



February 10, 2021

CPhA

CPhA continues to spearhead call for role of pharmacists in delivering COVID-19 vaccine

Across the country, health professionals, including pharmacists, and public health officials are preparing for more robust supplies to come, and a vaccination campaign whose scale will be like nothing Canada has seen before, [says the National Post](#). “The fact we have this kind of interim period where the vaccine came and then stopped coming, it’s really unfortunate,” said Kelly Grindrod, a pharmacy professor at the University of Waterloo. “But it’s also bought a window for all these programs to catch their breath... (and) plan for the next round.” What’s clear is that when the vaccine starts being delivered in greater bulk, the task will be unprecedented. While flu shots are given en masse every year, uptake is only about 40%, much less than what is expected for the COVID-19 shots. “The task at hand is huge,” said Joelle Walker, vice president of public affairs at the Canadian Pharmacists Association. “We’ve never done it before on this scale.”

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

Provincial

SK Health Minister: “All hands on deck approach” for COVID-19 vaccination includes pharmacy

Saskatchewan Health Minister Paul Merriman says the province will take an “all hands on deck approach” to vaccinate as many people as possible, [reports CTV](#). The government said that Phase 2 of vaccine delivery will focus on the general population in 10-year increments, starting with people in their 60s and working down. The general population will also be able to get the vaccine through a variety of options, including mass immunization clinics, walk-in and drive-through clinics, doctors’ offices and pharmacies. According to the government, there will be more than 226 COVID-19 vaccine clinics in 181 communities across the province. There will be 141 mass immunization clinics, 24 drive-through clinics and 61 mobile clinics.

NS prototype vaccine clinics in pharmacies to launch in 4 communities

Nova Scotia’s first COVID-19 community vaccination clinic will be held later this month, with prototype clinics involving pharmacists coming in March, [says Canadian Healthcare Network](#) (subscriber access required). “We are currently finalizing a prototype with the Pharmacy Association of Nova Scotia (PANS) that will launch in a small number of pharmacies in March,” said Department of Health and Wellness spokesperson Marla MacInnis. “This will help us determine how broadly the vaccine can be distributed in this way given the temperature and storage requirements.” Four pharmacy prototype vaccine clinics will be held in the coming weeks. The first clinic is expected to begin the week of March 8 and the other clinics the week of March 22. “These clinics will help to define the role of pharmacy in Phase 2 of the provincial vaccine roll-out,” said PANS CEO Allison Bodnar. “These clinics are in addition to the role that some pharmacies are already playing to help vaccinate designated caregivers at long-term-care facilities around the province,” she added.

Science advisors do not recommend colchicine to treat COVID-19 patients

On February 4, an expert committee from Quebec's clinical research institute (INESSS) said it has advised the government and the province's medical community that it's premature to start using colchicine to treat people with COVID-19, [says CTV](#). The scientists said they based their interim decision on inconclusive evidence about the drug's benefits in the Montreal Heart Institute (MHI) COLCORONA study. The director-general of the Quebec Association of Pharmacy Distributors, Hugues Mousseau, said after the MHI press release promoting colchicine's effectiveness was issued, there was higher demand for the drug, adding it was "a few times the usual volume." It's not known if the influx of prescriptions is linked to the glowing press release and doctors deciding to start prescribing it to treat COVID-19 patients immediately. In the last few days, "the demand for colchicine has returned to more normal patterns," said Mousseau.

National

Health Canada approves extracting 6 doses from Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine vials

Health Canada has issued a label change authorization for the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine, allowing administrators to draw one more dose from each vial than previously advised, [according to CTV](#). That means that going forward Canadian health care professionals who are giving the shots will be able to extract 6 rather than 5 doses per vial, an update from what was authorized when the vaccine was first given the green light in December 2020. This comes after a Health Canada scientific review of data submitted by Pfizer demonstrating that 6 doses could safely and accurately be extracted from each vial.

Health Canada in 'final stages' of AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine review

Health Canada is in its "final stages" of reviewing the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine candidate, according to Supriya Sharma, the agency's senior medical adviser, [says CTV](#). During a technical briefing on February 9, Sharma said that Health Canada is currently going back and forth with the pharmaceutical company about what information the label will include. "That's what we're in the process of doing right now," she said, adding that this process can take "some time" before finalizing the review, which has been conducted in collaboration with the European Medicines Agency. Sharma said the review of the AstraZeneca vaccine has been more complicated due in part to the way the clinical trials were set up, noting that there is a trial ongoing in the US. As well, questions have been raised recently about the efficacy of the vaccine in certain circumstances.

International

New FIP resource supports pharmacy-based vaccination programs

The International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP) has [introduced a tool](#) to enhance strategies and create the necessary regulatory frameworks to combat the COVID-19 pandemic through pharmacist-led vaccination programs. The resource has been developed based on the experiences of regulators in countries where pharmacy-based vaccination and testing have been successfully introduced and regulated. "As highly accessible health care professionals located in small and large communities around the world, pharmacists can greatly contribute to public health and bringing pandemics under control. A number of countries have recognized the value of harnessing the potential of the pharmacy profession through pharmacy-based vaccination programs but many more could do so," said Ronald Guse, chair of FIP's Forum of Professional Regulators.

Small pharmacies beat big chains at delivering vaccines

More than a month into the COVID-19 vaccine rollout, only about 60% of the doses distributed across the US have actually made it into people's arms, according to federal data — a discouraging display of inefficiency. But a handful of states are far ahead of the pack, [says the Washington Post](#). At the top of the list are West Virginia, which had given out 84% of its doses, and North Dakota, at 81%. Many factors are slowing distribution, but one key element

appears to be the type of pharmacy states choose to work with. While the federal government partnered with CVS and Walgreens to handle vaccinations at long-term care facilities in the first phase of the rollout, North Dakota and West Virginia have instead [turned to independent, locally owned pharmacies](#).

Walmart to distribute COVID-19 vaccines across 19 states

Walmart is on the list of a handful of retailers that will be administering COVID-19 vaccines in their pharmacies through a US federal program, [says Drug Store News](#). Under the [Federal Retail Pharmacy Program for COVID-19 Vaccination](#), 21 national pharmacy partners — including Walmart, CVS, Walgreens, Rite Aid, Kroger and Albertsons — will accept and administer federal allocations of the COVID-19 vaccine. The retailers won't be receiving vaccines at all of their locations, but instead will participate on a state-by-state and store-by-store basis. Walmart and Sam's Club pharmacies will be receiving limited allocation from the federal government, said Amanda Jenkins, VP of health & wellness operations, Walmart US, and eligibility will be determined by the states for who can receive the vaccine.

Walgreens, Uber partner to improve COVID-19 vaccine access

Walgreens and Uber are working together to address barriers that can prevent underserved communities from getting vaccinated against COVID-19, [says Drug Store News](#). With the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention pointing to such issues as vaccine hesitancy and lack of access to transportation among communities of colour, the drug store chain and the rideshare company will roll out several initiatives in the coming months around education and transportation. "By combining Walgreens deep experience in community care with Uber's transportation technology and logistics expertise, we will take bold action to address vaccine access and hesitancy among those hit hardest by the pandemic," said John Standley, president of Walgreens. One of the initiatives — which will be piloted in Chicago, Atlanta, Houston and El Paso, among other cities — will offer free transportation to Walgreens stores and offsite clinics as part of Uber's push to provide as many as 10 million free or discounted rides to vaccination sites.

Merck warns against using antiparasitic drug to treat COVID-19

Drug maker Merck said its analysis of available data does not support the safety and efficacy of its antiparasitic drug ivermectin for the treatment of COVID-19, [reports Reuters](#). Ivermectin, which is approved in the US under the brand name Stromectol, is used mainly to treat roundworms, threadworms and other parasites. The company said its analysis of existing and emerging studies of ivermectin to treat COVID-19 found no scientific basis for a potential therapeutic effect. Merck added that there was a concerning lack of safety data in the majority of studies testing ivermectin to treat COVID-19 and cautioned against the use of the drug beyond that of an antiparasitic.

In Depth

Sure, Canada's vaccination plan could have been better, but hindsight is always 20/20

A little angst over the slow rollout of vaccines in Canada is understandable. Vaccination seems like the way out of this interminable pandemic, so of course we're anxious to roll up our sleeves for some protection. But we need to keep our wits about us, [writes André Picard in the Globe and Mail](#). We can't abandon our principles in the name of expediency — nor can we let political partisanship blind us to some uncomfortable truths.

This weekly COVID-19 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.