

**March 10, 2021****CPhA*****CPhA names NL pharmacist Stephanie Burden Canadian Pharmacist of the Year***

For creating a practice that became a community lifeline during the COVID-19 pandemic, Stephanie Burden has been named Canadian Pharmacist of the Year by CPhA, [reports the Telegram](#). During the early days of the pandemic, Burden ensured her patients could continue to access the care they needed to stay healthy despite a reduction in the pharmacy's public hours by offering phone and online ordering and even making hard-to-find hand sanitizer for a local medical clinic. She also took advantage of social media to stay connected to patients by creating videos on how to stay safe and calm. "Social media allowed me to stay connected, to give them advice on how to adapt and live well through COVID-19. I just wanted to be that dependable figure for them," Burden says.

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

Provincial***Pharmacies in 3 Ontario public health units to begin administering COVID-19 vaccines***

Pharmacies in 3 Ontario public health units will begin administering COVID-19 vaccines, [reports the Canadian Press](#). Health Minister Christine Elliott says many of the AstraZeneca vaccine doses expected to arrive in the province will go to pharmacies for the pilot program. The Ontario Pharmacists Association (OPA) says the vaccination pilot will begin with approximately 380 pharmacies in Toronto, Kingston and Windsor-Essex health units. OPA CEO Justin Bates says pharmacies will use their own booking systems to make appointments, likely starting with people between the ages of 60 and 64, and the program will eventually scale up.

Quebec to go against advice from national vaccine panel and give AstraZeneca to 65+

On March 8 officials announced that Quebec will administer the newly approved AstraZeneca vaccine to seniors, despite Canada's national vaccine expert panel recommending against its use for people over the age of 65, [says the Canadian Press](#). The province's vaccine expert committee is recommending that all approved vaccines be used immediately to prevent deaths and hospitalizations, the Health Department said, adding that the AstraZeneca vaccine "provides more flexibility in immunization efforts, especially for priority groups aged 70 to 79." Canada's National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) has said the AstraZeneca vaccine is not recommended for people aged 65 years and over because of insufficient data on its efficacy in older people, despite its approval by Health Canada for adults of all ages. There are no concerns that the vaccine is unsafe for use, but the NACI panel said the vaccines from Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna are preferred for people 65 years old and above "due to suggested superior efficacy."

AstraZeneca vaccine to rollout at NS pharmacies beginning March 20

The Nova Scotia government has partnered with the Pharmacy Association of Nova Scotia (PANS) and Doctors Nova Scotia to help deliver 13,000 doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine before April 2, [reports CTV](#). Nova Scotians ages 63 and 64 will be the first group eligible to access the vaccine beginning March 20. The vaccine will be available at 25 locations across the province, including 13 pharmacies, on a first-come, first-served basis. “Pharmacists and pharmacy technicians are eager to do their part to end this pandemic,” says PANS CEO Allison Bodnar. “With all health-care providers working together, we believe that we will be successful in getting Nova Scotians their COVID-19 vaccine quickly.”

PEI pharmacies to begin COVID-19 vaccines for food service industry workers

PEI is setting aside AstraZeneca vaccines for 18- to 29-year-olds who are working in the food service industry, [reports CBC](#). Starting March 11, Islanders in that group will be able to call to make an appointment to get a vaccine or book online. They will need to have a PEI health card and will get a shot of the AstraZeneca vaccine at 1 of 6 pharmacies across the Island, the province said in a [news release](#) on March 9.

NL pharmacists ready to give COVID-19 vaccines, but await details

Newfoundland and Labrador Health Minister John Haggie says that the province will continue to move through phase 2 of its vaccination plan when more kinds and amounts of vaccine arrive, [reports CBC](#). Although there are still details to work out, Haggie says that the rollout could also include pharmacists and physicians administering the COVID-19 vaccine to patients in a similar manner to the 2020 flu shot season. Pharmacists are prepared to help in the delivery of the vaccine, but the group representing them said they need to hear more details from government. “Pharmacists have the training, expertise and are ideally situated to play a very important role in the vaccinating [of] the general public against COVID-19,” says Pharmacists’ Association of Newfoundland and Labrador executive director Jennifer Collingwood.

National

Shoppers Drug Mart marks COVID milestone with first vaccine in pharmacy

Shoppers Drug Mart and Loblaw pharmacies in Real Canadian Superstore locations in Alberta delivered the first COVID-19 vaccines in community pharmacies on March 4, [marking a milestone](#) in the ongoing efforts to stop the spread of COVID-19. Pharmacies throughout Alberta started administering the Pfizer vaccine to residents over the age of 75. “Pharmacists are among the most trusted health care professionals, providing convenient and accessible community-level health services,” says Jeff Leger, president, Shoppers Drug Mart. “Across Canada, there are more than 10,000 pharmacies, in rural areas and urban centres. Based on the most recent flu season, it is expected that community pharmacies could vaccinate up to 3 million Canadians each week.”

Canadians’ hesitancy about COVID-19 vaccine dropping, new poll suggests

A new survey conducted by the Angus Reid Institute suggests Canadians are more willing to get a COVID-19 vaccine immediately rather than take a “wait-and-see” approach, [says CBC](#). Those who responded to the poll also said they were less concerned about contracting COVID-19 than they were in the fall and earlier this winter, hinting at a spark of optimism about the pandemic. Specifically, 66% of respondents said they would get a vaccine as soon as possible, opposed to 39% who gave the same answer in September. And only 16% said they would wait to get the vaccine, compared to 38% in September. The number of respondents who said they would not get the vaccine at all remained relatively steady at 12%, compared to 14% in July.

International

Australia: Harmonization of community pharmacy vaccine rollout welcomed

An agreement by the National Cabinet that the states and territories harmonize legislation and regulation to allow COVID-19 vaccinations to be administered in community pharmacies has been [welcomed by the Pharmacy Guild of](#)

[Australia](#). Guild national president George Tambassis said that the agreement has paved the way to a wider rollout of the COVID-19 vaccination program. “With more than 5900 community pharmacies spread out across Australia, there is broad accessibility for all residents to access vaccinations via this network,” Tambassis said. He added that harmonization is an important step in the COVID-19 vaccination rollout, stating, “It is crucial that all states and territories are on the same page in allowing the COVID-19 vaccination to be delivered in community pharmacies. Having different laws covering different jurisdictions would only slow the rollout and potentially put Australians at risk.”

Ireland: Pharmacy COVID-19 vaccinations to start in April

People will be able to get COVID-19 vaccinations in local pharmacies beginning in early April, [according to the Irish Examiner](#). Irish Pharmacy Union secretary general Darragh O’Loughlin says the move will bring relief to people who live far from the mass vaccination centres, as the union estimates half the population live less than 1 km from their closest pharmacy. He acknowledged the delay is hard for the public. “We are still a couple of weeks away; it will be into April. Pharmacists are frustrated they are not yet involved. We know this is because of a supply issue. There has not been a reliable supply of AstraZeneca into the country so far,” he said. O’Loughlin urged the health minister to act on the supply issues. “To avoid any further delays, we are calling for capacity to be increased by allowing pharmacists to start vaccinating using the AstraZeneca vaccine,” he added.

Open spaces, no pharmacies: Rural US confronts vaccine void

As the US campaign against COVID-19 moves from mass inoculation sites to drugstores and doctors’ offices, getting vaccinated remains a challenge for residents of “pharmacy deserts,” communities without pharmacies or well-equipped health clinics, [says the Associated Press](#). To improve access, the federal government has partnered with 21 companies that run free-standing pharmacies or pharmacy services inside grocery stores and other locations. More than 40,000 stores are expected to take part, and the Biden administration has said that nearly 90% of Americans live within 5 miles of one. But there are gaps in the map: More than 400 rural counties with a combined population of nearly 2.5 million people lack a retail pharmacy that’s included in the partnership. More than 100 of those counties either have no pharmacy or have a pharmacy that does not offer services such as flu shots, and possibly lacks the equipment or certified staff to vaccinate customers.

USA: Walgreens marks 5 million administered COVID-19 vaccinations

Walgreens has hit a milestone in its efforts to administer COVID-19 vaccines, [says Drug Store News](#). On March 9 the retailer announced that it has administered roughly 5 million COVID-19 vaccinations across long-term care facilities, stores and dedicated clinics. Additionally, the company has conducted more than 60,000 clinics at long-term care facilities and vaccinated a majority of residents and staff that opted to receive their vaccine from Walgreens. “We’re now seeing steep declines in new COVID-19 cases and related deaths in nursing homes and assisted living facilities, demonstrating the remarkable impact these vaccines can have in this pandemic,” said John Standley, president of Walgreens.

Ivermectin does not alleviate mild COVID-19 symptoms, study finds

Ivermectin, a controversial antiparasitic drug that has been touted as a potential COVID-19 treatment, does not speed recovery in people with mild cases, [the New York Times writes](#), citing a trial published in JAMA. Ivermectin is typically used to treat parasitic worms, but scientific evidence for its efficacy against the coronavirus is thin. Some studies indicate the drug can prevent several different viruses from replicating in cells. Last year, researchers found high doses suppressed SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, in cell cultures.

Merck says study shows COVID-19 drug causes quick reduction in virus

Merck has reported that an experimental COVID-19 drug, which promises to be a kind of Tamiflu for the pandemic, has shown positive results in a preliminary study, [Reuters says](#). The antiviral drug molnupiravir, which is being developed by Ridgeback Biotherapeutics, significantly reduced infectious virus in subjects in a mid-stage study after 5 days of treatment. If further study proves it capable of treating people with COVID-19 who show symptoms, the drug could bolster a limited arsenal of treatments and be the first oral antiviral against the disease.

In Depth

Which COVID-19 vaccine is best? Experts say it's the first one that's offered to you

Now that Canada has an expanding menu of COVID-19 vaccines, you're probably hearing chatter about how this one is better and that one is worse. Alan Bernstein, the president of the research organization CIFAR and member of the federal government's COVID-19 vaccine task force, has this advice for you: Take the first shot you can. Yes, each shot comes with a different efficacy rate — but, [as the *Star* reports](#), that doesn't mean you can easily conclude one is better than the others.

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.