health complications following the removal of restrictions on the mifepristone pill, which researchers said is considered the “gold standard” drug for medical abortions globally. “Complications were already very rare, and we found that abortion continued to be safe and effective when mifepristone was prescribed without restrictions,” Dr. Laura Schummers, the study’s lead author, said [in a news release](#). “This is the strongest evidence yet that it is safe to provide the abortion pill like most other prescriptions, meaning any doctor or nurse practitioner can prescribe, any pharmacist can dispense, and patients can take the pills if, when and where they choose.”

International

UK: Immediate action needed to address workforce wellbeing

The Royal Pharmaceutical Society (RPS) is [calling for urgent action](#) following the publication of its [annual workforce wellbeing survey](#) in partnership with the charity Pharmacist Support. The survey revealed that 89% of respondents were at high risk of burnout—a figure unchanged from last year’s survey. In addition, 57% of respondents reported being frequently unable to take a rest break or were not offered a break at all. RPS is now calling for immediate action to ensure pharmacists have access to rest breaks and are able to take them. It is also calling for governments, the National Health Service and employers to urgently address the workforce

issues that are impacting pharmacists' wellbeing. Actions that are required include prioritizing essential work, effective workforce planning and better access to information.

Ireland: Pharmacist shortage could see shorter opening hours and weekend closures

A growing shortage of pharmacists could see community-based pharmacies forced into "shorter opening hours, closures on weekends and bank holidays" unless action is taken to tackle the burgeoning problem, [the Irish Examiner reports](#). According to the Irish Pharmacy Union (IPU), 240 places in university pharmacy courses at the moment is insufficient and will likely lead to patient care being compromised in the future. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been keenly felt in the sector, with young pharmacist retention becoming harder than ever, the IPU said. Darragh O'Loughlin, IPU secretary-general, said pharmacies are not like most businesses: "If there is no pharmacist available or present, a pharmacy is legally not allowed to open its doors. The sector is now beginning to feel a real pinch due to this shortage."

New Zealand: Demand for rapid antigen tests ramps up in Auckland as border reopens

Pharmacies say they've been swamped with demand for rapid antigen COVID-19 tests by Aucklanders wanting to leave the city without a vaccine pass. The Ministry of Health has dispatched 250 000 tests to approved sites across the country, yet some in Auckland have [told RNZ](#) they've received only a small number, or none at all, and may have to turn people away. On the list of approved providers, one central Auckland pharmacist said by the time she closed her doors that night, none of the 300 tests she ordered from the Ministry of Health the previous week had turned up. Unichem Pakuranga Pharmacy Co-owner Vicky Chan said 150 tests arrived at her pharmacy and she hoped there would be another opportunity to get more soon from the Ministry of Health. Given the level of demand she had, she was not sure how long the stock would last. "You wouldn't believe all the amount of phone calls, and through our social media and emails," she said. Andrew Gaudin, chief executive of the Pharmacy Guild of New Zealand, said people wanting to travel straight away should allow plenty of time.

US: Walgreens reportedly considering sale of UK-based Boots pharmacy

Walgreens Boots Alliance may be thinking of letting Boots go. The pharmacy retailer is putting advisors in place, including Goldman Sachs, to explore options for Boots, [Drug Store News reports](#). Walgreens acquired the UK-based pharmacy chain in a 2-step process that began in 2012, with a 45% equity ownership in Alliance Boots. It completed the process in 2014, acquiring the remainder of the company to form Walgreens Boots Alliance. According to the report, Walgreens CEO Roz Brewer, who took the reins of the company in March, is focused on sharpening Walgreens' focus on US health care. Some industry experts say that Boots has lost its distinctive character under US ownership, and that its stores and services have suffered from a lack of investment.

In-Depth

'This is not just a cold or the flu': University of Waterloo pharmacy prof answers COVID-19 questions about vaccines for children

To help parents have a better understanding of the vaccine, the City of Waterloo hosted an online Q&A session where Kelly Grindrod, associate professor at the University of Waterloo School of Pharmacy, answered parents' questions about the vaccine for children. Here are [5 questions](#) asked during the session.

US pharmacists say they are overworked and burned out due to short-staffing and the increased demand for COVID-19 shots

[Business Insider](#) spoke to 6 current and former pharmacists at CVS, Walgreens and Rite Aid who said they experienced burnout and did not receive adequate support from the pharmacies to handle increased workloads from COVID-19 vaccines.

Worth Repeating

"I urge the patient, 'Please get the vaccine, just to prevent any kind of hospitalization.'" — Pharmacist Keyur Shah of High Level, Alberta, [says vaccinations at his pharmacy are slowly starting to rise](#) in a county that makes up the bulk of the province's least-immunized health region.

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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