

From: Public & Professional Affairs Department
Sent: November 25, 2020 6:12 PM
Subject: The Weekly: CPhA's COVID-19 Update for November 25



November 25, 2020

Provincial

Ontario deploys rapid COVID-19 tests that can turnaround results in under 20 minutes to hospitals, long-term care homes

The Ontario government has started to deploy rapid COVID-19 tests to hospitals, long-term care homes and regions of high-transmission as the province continues to combat a second wave of COVID-19 [reports CP24](#). Premier Doug Ford, along with the health minister and minister of long-term care, made the announcement on November 24. “We have moved these tests out as quickly as possible, making sure that we do the necessary examination of the ones that have been received making sure that they’re ready to go, then making sure that we have the right allocations going to the right places,” Health Minister Christine Elliott said at the press conference.

BC negotiates COVID-19 vaccine rollout as Canada waits behind other countries

Health officials in BC are working with provincial and federal counterparts on who will receive the COVID-19 vaccine and how, even as the prime minister revealed Canada will not be at the front of the line for approved vaccines, [says CTV](#). “The government of BC is working with the BC Centre for Disease Control, Health Canada, the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) and other provinces and territories to make sure British Columbia has the logistics in place to deploy a COVID-19 vaccine as soon as it’s available and approved for use,” said a spokesperson. “As Dr. (Bonnie) Henry has said, we are optimistic that a vaccine could be available in early 2021 to add to the tools British Columbia has to stop this pandemic and keep people safe.”

What Quebec’s COVID-19 vaccination campaign might look like and the challenges to come

In a [CBC article](#) discussing the challenges of distributing a COVID-19 vaccine, Quebec’s Minister of Health, Christian Dubé, said the current flu vaccination campaign has managed to reach 200,000 people per week, and that his department is discussing options to scale that up quickly depending on the availability of COVID-19 vaccines. “Are we going to go to the pharmacists, or other medical professionals ... we’re in the middle of preparing for that. Those discussions have started. That means in the coming weeks not only will we be ready, I would tell you we already are,” Dubé said. There are complex issues to manage in any vaccination effort; for example, the winter rollout will be complicated by the fact that most of the leading candidate vaccines will require two injections, with the second coming between 2 and 4 weeks after the first.

Flu clinics testing record-keeping app to ease rollout of COVID-19 vaccine

Staff at Ottawa’s Bruyère flu clinics are piloting new technology that tracks a family’s immunization records through an app to prepare for a paperless COVID-19 vaccination rollout, [according to CBC](#). Clinic Flow, created by CANImmunize, is being used to book flu shot appointments at 2 clinics run by the health-care group. Dr. Sufian Zayed, a family physician and unit director of the Bruyère Family Medicine Centre, said his staff expected to be overwhelmed by the current flu season, but said the new system helped mitigate those fears.

National

Community pharmacy is the missing piece in the COVID-19 vaccine puzzle

A national COVID-19 vaccination strategy will put tremendous pressure on federal and provincial public health leaders and systems. With the right investment, planning and partnership, community pharmacy can be the missing piece to this puzzle, says Dimitris Polygenis, pharmacist and president of pharmaceutical solutions and specialty health for McKesson Canada, in an [opinion piece in the Star](#). “The COVID-19 vaccines showing the most promise require 1 to 3 doses to be effective, and those doses have to be administered anywhere between 2 and 8 weeks of each other. Patients will not fully benefit from a vaccine if they do not show up or return on time for subsequent doses. Pharmacists have the tools and experience to ensure that this happens,” he writes.

Canada will get COVID-19 vaccines after other countries due to lack of manufacturing capacity, PM says

Canadians will get COVID-19 vaccines later than people in other countries because of a lack of domestic vaccine manufacturing capacity, says Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, and [reported by the Globe and Mail](#). Canada is at a “disadvantage” because, unlike countries such as Germany, Britain and the United States, Canada can’t manufacture vaccines at home, Trudeau said at a news conference in Ottawa. His concession comes as pressure on the federal government mounts to explain when and how Canada will be able to roll out vaccines for Canadians and after the federal government said in August that Canada would be able to make 250,000 doses of vaccines by November. Germany, Britain and the US have all said their citizens could start getting COVID-19 jabs as early as next month and Spain has said it plans to start its vaccination campaign in January. Trudeau wouldn’t say when Canadians can look forward to the return to normal that would come with a vaccine rollout.

COVID-19 vaccines won’t ship to Canada until they are approved for use here

Canada will not receive any of the millions of pre-purchased vaccine doses the federal government has ordered unless and until Health Canada approves the vaccine’s safety, [says the Star](#). Contracts signed with the most promising COVID-19 vaccine manufacturers to date do not provide for delivery to Canada or long-term storage here while regulatory approval is still pending, Public Services and Procurement Minister Anita Anand said on November 24. And even if the federal independent regulators swiftly approve any of the 3 vaccine candidates they are currently reviewing, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau acknowledged that Canada will likely be behind countries like Germany, Britain, the US and others where those vaccine manufacturers are based.

Health Canada grants emergency-use authorization to Eli Lilly’s COVID-19 antibody treatment

Health Canada has authorized Eli Lilly’s monoclonal antibody therapy for emergency use in helping treat COVID-19 infections, [says CTV](#). The single antibody treatment, bamlanivimab, [has been approved for use](#) in adults and children aged 12 or older with mild to moderate coronavirus infections. Lilly says the treatment is for those who risk progressing to severe COVID-19 symptoms or hospitalization. It is not authorized for patients who are already hospitalized or require oxygen. On November 24 Public Services and Procurement Minister Anita Anand [announced](#) that the federal government has agreed to buy as many as 26,000 doses of the drug, developed in partnership with the Vancouver company AbCellera Biologics.

International

Impact of COVID-19 on pharmacists’ mental health and wellbeing

The Royal Pharmaceutical Society (RPS), in partnership with charity Pharmacist Support, have published the second annual [survey on mental health and wellbeing](#), which demonstrates the impact of COVID-19 on pharmacists. More than half (54%) of pharmacists believed that COVID-19 had impacted their mental health and wellbeing to a partial extent while nearly a third (31%) said it had to a significant extent. When asked more generally about their work, 72% of respondents said it had negatively affected their mental health and wellbeing, with reasons given including increased demand, inadequate staffing, long hours and a lack of breaks and time off. This figure is comparable with the 2019 survey (74%), showing that while COVID-19 may have exacerbated these issues, they pre-existed the pandemic.

Asymptomatic pharmacy staff to get at-home tests

Asymptomatic National Health Service (NHS) staff working in a community pharmacy in England will be able to test themselves for COVID-19 at home twice a week, [C+D reports](#). All “patient-facing” NHS staff will receive “appropriate training” that will enable them to use the lateral flow tests at home twice a week and get the results back before going to work. The announcement was made by NHS England and NHS Improvement (NHSE&I) national medical director Professor Stephen Powis, national director for emergency and elective care Pauline Philip, and chief nursing officer Ruth May [in a letter](#) to NHS staff in early November.

FIP guidance document on COVID-19 diagnostic testing methods and devices available

A [guidance document](#) produced by the International Pharmaceutical Federation (FIP) Testing Working Group has been published to help pharmacists advise people on COVID-19 tests. The document evaluates the diagnostic testing methods and devices currently available, covers how different types of diagnostic test work and how the results are interpreted. It also addresses the question of whether or not the presence of antibodies confers immunity to COVID-19, and makes recommendations on information to give to patients who have tested positive or negative.

AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine is 70% effective on average, early data show

AstraZeneca said on November 23 that its coronavirus vaccine reduced the risk of COVID-19 infection by an average of 70.4%, according to an interim analysis of large Phase 3 trials conducted in the United Kingdom and Brazil, [STAT reports](#). The AstraZeneca vaccine, developed in partnership with Oxford University, is the third vaccine to announce positive clinical trial results this month. Two other vaccine candidates, 1 from partners Pfizer and BioNTech and the other from Moderna, showed 95% efficacy against COVID-19 infections in their respective clinical trials.

Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine could get UK approval this week

The United Kingdom could give regulatory approval to Pfizer-BioNTech’s COVID-19 vaccine this week, even before the United States authorizes it, the Telegraph news site said on November 22 and [reported by Reuters](#). Citing government sources, it said British regulators were about to start a formal appraisal of the vaccine and that NHS had been told to be ready to administer it by December 1. The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) said last week that it would meet on December 10 to discuss whether to authorize the vaccine.

US approves Regeneron antibody treatment

A COVID-19 antibody therapy used to treat US President Donald Trump was approved by the FDA on November 21 for people who aren’t yet hospitalized by the disease but are at high risk, [says Agence France-Presse](#). The green light for drug maker Regeneron came after REGEN-COV2, a combination of 2 lab-made antibodies, was shown to reduce COVID-19-related hospitalizations or emergency room visits in patients with underlying conditions. “Authorizing these monoclonal antibody therapies may help outpatients avoid hospitalization and alleviate the burden on our health care system,” said Stephen Hahn, commissioner of the FDA.

WHO says no evidence remdesivir works for severe infections

Remdesivir should not be used in hospitals because there is no evidence it works, the World Health Organization (WHO) has advised and [the Guardian has reported](#). The WHO issued what it calls a “living guideline,” which can be updated as evidence comes in, largely as a result of a Solidarity trial it led in several countries. Solidarity allocated patients randomly to several drugs including remdesivir and found that those who took it were no more likely to survive severe COVID-19 than those who did not.

Worth Repeating

“Christmas is not going to be having any kind of large group interactions. Even with family, you’ve got to really think twice. Avoid non-essential travel. Keep to your current household contacts as much as possible.” — Canada’s top public health officer, Dr. Theresa Tam, warning that this year’s Christmas is going to be different.

“Turn your fear and anxiety around and say ‘what am I gonna do to bring a sense of control for myself and a sense of control for

my community?’” — Nova Scotia Chief Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Robert Strang, announcing ramping up of restrictions in the province in wake of a spike in COVID-19 cases.

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

This weekly COVID-19 update is compiled by the Canadian Pharmacists Association. To unsubscribe, please reply to this email with “Unsubscribe” in the subject line.

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