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FW: The Weekly: CPhA's COVID-19 Update for February 24

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CPhA

COVID Conversations upcoming webinar: COVID-19 vaccines

CPhA's next *COVID Conversations* webinar will take place on **March 4** from **12:00-1:30pm ET**. Join us for [COVID-19 vaccines: What we know today and what we will need to know tomorrow](#) as we take a look at pharmacy's current role in the largest public health vaccination campaign in Canadian history, and how it may evolve in the coming weeks and months. Our expert panellists will review technologies and evidence, discuss key patient education strategies to reduce vaccine hesitancy and answer your questions. Registration is free and open to all.

CPhA continues to advocate for pharmacists' role in provincial COVID-19 vaccine administration

As outlined in a [Global News report](#) examining the patchwork of provincial COVID-19 vaccine rollout plans across Canada and the range of preparations being made, using pharmacies to deliver the shots is a component of the country-wide plan. Joelle Walker, vice-president, Public Affairs at CPhA, says, "Pharmacists can comfortably administer, at bare minimum, 1 million vaccines a week and probably closer to 2-3 million doses."

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

Provincial

Saskatchewan pharmacists will help deliver vaccine during Phase 2 rollout

The Saskatchewan government said on February 22 that it has reached a deal with pharmacists to give people COVID-19 shots as part of the mass vaccination campaign scheduled to begin in April, [says the CBC](#). Pharmacists will deliver the COVID-19 vaccine through community pharmacies, in addition to the 230 centres run by the Saskatchewan Health Authority. Pharmacy Association of Saskatchewan CEO Dawn Martin says there should be pharmacists ready to give the vaccine in almost all communities across the province. "Roughly, we're looking at the same amount of pharmacies and pharmacists providing COVID-19 vaccinations that provided flu shots," Martin says. "So just about every community pharmacist out there will be helping out with this initiative one way or another, either by doing injections or by taking up other work that is still critical, providing prescriptions and other services at pharmacies."

With a mass expansion of the COVID-19 vaccine program just weeks away, are provinces ready for the rollout?

Pharmacies and their professional associations have been advocating to be involved in the rollout of COVID-19 vaccinations, arguing that Canada's more than 42,000 pharmacists are spread out geographically and are used to organizing immunization campaigns, [says the Globe and Mail](#) in a report on provincial vaccine delivery preparedness. During flu season, for example, Shoppers Drug Mart vaccinated 2.1 million people over the course of 5 weeks, with some pharmacies giving as many as 500 shots a day. But in some cases, pharmacies are still awaiting clear information about the role they will play — and say the earlier the details are ironed out, the better. “We’ve seen with flu season, pharmacies can ramp up quickly, and can immunize a lot of people in a short amount of time,” says Bryce Wong, director of pharmacy practice support with the BC Pharmacy Association.

National

Canada set to receive record 640,000 COVID-19 vaccine doses this week with Pfizer, Moderna deliveries

Canada is poised to receive a record number of COVID-19 vaccine doses this week, thanks to scheduled deliveries from Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna, as the country looks to speed up its vaccination efforts, [reports the Canadian Press](#). The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) says it expects more than 640,000 shots from the pharmaceutical giants this week, which would represent the largest number of deliveries in a single week. The previous record was set last week when Pfizer-BioNTech delivered more than 400,000 doses of its vaccine following a month-long lull while it expanded a production plant in Europe.

AstraZeneca vaccine review is in the ‘final stages’ Health Canada says

Health Canada's chief medical adviser says the department is poised to make a decision on whether to authorize a promising COVID-19 vaccine from AstraZeneca in the coming days, [according to the CBC](#). Dr. Supriya Sharma told the House of Commons health committee that the regulator has received all the necessary scientific information from the company but is still looking into questions about labelling and the product monograph. “That review is ongoing. It is in the final stages and the length of time that that takes is really dependent on a number of factors,” Sharma said, adding that the regulator has put some questions to AstraZeneca and is awaiting responses. Other countries, notably Australia, the European Union and the United Kingdom, have already authorized the product for use in their jurisdictions, but under different conditions.

‘Too early’ to say when Johnson & Johnson shots will arrive, minister says

Public Services and Procurement Minister Anita Anand says that Canada is ready to deploy a new COVID vaccine from Johnson & Johnson's pharmaceutical division, Janssen, once it receives regulatory approval from Health Canada, but she couldn't say how many shots will be available in the coming weeks, [according to the CBC](#). The US Food and Drug Administration's Vaccines and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee will meet Friday to review the clinical trial data for this vaccine. A final US decision on issuing emergency use authorization could follow as early as this weekend. Health Canada could make the same decision in a matter of days. The US and Canada have been in synch on past COVID-19 vaccine approvals. Canada has ordered 10 million doses from Johnson & Johnson with options for up to 28 million more, if necessary. Most of those shots are expected to arrive by the end of September.

New variants mean more vaccination needed for herd immunity: Health Canada

With new COVID-19 variants gaining a foothold in Canada, the percentage of vaccinated Canadians required to achieve herd immunity is increasing, [reports Global News](#). That's because the B.1.1.7 variant, which first emerged in the UK, and the B.1.351 variant, first discovered in South Africa, are believed to be more infectious than the original strain. As the virus gets better at spreading, our vaccination rates will have to be even higher to make sure those who can't get vaccinated can still be kept safe, Dr. Supriya Sharma told the House of Commons health committee on February 22. “When we were first looking at [COVID-19], we were looking at estimates of around 60 to 70% that we would require being vaccinated [to achieve herd immunity],” Sharma explained. “Now with the emergence of variants and because they are more transmissible, I think a lot of people are adjusting those numbers up, towards more like 85%, or even potentially 90% coverage to achieve herd immunity.”

International

Green light for pharmacist immunizers in Australia

Pharmacist immunizers in Victoria have been given regulatory approval by the state's Department of Health to administer the COVID-19 vaccine, [reports the Australian Journal of Pharmacy](#). Victorian pharmacists who have completed immunizer training, hold current first aid and CPR certificates, and have completed the Commonwealth COVID-19 Vaccination Training as well as any other required training, may be able to administer the vaccine. The Health Secretary also made a public health emergency order allowing registered non-immunizer pharmacists, intern pharmacists and fourth-year pharmacy students to undertake "authorized vaccination activities" in relation to the COVID-19 vaccine rollout—for example, drawing up of the vaccine and labelling in preparation for the actual administration to a patient. South Australia, the Northern Territory Parliament and Queensland have also authorized pharmacists to administer COVID-19 vaccines.

US pharmacies see high demand for vaccines

The [federal retail pharmacy program for COVID-19 vaccinations](#) in the US has been underway for about a week now, and appointments are filling up quickly. Like at other types of vaccine sites, demand is far greater than supply. Many pharmacies [told CNN](#) that they are able to receive and administer far more doses than they have. "The pharmacies that are getting the vaccines have been able to receive the vaccine and to administer the vaccine. So, we're not hearing any issues, once they get the vaccine," said Mitch Rothholz, chief of governance and state affiliates at the American Pharmacists Association (APhA). The program, which began the first week of February, allocates a limited supply of COVID-19 vaccine to 21 national pharmacy partners and independent pharmacy networks. As the program grows, Rothholz said, pharmacies will play a role in administering doses alongside public health departments, clinics, mobile units and other vaccination sites. "All of those together will be able to successfully vaccinate individuals, according to the national plan. So it's not one approach that's going to replace all the others. It's all of them working together to increase the access to sites and practitioners where the public is comfortable getting vaccinated," Rothholz said. "That's the goal."

Kroger Health debuts vaccine-scheduling solution

With the growing demand for COVID-19 vaccines, Kroger Health is rolling out its new vaccine scheduling tool to allow for easy and efficient COVID-19 vaccine appointment scheduling online, [says Drug Store News](#). The tool is able to handle more than 250,000 requests daily and will reflect the number of vaccine doses confirmed with Kroger's system. It also will allow customers to check their eligibility and create appointments as availability increases, and allow scheduling of first and second doses at once. As of February 16, Kroger Health says it has administered more than 380,000 COVID-19 vaccines in 25 states to health-care workers, skilled nursing facilities, elderly populations, educators and its eligible associates. Besides the new scheduling tool, Kroger Health has also rolled out various efforts around encouraging and streamlining vaccination, including a vaccine call support centre, secure online scheduling and giving associates who get fully vaccinated a one-time payment of \$100.

Pfizer, BioNTech apply to store COVID-19 vaccine at warmer temperatures

Pfizer and BioNTech have submitted new temperature data to the US health regulator that they say could allow their COVID-19 vaccine to be stored in pharmacy freezers rather than in ultra-cold storage facilities, [reports Thompson Reuters](#). Pfizer-BioNTech's current label requires the vaccine to be stored in an ultra-cold freezer at temperatures between -80°C and -60°C, calling for it to be shipped in specially designed containers. Now, new data has been submitted to the FDA to support a proposed update to its emergency use authorization label that would allow vaccine vials to be stored at -25°C to -15°C for a total of 2 weeks as an alternative for storage in an ultra-low temperature freezer. "The data submitted may facilitate the handling of our vaccine in pharmacies and provide vaccination centres an even greater flexibility," BioNTech chief executive officer Ugur Sahin said.

Drug supply chain issues aren't going away, report says

In a new American Society of Health-System Pharmacists (ASHP) report, 92% of its [2021 Pharmacy Forecast](#)

panellists said global issues such as COVID-19 will increase the potential for more drug shortages, and almost 90% said a major technology failure or breach could cause widespread disruptions in the delivery of US health-care supplies. To help mitigate these issues, according to the [Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy report](#), 90% of panellists also predicted that at least 75% of health systems will develop allocation guidelines. In the report, the ASHP notes a 36.6% increase in ongoing drug shortages from 2017 to 2020, with 276 shortages occurring in 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic continues to change the health-care field, but the panellists were optimistic about future pandemic responses. For instance, hydroxychloroquine, azithromycin and cisatracurium were just 3 of the drugs that saw unprecedented demand surges this past year, but 90% of panellists predicted that at least 75% of health systems would develop allocation guidelines for future shortages using resources such as ethics committees or crisis standards of care.

WHO agrees to compensation fund for serious COVAX vaccine side effects

The World Health Organization (WHO) has agreed to a no-fault compensation plan for claims of serious side effects in people in 92 low-income countries due to get COVID-19 vaccines through the COVAX program, resolving a big concern among recipient governments, [Reuters writes](#). The program will be financed initially from donor funding as an extra charge on all vaccine doses distributed through COVAX. The WHO-agreed plan, which has been under discussion for several months, is designed to cover serious side effects linked to any COVAX-distributed vaccines until June 30, 2022, to COVAX's Advance Market Commitment-eligible economies, a group of 92 poorer states that include most African and Southeast Asian countries.

In Depth

What can we learn from rapid US vaccine push?

A [Canadian Press report](#) examining the difference between the COVID-19 vaccine rollout in the US and Canada acknowledges that getting vaccines into US pharmacies, where they can be easily administered, has helped. The US government announced weeks ago its aim to supply vaccines to about 40,000 drug stores in the coming months. Canada has not yet reached the pharmacy stage of its vaccine rollout, but Dr. Isaac Bogoch, an infectious disease expert with the University of Toronto, expects that to happen once we have enough supply to branch out. "We have the exact same plan, we just need the critical mass of vaccines," said Bogoch, who's also on Ontario's vaccine distribution task force. "When we get that, you're going to see from coast to coast vaccines offered at many different settings."

Why I'm Getting Vaccinated: A pharmacist whose 'positive, hopeful' manner changed a hesitant patient's mind

People's [Why I'm Getting Vaccinated campaign](#) hopes to fight vaccine misinformation and encourage people to get the shot as part of the battle against COVID-19. Marjan Pekar, a physical therapist at a rehabilitation centre and nursing home in Great Neck, NY, was one of the first people eligible to receive the vaccination, but she declined to get it when it was offered by her employer. "I felt that it was too new and I was worried about the possible long term effects," she said. She went to the Walgreens vaccine clinic, where she met Helen Maser, a pharmacist for 35 years, who was happy to talk her through her apprehension.

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.