

Subject:

The Weekly: CPhA's COVID-19 Update for January 27



January 27, 2021

CPhA

CPhA participates in federal pre-budget consultations

Mona Fortier, Minister of Middle Class Prosperity and Associate Minister of Finance, and Patty Hajdu, Minister of Health, met virtually on January 26 with health care organizations and associations from across Canada, including CPhA, to hear their ideas about how Budget 2021 can continue to support the health and safety of Canadians through the pandemic. CPhA shared its views on the importance of federal support to accelerate COVID vaccination and testing efforts at the community level, as well as implementing a health human resource strategy that would allow health professionals, including pharmacists, to practice to full scope. The discussion and ideas shared with Minister Fortier and Minister Hajdu during the round table would help the government ensure an inclusive, equitable and resilient recovery.

Protecting the Front Line: COVID-19 Day-to-Day Questions FAQ updated

CPhA's [COVID-19 FAQ](#) has been updated to include new information on COVID-19 testing and vaccination.

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

Provincial

SK pharmacists ready and willing to give out COVID-19 vaccine

Dawn Martin, CEO of the Pharmacy Association of Saskatchewan (PAS), says it is important for the provincial government to use all of the resources it has at hand for rolling out the COVID-19 vaccine, and that includes all health care providers

such as pharmacists, [reports CTV](#). “Pharmacists are ready to roll up their sleeves to get the shot and they’re really ready to roll up other people’s sleeves to give the shot, and we just have to figure out the right time for that to happen,” she says. Martin anticipates that vaccine demand will start to ramp up in April when distribution moves to the general public. “I think that’s where pharmacists are going to be really, really needed and really involved ... to make sure that there is really good access right across the province and certainly at perhaps more convenient times for folks so that they can get as many people vaccinated as possible,” she says. Martin adds that there may even be opportunities for pharmacists to help on a volunteer basis right now at mass vaccination clinics in the province.

NL pharmacists ought to play role in COVID-19 vaccine rollout

The professional association representing pharmacists in Newfoundland and Labrador says its members can play a key role in ensuring COVID-19 vaccines are delivered efficiently later this year. Janice Audeau, president of the Pharmacists’ Association of Newfoundland and Labrador (PANL) and a pharmacist in Corner Brook, said the association has raised the issue with the provincial government. “We already do a lot of vaccinations in communities anyway, and we have over 700 pharmacists in the province,” Audeau [told CBC](#). “We’re in all kinds of communities where there may not be a lot of resources, so we’re in a great position to be able to get vaccine to as many people as possible.” Audeau believes allowing pharmacists to administer the COVID-19 vaccine could help get doses into more arms across the province, similar to the influenza vaccine in 2020 when NL pharmacists provided about 40% of the vaccines.

National

Canada seeking reassurance as Europe mulls export controls on COVID-19 vaccines

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau says he remains confident in Canada’s vaccine supplies despite threats from Europe that it might impose export controls on vaccines produced on that continent, [says the Canadian Press](#). Speaking to reporters on January 26, Trudeau said the situation in Europe is worrisome but he is “very confident” that Canada is going to receive all the COVID-19 vaccine doses promised by the end of March. And despite the sharp decline in deliveries of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine this month, he said Canada will still vaccinate all Canadians who want shots by the end of September. “We will continue to work closely with Europe to ensure that we are sourcing, that we are receiving the vaccines that we have signed for, that we are due,” Trudeau said.

Scientists launch social media campaign to counter COVID-19 misinformation

Scientists and health experts are launching a nationwide campaign to counter misinformation about COVID-19 and related vaccines, [the Canadian Press reports](#). The #ScienceUpFirst initiative is an awareness and engagement campaign that will use social media to debunk incorrect information and boost

science-based content. The campaign states there is a marked rise in misinformation and conspiracy theories related to COVID-19 vaccines, virus transmission and government response, and it represents a threat to the health and safety of Canadians. “Misinformation is a dire, imminent threat to the lives of all Canadians and is proven to be one of the factors fueling COVID-19 infections, and dissuading Canadians from getting vaccinated,” says Timothy Caulfield, Canada research chair in health law and policy at the University of Alberta. Anyone interested in participating can follow @scienceupfirst, use the #ScienceUpFirst hashtag on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook, and tag the account to amplify science-based posts and alert it to misinformation posts.

Caution urged on new study to treat COVID-19 with colchicine

Following an [announcement](#) from the Montreal Heart Institute (MHI) on January 24 that the COLCORONA clinical trial has provided clinically persuasive results of colchicine’s efficacy to treat COVID-19, Quebec’s College of Physicians and the Order of Pharmacists reacted quickly, asking their members to steer clear of colchicine for now, [according to CTV](#). Pharmacists will not be permitted to dispense colchicine if the drug is prescribed for someone as a precaution, in the event they eventually test positive for COVID-19. The Orders’ statement also called the results of the clinical trial “encouraging” but “preliminary,” because the data haven’t been formally analyzed and published.

Blood thinners help moderate COVID cases and may reduce strain on ICUs

Canadian scientists say blood thinners appear to prevent some COVID-19 patients with moderate illness from deteriorating further, offering a “massive” advance in treatment that they expect will ease suffering and lessen strain on hospital ICUs, [says CTV](#). University Health Network scientist Ewan Goligher says that blood thinners could soon be part of standard care after the interim results of global trials showed heparin reduced the probability of requiring life support by about a third. The news comes on the heels of promising early data for another COVID-19 drug targeting seniors, as health systems across the country wrestle with the impact of a recent surge in cases and long-term care homes battle devastating outbreaks.

Made-in-Canada coronavirus vaccine to begin human clinical trials

A made-in-Canada vaccine to protect against COVID-19 began human clinical trials on January 26 in Toronto, says the biotechnology company that developed the vaccine. [According to the CBC](#), Toronto-based Providence Therapeutics said 3 shots will be given to 60 adult volunteers at a clinical trial site in Toronto in the first phase of the trial on Tuesday. Fifteen of those volunteers will receive a placebo and 45 will get the vaccine, called PTX-COVID19-B. Brad Sorenson, the company’s CEO, said it’s the first time a vaccine designed and manufactured in Canada has begun clinical trials. The company has purchased a site in Calgary to mass produce the vaccine.

International

Vast majority of pharmacists in the US plan to or have been vaccinated against COVID-19

A [new survey](#) conducted by the American Pharmacists Association (APhA) shows that more than 9 in 10 pharmacists plan to or have already been vaccinated against COVID-19. Of these, 51% said they had received 1 dose, 10% had received 2 doses and 31% planned to get it as soon as it is available. When asked about their readiness to administer the vaccine, 41% of pharmacists surveyed said they were already administering it, 38% said they would be able to administer it as soon as it is available and 17% were preparing to administer the vaccinations and would participate in future phases of the vaccine delivery program. The survey also found that 95% of respondents are comfortable addressing patients' concerns about the vaccine and 79% said staffing in their pharmacy practice is adequate to offer the vaccine.

FIP issues Holding Statement on COVID-19 testing

On January 22 the International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP) issued a [Holding Statement on in-pharmacy COVID testing](#). This statement affirms that pharmacists can play an active role in diagnostic testing by providing tests and pre- and post-test information to patients, as well as helping to refer positive cases for follow-up and contact tracing. In this statement, FIP emphasizes that many community pharmacies and pharmacists are available to provide these essential tests now and look forward to joining efforts with other health professions using this strategy to bring the pandemic under control. Its recommendation to governments scaling up testing across populations is to support pharmacists who are able to play this important role.

Pharmacy associations commend Biden's COVID-19 plan to activate pharmacies

US President Joe Biden's plan to use pharmacies nationwide to hasten the administration of COVID-19 vaccinations is garnering praise from the industry, [reports Drug Store News](#). Both the National Association of Chain Drug Stores (NACDS) and APhA released statements in praise of [the plan](#). "We greatly appreciate President Biden's thoughtful and determined remarks and his pledge to 'fully activate the pharmacies across this country to get the vaccinations into more arms as quickly as possible,'" said NACDS president and CEO Steve Anderson. Scott Knoer, executive vice president and CEO of APhA, said "The incoming administration has stated that this is a race against time — and we agree. It is essential that this plan builds on utilizing the army of ready, willing and able pharmacists, pharmacy technicians and pharmacy interns in all practice settings to accelerate the vaccination of all Americans. Approximately 400,000 pharmacy personnel have been trained for precisely this moment, and now is the time to mobilize them."

Pharmacists encouraged to be at front line

The Pharmaceutical Society of Australia (PSA) has welcomed the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) approval of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine,

which is set to be rolled out as part of Australia's COVID-19 vaccination program, [says the Australian Journal of Pharmacy](#). The TGA and federal government made the announcement on January 25. PSA President and associate professor Chris Freeman says the TGA announcement is a historic step towards Australia's national COVID-19 vaccination program. Freeman also notes that while the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine would not be administered in community pharmacies, pharmacist vaccinators may form a vital part of the vaccination workforce at these public health vaccination clinics. "Pharmacists stand ready to administer COVID vaccines to the Australian community," he says. Community pharmacists are expected to administer other COVID-19 vaccines in other phases when they become available.

Pharmacists 'sidelined' in vaccination program

Pharmacists have said they have been "sidelined" from the COVID-19 vaccination program for people over 70 years of age, [says RTE](#). The Irish Pharmacy Union (IPU) says it has been given no written explanation as to why vaccination of patients over 70 is to be done exclusively by general practitioners. IPU secretary general Darragh O'Loughlin says there is no clinical reason for it: "Pharmacists have safely vaccinated over 70s for the flu every year for a decade." O' Loughlin also says the IPU has been given no information on when pharmacists and their teams will be vaccinated for COVID-19, despite being a core part of the National COVID-19 Vaccination Program.

Second wave of community pharmacies join vaccination push

Another 65 community pharmacy sites joined the national effort across England to vaccinate vulnerable groups against COVID-19 as quickly as possible, [says the Royal Pharmaceutical Society \(RPS\)](#). RPS in England chair Claire Anderson says, "It's a proud day as more and more pharmacists help ramp up the NHS vaccination program by providing local sites where people can get their COVID-19 vaccine. It's fantastic and inspiring to see the speedy progress being made due to the clinical skills of pharmacists." She added, "The professionalism of pharmacists across hospital, GP practice and community sites who have stepped up to the challenge has been extraordinary. A huge amount of behind-the-scenes work has been done by colleagues across pharmacy to make all the sites a success."

Merck to stop developing its 2 COVID-19 vaccines

Merck said on January 25 it will stop developing both of the current formulations of the COVID-19 vaccines that the company was working on, citing inadequate immune responses to the shots, [according to STAT](#). Work will continue on at least 1 of the vaccines, which is being developed in partnership with the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative (IAVI), to see if using a different route of administration would improve how effective it is. "We're disappointed by this result," Nick Kartsonis, a senior vice president for infectious disease and vaccines at Merck Research Laboratories, said in an interview with STAT. "But it also allows us to continue to focus on our therapeutic candidates and move those forward. And, you know, we are open to continue the work to see if we can address the pandemic in any way we can add value."

Johnson & Johnson expects data COVID-19 data next week

Johnson & Johnson (J&J) says it expects to report eagerly awaited data on its COVID-19 vaccine early next week, and that it will be able to meet the delivery target for doses to countries with which it has signed supply agreements, [reports Reuters](#). Public health officials are increasingly counting on single-dose options like the one being tested by J&J to simplify and boost inoculations, given the complications and slower-than-hoped rollout of authorized vaccines from Pfizer and Moderna, both of which require second shots weeks after the first.

Moderna's vaccine is less potent against one COVID-19 variant but still protective

The 2-dose Moderna vaccine approved for use in Canada appears to protect against the coronavirus variants first identified in the UK and South Africa, [reports CBC](#). However, it may be less effective against the B1351 variant found in South Africa, according to studies conducted by the company, which is now developing an alternative version of the vaccine for booster shots. "It's clearly good news," says Toronto-based infectious disease specialist Isaac Bogoch, a member of Ontario's vaccine distribution task force. A booster shot being in development is not unexpected, he says, to ensure immunity against the evolving SARS-CoV-2 virus, including the B1351 variant.

In Depth

What the Pfizer shortage means for Canada's vaccine rollout

Canada won't receive a single vial of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine this week due to an international shortage that has prompted finger-pointing in Ottawa and forced provinces to temporarily delay their vaccine rollouts. For the next 4 weeks, Canada's vaccine deliveries will be cut in half with up to 400,000 doses delayed, [according to Maj.-Gen. Dany Fortin](#), who is leading the country's vaccine rollout. Canada won't receive any new deliveries from Pfizer this week, and only one-quarter of the previously promised delivery next week. Why has this happened and what does it mean? [CTV explains](#).

Worth Repeating

"We need to embrace the mantra of mindfulness guru Jon Kabat-Zinn: 'You can't stop the waves, but you can learn how to surf.'" The Globe and Mail's André Picard [takes a look](#) at how to make sense of the often contradictory pandemic news.

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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