



Canadian Pharmacists Association  
Association des pharmaciens du Canada

# The Weekly

Latest pharmacy developments in response to COVID-19

**May 19, 2021**

## **CPhA**

### ***Upcoming webinar: The community pharmacy as a health hub***

Our next practice development webinar, *The community pharmacy as a health hub*, will take place on **Thursday, May 27 from 1-2:30pm ET**. In this session, our featured panellists will discuss how community pharmacies are uniquely positioned to serve as health hubs and how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected this model of care. They will share their innovative practices that combine education, advice and health-system navigation into patient care.

[Registration](#) is now open.

### ***New practice tool available: Administration of COVID-19 vaccine in special populations***

CPhA has developed a new resource for pharmacists who have specific questions regarding the safety and efficacy of COVID-19 vaccines in patient populations who were excluded from initial clinical trials. The resource is available in [English](#) and [French](#).

### ***CPhA & pharmacists meet with Justin Trudeau, Chrystia Freeland: Recording available***

In case you missed it, on April 20 CPhA and pharmacists from across the country were joined by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland in a virtual meeting to discuss pharmacists' front-line experiences administering COVID-19 vaccinations.

The [recording](#) is now available on our website.

### ***Updated chart: Pharmacy involvement in COVID-19 vaccination***

Across the country, most adults 18+ are now eligible to receive the vaccine, with lowered age limits in AB, SK, ON, NS, NB and QC. As COVID-19 vaccination rollouts continue, CPhA is making weekly updates to our Pharmacy Involvement in COVID Vaccination map, staying on top of the role pharmacists are playing in the vaccination effort. The graphic is available in [English](#) and [French](#).

CPhA's COVID-19 web pages are being updated regularly at [www.pharmacists.ca/covid19](http://www.pharmacists.ca/covid19) and [www.pharmacists.ca/covid19fr](http://www.pharmacists.ca/covid19fr).

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## Provincial

### ***SK vaccine rollout is roaring away at full speed, thanks to pharmacy***

The Saskatchewan Ministry of Health reported a new record number of doses administered on May 16, thanks largely to increased involvement of pharmacy, [according to CKOM Radio](#). With 18,995 doses given in the latest reporting period, the total number of doses administered now stands at 590,952. Of people 40 and older, 74% have received their first shot, while 66% of people over 30 and 57% of people over 18 have theirs. The province credits the record-breaking days “largely to the expanded capacity resulting from increased involvement of pharmacies in the COVID vaccination program,” it said in its daily news release.

### ***PEI pharmacists going exclusively with Moderna, AZ suspended***

The executive director of the PEI Pharmacists Association says that leftover doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine have been returned to the provincial pharmacy, and that pharmacies are now giving Moderna as a first dose to those over 40 in PEI. [Speaking to CBC](#), Erin MacKenzie noted that the province does have enough AstraZeneca to deliver second shots to anyone who received it in the first round, but says the Chief Public Health Officer will let pharmacies know around the end of May whether that will happen. She added that the uptake of Moderna vaccines at pharmacies has been very good, especially since those 40 and over can now book appointments either at pharmacies or through the province's mass clinics.

### ***Shoppers Drug Mart makes rapid COVID-19 screening available in ON, AB***

Shoppers Drug Mart is making quick and convenient COVID-19 screening accessible to asymptomatic customers in Alberta and Ontario. According [to a news release](#), rapid antigen tests are available in all Shoppers Drug Mart and Loblaws pharmacies in the 2 provinces, providing results typically within 15-20 minutes. Asymptomatic testing is limited to those not exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms and who have not been in contact with a COVID-19 patient. “To get through this pandemic, we all need to follow public health guidelines, get vaccinated and continue testing and screening in order to stop the spread of COVID-19,” said Ashesh Desai, executive vice president, pharmacy and healthcare, Shoppers Drug Mart. “As Ontario and Alberta begin their recovery from this third wave of COVID-19, rapid screening options can provide customers with an extra level of confidence,” he added.

## ***For many, first vaccine dose has a clear psychological effect — optimism***

While 1 dose is only the first step toward full protection against COVID-19, it has nonetheless been an important step for many. Those who have received the first jab said they've felt relief, euphoria and a renewed sense of hope for the first time in months, [reports the Toronto Star](#). For people in Ontario, the first shot is "the beginning of the end," said Kelly Grindrod, a pharmacist and assistant professor at the University of Waterloo, who has administered hundreds of doses herself. The finish line is now in sight, she said, and with that comes significant psychological relief. "Our reality for the last year (has been) all the things we cannot do, all the places we cannot go, people we cannot hug," Grindrod said. "Even grocery shopping, a regular weekly event, became dangerous." The first dose has eased some feelings of peril, she added, especially for those who are older or immunocompromised.

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## **National**

### ***Tam expects AstraZeneca recipients will be able to choose second vaccine***

Canada's Chief Public Health Officer said May 18 she expects Canadians who got the AstraZeneca vaccine in the first round of vaccinations will be able to choose which vaccine they get for their second dose, [reports the Canadian Press](#). Dr. Theresa Tam's comments came hours after a small Spanish study on mixing and matching vaccines reported that giving a Pfizer-BioNTech shot for the second dose after AstraZeneca is safe and produced twice as many antibodies as a second dose of AstraZeneca. The National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) is still awaiting further data from another mixing-and-matching study underway in Britain, but Dr. Tam said advice on second doses should be ready before most people are due to get their second vaccination.

### ***Despite months of mixed messages, most Canadians who received an AstraZeneca vaccine have no regrets***

As the rate of Canadians who have been vaccinated with at least 1 dose of a COVID-19 vaccine surges to more than 50% of the adult population, [new data from the Angus Reid Institute](#) shows that Canadians have moved consistently and significantly away from attitudes of "don't know" or "wait and see" to a place of "getting it done." The Institute's most recent public opinion survey showed 53% of adults have received their first vaccine, while another 29% would like to receive theirs as soon as possible. In the eyes of Canadians, however, not all vaccines are created equal, with just 35% reporting that they are comfortable receiving the AstraZeneca vaccine. The 2 vaccines that are being used for most vaccinations, Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna, continue to be viewed in a much more positive light. That said, the vast majority of those who have already received at least 1 dose of AstraZeneca expressed no regrets. Almost half (48%) said they were totally pleased with their decision, while nearly the same number (44%) say that while Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna would have been better, they're okay with their choice. A mere 2% of this group expressed total regret.

### ***Canadian COVID-19 vaccine shows promise in clinical trials***

Canada's first homegrown COVID-19 vaccine to be tested in human subjects has notched an impressive result that suggests it may perform well in relation to other vaccines when deployed against the pandemic, [reports the \*Globe and Mail\*](#). But the question of how soon it might be available remains unanswered. Results from a Phase 2 clinical trial show that the 2-dose shot, developed by the Quebec-based biopharmaceutical company Medicago, can do as well or better than the mRNA vaccines produced by Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech — and significantly better than those made by AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson — at generating antibodies against the coronavirus. The interim results, which Medicago researchers [posted in a study](#), have not yet been reviewed by other scientists. They include data gathered up to April 9 on 600 individuals who enrolled in the Phase 2 trial. By design, half of the participants were over 65. The scale of a Phase 2 trial is insufficient to provide a direct measure of the vaccine's efficacy. However, the concentration of antibodies that the Medicago vaccine generated in those who received it is higher than that demonstrated by any vaccine that Canada has made agreements to purchase, apart from the shot made by Novavax, which has not yet been authorized by Health Canada.

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## International

### ***CVS employee arrested for stealing COVID vaccination cards***

US health services and pharmacy chain CVS has fired an employee who was arrested for allegedly stealing vaccination cards, which are used as proof of immunization against COVID-19, [reports \*Human Resources Director\*](#). The arrest is only the latest in a string of incidents involving people across the US who purportedly make, sell, distribute or buy falsified vaccination records in order to avoid getting the actual shot. New York police apprehended the employee, who was found to be in possession of more than 60 vaccination cards, including 8 that were already filled with immunization details. The suspect was allegedly planning to sell and distribute the cards to students and “share them with family members and friends, so that they could go into venues and possibly even use them at schools,” said Nassau County Police. CVS, meanwhile, vows to cooperate with authorities in investigating the matter, and has fired the employee in question. “Following his arrest, we took immediate steps to terminate his employment as his alleged activity conflicts with our values, our policies and our commitment to safe, secure vaccination protocols,” the company said in a statement.

### ***Spanish study finds AstraZeneca vaccine followed by Pfizer-BioNTech dose is safe and effective***

A Spanish study on mixing COVID-19 vaccines has found that giving a dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine to people who already received a first shot of AstraZeneca vaccine is highly safe and effective, preliminary results showed on May 18. [Reuters reports](#) the CombivacS study, run by Spain's state-backed Carlos III Health Institute, found the presence of IgG antibodies in the bloodstream was between 30 and 40 times higher in people who got the follow-up Pfizer-BioNTech shot than in a control group who received only 1 AstraZeneca dose. Meanwhile, the presence of neutralizing antibodies rose 7-fold after a Pfizer-BioNTech dose, significantly more than the doubling effect observed after a second AstraZeneca shot.

## ***More flexible storage conditions for Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine***

The European Medicine Agency's (EMA) Human Medicines Committee [has recommended a change](#) to the approved storage conditions of Comirnaty, the COVID-19 vaccine developed by Pfizer-BioNTech, that will facilitate the handling of the vaccine in vaccination centres across the EU. This change extends the approved storage period of the unopened thawed vial at 2-8°C (i.e., in a standard fridge after being taken out of deep-freeze conditions) from 5 days to 1 month (31 days). Increased flexibility in the storage and handling of the vaccine is expected to have a significant impact on planning and logistics of the vaccine rollout in EU member states. EMA is in continuous dialogue with the marketing authorization holders of COVID-19 vaccines as they seek to make manufacturing improvements to enhance vaccine distribution in the EU.

## ***US to send 20 million more COVID-19 vaccine doses abroad in coming weeks, Biden says***

US President Joe Biden said on May 17 that the US will share an additional 20 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines with the world in the coming 6 weeks, as domestic demand for shots drops and global disparities in distribution have grown more evident, [according to the Associated Press](#). The doses will come from production of Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna or Johnson & Johnson stocks, marking the first time that US-controlled doses of vaccines authorized for use in the country will be shared overseas. It will boost the global vaccine sharing commitment from the US to 80 million. The announcement comes after the Biden administration's prior commitment to share about 60 million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine, which is not yet authorized for use in the US, by the end of June. The AstraZeneca doses will be available to ship once they clear a safety review by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

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## **Pharmacy on the front line**

### ***Calgary pharmacist says 'we're doing our best' on COVID vaccines***

Go behind the scenes of an extremely busy pharmacy counter with Robert Wong and his team in [this CBC video](#) as they administer COVID-19 vaccines to Albertans while navigating strong emotions, new booking systems, changing eligibility, cancellations or no-shows, and supply shortages.

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## **In-depth**

### ***'Game-changer': How mRNA COVID-19 vaccine technology could help fight other diseases***

The use of messenger RNA technology (mRNA) in the creation of COVID-19 vaccines has made a considerable impact in the fight against the coronavirus, with the first doses being given to people less than a year after the pandemic was declared. As this [report from Global News](#) explains, while it doesn't mean a vaccine for something like cancer is coming as quickly as it did for COVID-19, it could still have a big impact on the fight against other diseases and viruses going forward.

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## Worth repeating

“Despite a vaccine rollout that has had false starts and setbacks, most of our fellow citizens have not been deterred. They see vaccination for what it is: the route back to normal life, for each of us individually and all of us collectively.” — The *Globe and Mail*, [in an editorial](#) lauding Canadians who have stepped up to get their vaccine, as our vaccination rate for the first dose will soon overtake that of the US.

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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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