

Subject:

The Weekly: CPhA's COVID-19 Update for February 3, 2021

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February 3, 2021

CPhA

Treatment of COVID-19 with colchicine

CPhA has released a new document on the [treatment of COVID-19 with colchicine](#). The role of this drug has not yet been established, and it is recommended that colchicine be restricted to use in clinical trials until more data are available.

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

Provincial

MB government partnering with pharmacist, physician organizations to prepare for COVID-19 vaccine delivery

The Manitoba government is [partnering with organizations](#) representing Manitoba pharmacists and physicians to prepare for the province's rollout of new vaccines once they are approved for use in Canada. Manitoba's Health and Seniors Care Minister Heather Stefanson made the announcement February 2, stating "We now anticipate that new vaccines that do not need to be frozen could become available in Manitoba in the days and weeks ahead, once they are approved by Health Canada and distribution begins." Pawandeep Sidhu, Pharmacists Manitoba president, said "Pharmacists Manitoba welcomes the opportunity to partner in providing Manitobans with increased access to COVID-19 vaccinations. Pharmacists are ready and willing to help vaccinate Manitobans and we know that pharmacies are a well-known location to get a vaccine."

PEI makes legal changes to let pharmacists give COVID-19 vaccine shots

The PEI government has made the changes in law required to allow pharmacists

to provide vaccinations that can protect Islanders against COVID-19, [reports CBC](#). However, the body that governs pharmacists in the province says it could be a while before pharmacists start asking people to roll up their sleeves. The registrar of the PEI College of Pharmacy says that before any pharmacists can start offering COVID-19 vaccinations, they'll likely need Health Canada to approve a type of vaccine that's easier to store than the 2 that have been approved for use so far. About 170 PEI pharmacists already have the certification to provide injections to patients 18 and older.

Pharmacists eager for role in COVID-19 vaccine rollout

Pharmacists in some parts of Canada are currently administering COVID-19 vaccines in hospital-based clinics and long-term care homes, [says Canadian Healthcare Network](#) (subscriber access required). Pharmacy associations across the country continue to speak with provincial governments about community pharmacists being included in the wider rollout of the approved vaccines. In BC, for example, pharmacists have been administering vaccines in clinics managed by local health authorities. These clinics target the highest priority groups, including long-term care and assisted living residents and staff, remote Indigenous communities and health care workers at acute care facilities. "As we've started to get more vaccine doses into the province and the program is expanding, we've started to see that pharmacists are being recruited to support public health," says Bryce Wong, director of pharmacy practice support and special projects at the BC Pharmacy Association.

QC doctors to receive recommendation on controversial possible COVID-19 treatment

Quebec doctors will receive an interim recommendation this week from the National Institute for Excellence in Health and Social Services (INESSS) on whether they should prescribe the medication colchicine to treat non-hospitalized COVID-19 patients, [says CTV](#). The update comes after a tumultuous week that started with a prominent Montreal Heart Institute (MHI) researcher making bold claims in a press release about the effectiveness of the medication and ended with pushback after many scientists were eventually able to scrutinize the study's data themselves. The INESSS guidelines will serve as a stopgap measure. The study has been submitted to a science journal but has not yet been peer-reviewed or published. In the meantime, guidelines from the College of Physicians, the Order of Pharmacists and INESSS scientists issued 2 days after the press release came out state that colchicine should be viewed with great caution when it comes to treating COVID-19.

National

Special syringes shouldn't overshadow other vaccination tools, pharmacy prof says

Special syringes that help generate extra doses of COVID-19 vaccines may be in demand right now, but one expert says the country shouldn't treat it as the only

solution to getting Canadians inoculated as quickly as possible, [reports the Canadian Press](#). So-called low dead space syringes, which limit vaccine getting trapped in the needle, have become popular in recent weeks as many countries try to capture 6 doses from each Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine vial instead of the standard 5. But Kelly Grindrod, an associate professor at the University of Waterloo's pharmacy school, said 1 mL syringes and alternate vaccines are just as important to the country's inoculation efforts. "What we're seeing now is that [vaccination] is really messy business and having more options in the long run actually will be a lot better for us than hanging our hat on one," she said.

Walmart preps for vaccination rollout

Walmart Canada is ready to play a role in the upcoming COVID-19 vaccination rollout, [according to a news release](#). Walmart has already provided thousands of asymptomatic COVID-19 tests in Alberta and Ontario as part of provincial government pilot programs. In the US, Walmart is providing COVID-19 vaccinations at select stores and expects to deliver between 10 and 13 million doses per month at full capacity when supply and allocations allow. In anticipation of plans to include pharmacies to maximize vaccine distribution in various provinces, Walmart has increased refrigeration capacity in its pharmacy network across the country. In addition, the company is purchasing a number of ultra-cold freezers to assist with the storage and handling of some vaccine formulas.

U of T researchers adapt glucose meter to help detect diseases, including COVID-19

Researchers at the University of Toronto, led by Assistant Professor Keith Pardee of the Leslie Dan Faculty of Pharmacy, have developed a point-of-care diagnostic test using a widely available glucose meter that can be adapted to diagnose a number of diseases, including COVID-19. The new gene circuit-based system is [described in a paper](#) published in Nature Communications. "Advanced diagnostic tests, including COVID-19 diagnostic tests, require some specialized equipment that you really only find in a lab," says Evan Amalfitano, a PhD candidate in Pardee's lab and lead author of the study. "A commercial, off-the-shelf glucose meter is a lot cheaper and already widely distributed." While the approach shows considerable promise, there is a significant amount of product development work needed before the technology could be moved from the lab into the field.

Canada could be producing COVID-19 vaccine by the fall

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau says a deal has been struck with Novavax to produce its COVID-19 vaccine in Canada, but the pharmaceutical company isn't expected to be ready to roll out doses domestically until the fall at the earliest, [says CTV](#). The federal government has signed a memorandum of understanding with Novavax to pursue options to produce its COVID-19 vaccine at a new Montreal facility that is under construction. While the prime minister is calling this a "major step forward," it could be months before this potential made-in-Canada vaccine candidate is approved, let alone shipped to delivery sites nationwide. Last week Novavax quietly [submitted its COVID-19 vaccine](#) to Health Canada for regulatory approval, less than 2 weeks after Ottawa finalized a deal with the

Maryland-based company for 52 million doses of the shot.

Health Canada on track to approve AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine by mid-February

Health Canada is on track to give the green light to a third COVID-19 vaccine within the next 2 weeks and a fourth may not be far behind, [reports the Canadian Press](#). Eric Morrisette, chief of media relations at Health Canada, said on January 29 that the regulatory team that has been reviewing an application from AstraZeneca since October 1 is just awaiting final submissions from the drug maker on manufacturing processes before making its decision. AstraZeneca was the first to apply for approval for a COVID-19 vaccine in Canada and has been greenlit in 15 jurisdictions including the UK, Mexico, India and, as of Friday, the entire European Union.

Canadian corporations band together for COVID-19 rapid testing project

Some of Canada's top airlines, banks and sports teams have united to pilot rapid tests identifying COVID-19 in hopes that they can find a way to reopen workplaces, [reports the Canadian Press](#). The pilot is being run by the University of Toronto's Creative Destruction Lab, which has partnered with 12 companies, including Loblaw and Shoppers Drug Mart, to experiment with antigen tests that take about 15 minutes to deliver results. Those behind the project believe it could give Canada's corporate world a road map to quelling the spread of COVID-19 in workplaces that have had to close or have struggled to contain outbreaks.

International

AU community pharmacies participating in next phase of COVID-19 rollout

Australian community pharmacies are now invited to express interest in participating in Phase 2A of the COVID-19 Vaccination Program, following an announcement by Australia's health minister on January 31, [reports the Australian Journal of Pharmacy](#). "Community pharmacy will be an important partner in the rollout of COVID-19 vaccines," Health Minister Greg Hunt said in a joint statement with Pharmacy Guild national president George Tambassis. "Utilising the existing network of thousands of community pharmacies will ensure the general population have broader access to COVID-19 vaccinations, provide choice in where the community receive a vaccine, and address barriers to access some parts of rural and regional Australia. Participation in the program will be voluntary and pharmacies will need to demonstrate they meet the highest safety standards and have capacity and capability to deliver COVID-19 vaccines, as well as ensuring they continue to provide important services to their local communities," said the statement.

Bipartisan correspondence urges HHS to increase focus on community pharmacies

US Representatives Abigail Spanberger (D-VA) and David B. McKinley (R-WV) sent a letter to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) urging President Biden's administration to follow the lead of states that have used a

community pharmacist-led approach in the national COVID-19 vaccine distribution strategy, [reports Pharmacy Times](#). The correspondence follows a joint letter sent from the National Community Pharmacists Association (NCPA) and the American Society of Consultant Pharmacists (ASCP), which urged governors to use independent pharmacies. “Community pharmacists are integral parts of the communities they serve, especially in rural and underserved communities,” said the letter. “Their years of providing patient-centered care and wrap-around pharmacy services means they have earned their patients’ and their communities’ trust. This experience makes them uniquely capable of addressing the high rates of vaccine hesitancy we’ve seen among minority and underserved communities.”

US federal government to ship COVID-19 vaccine directly to pharmacies

The US will begin shipping doses of the COVID-19 vaccine directly to retail pharmacies next week, as the Biden administration expands how and where Americans can get inoculated, [NBC News says](#). The initial shipment of 1 million doses will go to 6,500 stores starting February 11, said Jeffrey Zients, the Biden administration’s COVID-19 coordinator. The Trump administration left states to devise their own distribution plans and some opted to use retail pharmacies in their states to help administer the vaccine to certain groups, like health care workers. Pharmacies that receive the vaccine directly from the federal government will still need to follow their state’s guidelines to determine which populations should receive the injections.

Advocates urge Illinois to get more pharmacies involved in vaccinating at assisted living sites

According to the [Chicago Tribune](#), big chain pharmacies have administered the first round of vaccinations at skilled nursing homes in Illinois, but will take about 2 more weeks to serve assisted living sites — a delay that may prove fatal for some residents, public health advocates warn. While a federal program depends on CVS and Walgreens drugstore chains to inject the vaccines, other states have found a way to speed up the process by involving other pharmacies that are already working with assisted living facilities in their communities, nursing home experts say. Some health advocates say Illinois should do likewise.

Webinar: Pharmacists’ involvement in COVID-19 vaccination: Addressing regulatory needs

In a webinar scheduled for February 4 at 8:00am ET, the International Pharmaceutical Federation’s (FIP) Regulators’ Forum will present a new regulatory vaccination preparedness self-assessment tool and risk assessment. Foundational regulatory needs will be presented to ensure oversight, quality assurance and public protection as the scope of pharmacists’ patient care is expanded to include prescribing, vaccination and testing in order to address population health needs during a pandemic. [Register here](#).

In Depth

A look at the 7 vaccines Canada has pre-ordered

Between July and October, Canada signed deals to pre-order 7 COVID-19 vaccines. The Canadian Press looks at what [we know about those vaccines](#), listed by manufacturer.

Despite supply issues, Canada “doing pretty good” on vaccine rollout: professor

Dr. Noni MacDonald, pediatrics professor at Dalhousie University’s School of Medicine and a founding member of the World Health Organization’s Global Advisory Committee on Vaccine Safety, [grades the federal government’s COVID-19 vaccine rollout](#). “Given what we have to deal with ... our provincial/territorial responsibility for health [and] our relatively small population for our huge geography, I think we’re doing pretty good,” says MacDonald.

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.

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