

# COVID-19 Guidance for Community Pharmacies

This document has been updated from the April 22, 2020 version. The following changes have been made:

- Addition to the list of signs or symptoms of COVID-19

**Note:** This guidance provides basic information only. It is not intended to take the place of medical advice, diagnosis or treatment.

**For the management of cases and contacts, Regional Public Health will provide the direction for follow up and advise if there is a need for employer action.**

## What you need to know

- Community pharmacies can play an important role in supporting the response to suspected cases of COVID-19 and in preventing the spread of the virus.
- Stockpiling of prescription medication by patients beyond a 30-day supply is **not recommended**. This will help ensure that shortages of drugs are not experienced.
- It is important to take the proper precautions in community pharmacies to protect both staff and clients

## General Advice to Pharmacies

There are several things that pharmacies can do to prevent themselves, their staff, and patients from becoming sick with this virus:

Post signage on entrance to pharmacy area informing persons to self-identify if they have 2 or more of the following symptoms:

- Fever or signs of fever
- new cough or worsening chronic cough
- runny nose
- headache
- sore throat
- new onset of fatigue
- new onset of muscle pain
- diarrhea
- loss of taste or smell

- Similar messaging should be communicated on telephone messages and websites.
  - Tissues, waste container and alcohol-based hand sanitizer should be available to clients and staff in pharmacies.
  - Align with the directive on the continuous use of surgical/procedure masks by health-care workers (HCWs). This directive is in response to the emerging evidence that asymptomatic, pre-symptomatic or minimally symptomatic individuals can transmit COVID-19 and is meant to prevent transmission of COVID-19 by HCWs to their clients and co-workers. All HCWs in nonclinical settings must wear a surgical/procedure mask when physical distancing cannot be maintained (e.g. Pharmacists providing counselling to clients who cannot maintain the 2 meters physical distancing).
  - Increasing the frequency of cleaning and disinfecting high-touch surfaces is significant in controlling the spread of viruses, and other microorganisms. All surfaces, especially those general surfaces that are frequently touched, should be cleaned at least twice daily and when soiled.
  - The following hard-surface disinfectant products meet Health Canada's requirements for emerging viral pathogens. These authorized disinfectants may be used against SARS-CoV-2, the coronavirus that causes COVID-19. <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/disinfectants/covid-19/list.html>
  - Review infection prevention and control/occupational health and safety policies and procedures with staff. For example, staff should not come to work when they are sick.
  - Pharmacists and staff should monitor for symptoms:
    - If a Pharmacist develops COVID-19 symptoms (two or more of the following- new onset/exacerbation of chronic cough, fever or signs of fever, sore throat, runny nose, headache) while away from their work, they should immediately call the dedicated line 1- 833-475-0724 to arrange testing, stay off work and self-isolate.
    - If a staff develops COVID-19 symptoms while away from work, they should call 811, stay off work and self-isolate.
    - If a Pharmacist or staff develops symptoms of COVID-19 while at work they should:
      - avoid further patient contact
      - immediately exclude themselves from work
      - do not remove their mask if wearing one or don one immediately

- wash their hands
  - Pharmacists call the dedicated line to arrange testing and staff call 811.
- For additional information on infection prevention and control, please refer to the Public Health Agency of Canada website: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/infectious-diseases/nosocomial-occupational-infections/routine-practices-additional-precautions-preventing-transmission-infection-healthcare-settings.html>

## Screening

- Pharmacies should undertake active screening (asking questions about symptoms and travel/exposures) and passive screening (signage) of patients for COVID-19.
- All patients should be screened over the phone before arriving at the pharmacy whenever possible.

### Sample Screening Questions:

1. Is the client experiencing-
  - new onset/exacerbation of chronic cough
  - fever or signs of fever
  - sore throat
  - runny nose
  - headache
  - new onset of fatigue
  - new onset of muscle pain
  - diarrhea
  - loss of taste or smell
2. Has the client has been advised to self-isolate?

### ***If a client is on the phone and answers yes to either of the two questions above:***

- the client reporting symptoms should be advised to call Telecare 811 for further guidance.
- The client should get someone from outside of their household to pick up any necessary medications; or
- the pharmacy should arrange for the delivery of medications, if this service is available.

- The medication should be delivered to the client by either of the means above without direct contact with the client (e.g. placed in mailbox).

***If a client presents in person and answers yes to either of the two questions above:***

- The client needs to be separated from other patients and staff so that they are at least 2 meters apart (use a separate room where available) and given a surgical/procedure/cloth mask if available.
- Pharmacy staff should avoid close contact with the client.
- Clients should be referred to the COVID Community Assessment Centers by calling 811 where appropriate and advise client to self isolate at home.
- Pharmacists should consult with public health if further direction is required.  
The following are hyperlinks to local Public Health Offices:
  - [Public Health Region 1 \(Moncton\)](#)
  - [Public Health Region 2 \(Saint John\)](#)
  - [Public Health Region 3 \(Fredericton\)](#)
  - [Public Health Region 4 \(Edmundston\)](#)
  - [Public Health Region 5 \(Campbellton\)](#)
  - [Public Health Region 6 \(Bathurst\)](#)
- Client-contact surfaces (i.e., surfaces within 2 meters of the client who has self- identified) should be cleaned and disinfected as soon as possible. When choosing an environmental cleaning product, it is important to follow product instructions for dilution, contact time and safe use, and to ensure that the product is registered in Canada with a Drug Identification Number (DIN) and labelled as a broad-spectrum virucide.

***If a client who presents answers no to two questions:***

They **should not** be directed to call Telecare 811 but rather should be referred to the Government of New Brunswick website for more information.

## **Renewal, Extensions and Emergency Refills of Prescriptions**

The best available information on the COVID-19 virus suggests that older people and those with pre- existing conditions should limit their potential exposure by remaining at home as much as possible. These patients may therefore seek early fills and / or deliveries of prescriptions to enable self-isolation. In addition, pharmacies may use their judgement and the options available to them to reduce non-essential physician visits, including those for prescriptions renewals.

Pharmacists should not hesitate to provide emergency fills, particularly in the case of expired prescriptions that would otherwise require a prescriber visit.

### **Worker Safety**

- Pharmacies should have written measures and procedures for worker safety, developed in consultation with the joint health and safety committee or health and safety representative including measures and procedures for infection prevention and control.
- Signage should be posted at the point of entry to the pharmacy and at reception areas for clients with symptoms and a relevant exposure history to self-identify, perform hand hygiene, wear a mask, and have access to tissues and a waste receptacle.

### **For More Information on COVID-19**

For more information on COVID-19, please consult the Department of Health's website on COVID-19 at [www.qnb.ca](http://www.qnb.ca).

For all other questions related to pharmacy practice, pharmacists should contact the New Brunswick College of Pharmacists.