

# COVID-19 AND CONTROLLED DRUGS AND SUBSTANCES

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Health Canada issued [temporary exemptions](#) for prescriptions of controlled substances, which permit pharmacists to extend, transfer and accept verbal orders, and permit pharmacy employees to deliver prescriptions. Health Canada also published an [interpretive guide](#) to clarify its interpretation of the prescribing-related activities pharmacists are permitted to conduct under the CDSA and its regulations. As pharmacists' scope of practice is established at the provincial/territorial level, the table below illustrates how the exemptions and Health Canada interpretations have been implemented across Canada.

	BC	AB	SK	MB	ON	QC	NB	NS	PE	NL	YT	NT	NU
Accept verbal orders	✓	✓	✓	L <sup>1</sup>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗
Accept orders by fax	✓	✓ <sup>2</sup>	✓	✓	✓ <sup>2</sup>	✓ <sup>2</sup>	✓ <sup>2</sup>	✓	✓ <sup>2</sup>	✓ <sup>2</sup>	✗	✗	✗
Transfer Rx to another pharmacist	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ <sup>3</sup>	✗
Extend/renew Rx	✗	✓ <sup>4</sup>	✓	✗	✓ <sup>5,6</sup>	✓	✓	✓ <sup>4</sup>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
Change drug formulation, dose and regimen, etc. <sup>7</sup>	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓ <sup>5</sup>	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Deliver Rx	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗

**L** Limited

1. Verbal orders may only be accepted by pharmacists for residents of a personal care home.
2. Pharmacists can always accept faxed orders for medications under the CDSA.
3. Only if there is a shortage of the prescribed substance at the transferring pharmacy.
4. Some limitations in place with regard to indications for treatment.
5. Prior to adapting or renewing, pharmacists are expected to collaborate with the prescriber. If collaboration is not possible, pharmacists may proceed with the adaptation or renewal for continuity of care and notify the prescriber within a reasonable period of time.
6. Ontario pharmacists may refill a prescription for a benzodiazepine or other targeted substance if more than one year has elapsed since the date it was written.
7. Pharmacists may not increase the dose of prescribed controlled substances independently, except in Quebec.

CPhA does not guarantee the accuracy of the information contained above.  
Please consult the provincial regulations and practice guidance available through the provincial regulatory authorities.

Revised November 2021



Canadian Pharmacists Association  
Association des pharmaciens du Canada