

Subject:

The Weekly: CPhA's COVID-19 Update for February 17



February 17, 2021

CPhA

CPhA hosts information session with Health Canada on pharmacy's potential role in COVID-19 rapid testing

With an increased focus on the distribution of COVID-19 rapid tests across the country, Health Canada presented an information session to pharmacy stakeholders on February 16, seeking feedback on how pharmacy can help scale up rapid testing in Canada. Participants raised a number of issues that should be considered, including regulations, capacity, reimbursement, coordination with vaccine efforts and the need for flexibility. CPhA will work with pharmacy stakeholders in the coming days to further outline the role that pharmacies can play in ensuring access to rapid testing for Canadians.

Ottawa could distribute COVID-19 rapid tests directly to pharmacies: PM

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau [said on February 11](#) that if rapid tests for COVID-19 continue to sit on shelves across the country, Ottawa may just start sending them directly to pharmacies. "We've sent over 19 million rapid tests to the provinces. Some are being used, not all," Trudeau said during a roundtable discussion with health-care workers. Trudeau's comments came after he urged provinces earlier this week not to let the rapid tests expire. The federal government sees the tests as a crucial supplement to the mass vaccination strategy going forward, but many provinces have held back on using them. Joelle Walker, vice-president of public affairs with the Canadian Pharmacists Association, called Trudeau's remarks a "good vote of confidence for the great role that pharmacies can play." "It makes a lot of sense to bring testing closer to Canadians through pharmacies," Walker said.

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

Provincial

Ontario's pharmacists await details on vaccination plans

As most Ontarians wait for details on where and when they will be able to receive a COVID-19 vaccine, so too do the people who will be tasked with administering it. The CEO of the Ontario Pharmacists Association says his organization is in communication with provincial officials on how best to handle the distribution, storage and delivery of the vaccine in the province's pharmacies. Justin Bates [told CTV News Toronto](#) that "our capacity is, under optimal conditions – assuming there's enough supply of course, that we could do per pharmacy per day, 46 vaccinations. So in a seven-day period that's over a million in the province of Ontario."

SK pharmacists well-prepared to advance province's COVID-19 vaccine delivery plan

Saskatchewan's pharmacists are standing by, ready to advance the province's COVID-19 vaccine delivery plan by providing vaccines through community pharmacies. "We continue to appreciate the province's science-based Vaccine Rollout Delivery Plan," said Dawn Martin, Chief Executive Officer, Pharmacy Association of Saskatchewan

(PAS), in a [news release](#). “We are proud to join other health care professionals in providing safe, timely access to COVID-19 vaccinations.” On February 16 the province announced an expansion of health-care workers eligible to get the COVID-19 vaccine in Phase 1, including pharmacists, physicians and other health-care providers. The premier and the province’s chief medical health officer said the government wanted to ensure those giving vaccines and those who may come in contact with high risk individuals are safe from the virus.

National

New COVID-19 Vaccination Tool Kit for Health Care Providers

The Public Health Agency of Canada has launched a new [COVID-19 Vaccination Tool Kit for Health Care Providers](#). Available in English and French, the current edition of the tool kit includes information about COVID-19, an overview of vaccines, authorized vaccines, guidance, vaccine safety and additional resources. It will be continually revised with new and updated information.

Pharmacies say they are ready to help with COVID-19 vaccine rollout

Pharmacy chains say they are ready and willing to help get COVID-19 vaccines into people’s arms and could ramp up in as little as 48 to 72 hours, if necessary, [reports the Globe and Mail](#). But retailers are awaiting more details from governments on their role, saying more preparation time and clear guidance would make the rollout go more smoothly. “The biggest concern would be having the vaccine available, and turning to pharmacies and saying, ‘Let’s do this,’ and then realizing that we have a lot of details that we haven’t quite ironed out,” said Sandra Hanna, CEO of the Neighbourhood Pharmacy Association of Canada, an industry group representing 11,000 pharmacies across the country. Most provinces have plans to include pharmacies in the vaccine rollout, but many details are still in the works, posing a challenge for the quick turnaround, with Canada expected to scale up vaccinations in the next 2 months.

Race is on for pharmacy chains to prepare for possible role in vaccine rollout

Canada’s biggest grocery and pharmacy chains are stocking up on cold storage technology, expecting that various governments will eventually tap the retail sector for help in rolling out COVID-19 vaccines, [reports Canada.com](#). One Cambridge, Ontario–based technology company, blueRover Inc., says it is working with big-box retailers and pharmacy chains to provide systems that monitor the temperature of vaccine refrigerators and freezers, which need to stay below -70°C for the Pfizer vaccine and -20°C for Moderna. The company’s system, which is also available in bags for transporting vaccines, sends alerts when temperatures dip below those levels. “I believe Canadian retail pharmacies see the need to elevate their game, to be ultra compliant, in anticipation of the rollout,” says David Melia, blueRover’s chief strategic officer. “They’re all getting ready for the possibility of being the group that is going to help get this to Canadians.”

India manufacturer says it will send AstraZeneca vaccine to Canada in less than a month

The world’s biggest vaccine manufacturer said on February 15 it would deliver COVID-19 shots from India to Canada in less than a month, days after a phone call between the 2 nations’ leaders, [says Agence France-Presse](#). India has stepped up worldwide shipments of the vaccine manufactured by the Serum Institute of India, which has emerged as a major player in the fight against COVID-19, as a form of “vaccine diplomacy.” The Serum Institute’s chief executive, Adar Poonawalla, said his company is awaiting regulatory approval from Canada. The number of doses to be shipped to Canada has not been disclosed, although the *Hindustan Times* reported February 14 that there could be an initial shipment of 500,000 shots.

Racialized adults should be prioritized for COVID-19 vaccination, new guidance suggests

Adults from racialized communities disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic [should be prioritized](#) for shots in the second stage of the vaccination campaign, says new guidance from Canada’s National Advisory Committee on Immunization. The advice would also see all essential workers who can’t do their jobs from home moved into the second stage, instead of focusing on health workers with lower-risk jobs. The second stage is

expected to start this spring after provinces get COVID-19 vaccines into the arms of all the staff and residents of long-term care homes, adults aged 70 or older, front-line health workers and adults in Indigenous communities.

International

US retail pharmacies on hiring spree

Retail pharmacies in the US are desperately recruiting pharmacists and pharmacy technicians to help administer the COVID-19 vaccines as the nation's immunization plan shifts to community pharmacies, [reports Canadian Healthcare Network](#) (subscriber access required). The Federal Retail Pharmacy Program, run by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and US Department of Health and Human Services, delivered 1 million doses of the COVID-19 vaccines to more than 6500 retail pharmacies on February 11. The plan is for the vaccines to be available soon in more than 40,000 pharmacies, and the retail chains involved in the program are now hiring to support the initiative. The [New York Times reported](#) that Rite Aid plans to fill 2000 pharmacy jobs and that Walgreens has filled 7500 of 9000 positions for pharmacists, pharmacy technicians and nurses. Scott Knoer, CEO of the American Pharmacists Association (APhA), pointed to the surging job opportunities for pharmacy students. "It used to be kind of hard to get a job in pharmacy. Now, it's changed because of COVID, and pharmacists are literally saving the world through vaccination," he told [CBS MoneyWatch](#).

England's PM vows to reimburse community pharmacy's COVID-19 costs 'as soon as possible'

Community pharmacies should be reimbursed for their additional costs during the COVID-19 pandemic "as soon as possible," UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson [told the Pharmaceutical Journal](#). Johnson also said that he does not want to see any pharmacies close, as they "play a vital role" in fighting the pandemic. Claire Anderson, chair of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society's English Pharmacy Board, said the Prime Minister's recognition of funding issues and the need for community pharmacies to be fully reimbursed for the additional costs they've faced throughout the pandemic is very pleasing to hear. "We now want the Government to follow this up with a pledge of new money that many community pharmacies need access to as soon as possible," she added. The Prime Minister's comments come after an investigation by the Pharmaceutical Journal revealed in January 2021 that 4 pharmacies closed each week in 2020 because of financial pressures exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

'We are here and ready,' say pharmacists who feel 'left in dark' on vaccine rollout

Pharmacists in Ireland say they have been "left in the dark" by the Department of Health after offering to rollout vaccines that were earmarked for the over-70s population to other cohorts in the community, [says the Independent](#). A plan to work in tandem — with pharmacists using AstraZeneca and GPs administering Moderna and Pfizer — would jump-start efforts to vaccinate in bigger numbers, says Eoghan Hanly, president of the Irish Pharmacy Union (IPU). The IPU, which has been included in the national COVID-19 vaccination program and has agreed to administer the vaccine, offered to administer the AstraZeneca shots to other cohorts while GPs use the Pfizer and Moderna supplies.

Israeli study finds 94% drop in symptomatic COVID-19 cases with Pfizer vaccine

Israel's largest health-care provider reported a 94% drop in symptomatic COVID-19 infections among 600,000 people who received 2 doses of the Pfizer vaccine in the country's biggest study to date, [reports Reuters](#). Clalit, the health maintenance organization that covers more than half of all Israelis, says the same group was also 92% less likely to develop severe illness from the virus. The comparison was against a group of the same size with matching medical histories who had not received the vaccine.

WHO authorizes AstraZeneca's COVID vaccine for emergency use

The World Health Organization (WHO) has granted an emergency authorization to AstraZeneca's coronavirus vaccine, a move that should allow the UN agency's partners to ship millions of doses to countries as part of a UN-backed program to tame the pandemic, [says Reuters](#). In a statement on February 15, the WHO said it is clearing the

AstraZeneca vaccines made by the Serum Institute of India and South Korea's AstraZeneca-SKBio. The WHO's green light for the AstraZeneca vaccine is only the second one the UN health agency has issued, after authorizing the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine in December. The announcement should trigger the delivery of hundreds of millions of doses to countries that have signed up for the UN-backed COVAX effort, which aims to deliver vaccines to the world's most vulnerable people.

In Depth

For pharmacists, the COVID-19 vaccine rollout brings exhaustion, but some relief

The nationwide frenzy to get COVID-19 vaccines has been complicated, frustrating and downright exhausting for millions of Americans. But take a moment to consider the plight of the local pharmacist. Working with limited supplies and imperfect scheduling systems, many are drowning under a flood of inquiries. Wait lists, where they exist, are getting longer. And even creative solutions are succumbing to the cold realities of the day. [STAT looks at the challenges](#) facing pharmacists as they try to meet the demand.

Worth Repeating

“Pharmacists are ready to rock,” — Dawn Martin, CEO of the Pharmacy Association of Saskatchewan, on [finalizing an agreement](#) with the province for pharmacists to administer COVID-19 vaccines, as they do with the annual flu shot.

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.