Ontario

Ministry of Health

COVID-19 Guidance: Community Pharmacies

Version 4 – June 19, 2020

Highlights of changes

- Reference to COVID-19 Operational Requirements: Health Sector Restart document
- Reference to COVID-19 Reference Document for Symptoms and COVID-19 Patient Screening Guidance Document
- Expanded guidance on what to do with a positive screening
- Expanded guidance on occupational health and safety, including infection prevention and control guidance

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This guidance provides basic information only. It is not intended to take the place of medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Pharmacists should use their professional judgement and follow this guidance where possible. In the event of a conflict between this Guidance and a Directive of the Chief Medical Officer of Health, the Directive prevails.

- Please check the Ministry of Health (MOH) COVID-19 website regularly for updated versions of this document, the case definition, reference document for symptoms, testing guidance, mental health resources, and other COVID-19 related information.
- The latest version of the COVID-19 Reference Document for Symptoms and COVID-19 Patient Screening Guidance Document are available and updated on the MOH COVID-19 website.
- Please check the Directives, Memorandums and Other Resources page regularly for the most up to date directives.

General

1. All health care providers (HCPs) at community pharmacies should adhere to guidance provided in the COVID-19 Operational Requirements: Health Sector Restart document. This includes considerations for: recommended risk assessments, hierarchy of hazard controls, physical capacity/environment, critical supplies and equipment, health human resources, sector inter-dependencies and collaboration, infection prevention and control, and occupational health and safety.

Active and Passive Screening

2. All pharmacies should undertake active screening (over the phone and for any patients presenting to the pharmacy staff with illness symptoms) and passive screening (voice recording, on websites, and signage at points of entry to the pharmacy). The latest COVID-19 Patient Screening Guidance Document on the MOH COVID-19 website should be used and may be adapted as needed and appropriate for screening purposes.
3. Community pharmacies have a shared responsibility for informing and educating the public on COVID-19, including promoting infection control and preventative measures.

Positive Screening: What to do

Positive screening over the phone

4. A patient who screens positive for COVID-19 over the phone should be referred to a local testing location or emergency department as appropriate based on where testing is offered in the patient's community. Patients with severe symptoms should be directed to the emergency department.

    - Pharmacies can use the Ontario assessment centre locator to direct patients to nearby testing locations. Assessment centres should accept all symptomatic patients referred for testing.

    - Patients should be instructed to self-isolate immediately and until test results are received and further instructions are provided.

Positive screening at the community pharmacy

5. A patient who screens positive through active screening by the pharmacist or self identifies as screening positive while at the community pharmacy must be separated from other visitors and staff so that they are at least two metres apart (use a separate room where available) and given a surgical/procedure mask, if available and they do not already have one, while pharmacy staff call their [local public health unit](#) and a plan for travel and further COVID-19 assessment is made.

6. If a patient is very ill, the pharmacy staff should first call an ambulance and let the paramedic operator know that the patient may have COVID-19 prior to contacting local public health.

Ensuring continuity of care

7. A patient who screens positive or is in self isolation should be advised to get someone from outside of their household to pick up their medications or the pharmacy should arrange for the delivery of medications, if this service is available. The pharmacist should ensure appropriate patient care is maintained (e.g., follow-up with the patient over the phone and provide any necessary counselling).

8. The medication should be delivered to the patient by either of the means above without direct contact with the patient. Pharmacists should exercise professional judgement to determine the most appropriate process taking into account the particulars of the medication with respect to security and storage (e.g., if placed in mailbox, ensure documentation of the reason for not obtaining a signature, have the delivery person call the patient once the medication is at door/mailbox to confirm they have come outside to get it, provide follow-up counselling by phone).

Testing for COVID-19

9. All testing for COVID-19 will take place in hospitals or a testing location (e.g., emergency departments, drive-thru testing centres, and/or assessment centres).

10. If patients are referred to a hospital or an [assessment centre](#), the pharmacy should make efforts to ensure that the patient has safe arrangements for travel to the hospital or testing location that maintains isolation of the patient (i.e., patient should wear a surgical/procedure mask and should not take public transit).

Reporting of Positive Screening

11. COVID-19 is a designated disease of public health significance (O. Reg. 135/18) and thus reportable under the *Health Protection and Promotion Act*.

12. Pharmacy professionals should contact their local public health unit to report any probable or confirmed cases of COVID-19.

Occupational Health & Safety

13. 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.

14. All staff in the pharmacy should self-monitor for COVID-19 symptoms at home and at work. Pharmacies should ensure that all staff who work in their settings are aware of the symptoms of COVID-19 and are instructed to not come to work if they are feeling ill, or return home from work if they develop any symptoms. The COVID-19 Quick Reference Public Health Guidance on Testing and Clearance has specific guidance on how to ensure a safe return to work for HCPs.

15. Patient-contact surfaces (i.e., areas within two metres of the patient who has screened positive) should be disinfected as soon as possible (refer to PIDAC Routine Practices and Additional Precautions In All Health Care Settings for more information about environmental cleaning).

16. All plexiglass barriers, if installed at the pharmacy, are to be included in routine cleaning (e.g., daily) using a cleaning product that will not affect the integrity or function of the barrier.

17. If a patient or staff member was in the pharmacy and later tests positive for COVID-19, pharmacies, if aware, are encouraged to call their local public health unit for advice on their potential exposure and implications for continuation of work. More details on staff illness are available in the COVID-19 Operational Requirements: Health Sector Restart document.