



Purpose

On March 18, 2020, the B.C Provincial Health Officer declared a provincial state of emergency as COVID-19 continues to spread in the province. This document is intended to support BCPhA members in addressing the state of emergency, while protecting their staff and patients as much as possible. The guidance includes measures drawn sources including the College of Pharmacists of British Columbia, the Ministry of Health and the BC Centre for Disease Control.

PODSA bylaws require pharmacy managers to establish policies and procedures for emergency preparedness (s.18(2)c(iv) emergency preparedness).

Please note the following contact information:

Local Health Unit

Regional Medical Health Officer

Pharmacy Manager / Head Office

Emergency Preparedness Plan

Pharmacy managers should consider some of the following:

- Assigning roles to pharmacy staff to manage COVID-19 response.
 - Maintaining common staff resource for all relevant COVID-19 updates (e.g. PharmaCare, College, BCPhA updates)
 - Regular meetings/email to updates for staff on COVID-19
 - Cleaning schedule
- Establish/disseminate plans for preventing pharmacy exposure to potential/actual exposure.
- Establish/disseminate protocol for management of confirmed COVID-19 exposure in pharmacy (*BCPhA is still awaiting additional direction from the Province on post-exposure procedures, but calling 8-1-1 or the local health unit would be reasonable first steps, additional direction will be provided*).
- Review COVID-19 related procedures with all pharmacy staff to ensure consistent application regardless of staffing (e.g. days supply limits, emergency refills etc).

Adjusting Pharmacy Operations

During this epidemic, it is important for to minimize crowding and handling of prescriptions in the pharmacy to prevent the risk of virus transmission. Example initiatives taken by pharmacies across B.C include:

- Provide adequate quantities of medications without encouraging stockpiling. (For emergency supplies – up to 30 days; for regular fills - if appropriate and agreed with the patient, limit to 30 days' supply otherwise pharmacies can continue to provide up to maximum days' supply as indicated on PharmaNet; for early refills – for period of self-isolation).
- Temporarily suspend non-essential pharmacy activities that has the potential to increase exposure e.g. collection of patient medication returns.
- Work with prescribers to fax and call in prescriptions
- Allow patients to call in regarding refills and renewals, including emergency supplies.
- Provide consultations via telephone/Skype etc.
- Designate a parking staff for elderly or immunocompromised patients so that they can avoid having



to come into the pharmacy, or encourage an asymptomatic patient representative (e.g. friend, relative, carer) to collect their medication, or arrange for a delivery.

- Actively reach out to at-risk patients and see if they need assistance.
- Develop a protocol for delivery agents to maintain physical distancing when delivering medications to patients' homes.

Preventative/Protective Measures

- Display [patient-facing posters](#) in your door/window areas and in the waiting room to raise awareness of symptoms and redirect symptomatic patients from entering the pharmacy.
- Encourage patients to call the pharmacy ahead of time/before visiting the pharmacy so the pharmacy can be prepared. See BCPhA patient handout "Your Pharmacist Can Help".
- Consider updating the automated telephone system to direct patients to automated refill-services and resources that can answer frequently asked questions (e.g. [BC COVID-19 Symptom Self-Assessment Tool](#), BC HealthLink, 8-1-1, BCCDC)
- Keep alcohol-based hand sanitizer at each patient contact point in the pharmacy
- Keep tissues and appropriate waste containers at each patient contact point and waiting area.
- Encourage staff to maintain a 2-metre distance between themselves and patients (including when going into OTC areas).
- Avoid touching OTC products and passing them to patients.
- Identify 2-metre distance between seats in the waiting area, line-up areas etc. (e.g. use floor taping indicating distances, use bold signage)
- Consider using physical barriers (e.g. Plexiglass, plastic films) along the front counters, with a small open/section at drop off/pick-up stations.
- Consider designating an area 2 metres away from staff or patients for patients displaying symptoms of COVID-19. Alcohol-based hand sanitizer, tissues and a lined waste container should be made available in this space.
- [Disinfect all frequently touched surfaces](#) (e.g., counter, door handle, touch screens, chair etc.) at least two to three times daily, and immediately after a symptomatic patient has left.
 - Consider wiping/disinfect shared objects (e.g. pin pads, pens) after every patient use.
 - Use Products with a Drug Identification Number (DIN) and labeled as a broad-spectrum virucide.
 - 10ml bleach to 990ml water also an effective disinfecting solution
- If available, consider using personal protective equipment (mask, gloves, long sleeve gown, eye protection) if coming into close contact (e.g. vaccinations) with patients displaying symptoms of respiratory illness or suspected of COVID-19 infection. ([BCCDC steps to putting on/off PPE](#))
- Promote regular thorough hand washing for 20 seconds with soap and warm water. Use disposable towels to dry hands.
- Promote self-isolation for staff returning from travel or displaying symptoms of respiratory illness.
- Promote use of masks and gloves for staff displaying symptoms of respiratory illness who are essential to the operation of the pharmacy.
- Staff should be encouraged to bring a change of clothes to wear following completion of their shift at the pharmacy.

Managing suspected COVID-19 Infection in the pharmacy

- Identification: If a patient or staff member has symptoms such as shortness of breath, coughing, or fever (more than 37.6°C), recently travelled to an epidemic area or out of Canada and/or come into contact with anyone infected,



- Call 9-1-1 if a patient presents with the following symptoms:
 - Severe difficulty breathing (e.g. struggling to breathe or speaking in single words)
 - Severe chest pain
 - Having a very hard time waking up
 - Feeling confused
 - Losing consciousness
- If not, and the pharmacy does not allow for physical distancing, ask patient to return to vehicle (where applicable) and speak over the phone.
- Screen patients using the [BC COVID-19 Symptom Self-Assessment Tool](#). This tool helps determine whether a patient needs further assessment or testing for COVID-19.
- Follow instructions as prompted.
- Do not send or advice patients to go to the emergency department, their family doctor, walk-in clinic unless their symptoms worsen.
- Consider providing patients with pamphlets/print outs about COVID-19 such as the HealthLink BC's COVID-19 [resource as appropriate](#).

Hand Hygiene

Hand hygiene is important for the prevention of transmission of microorganisms and viruses. Staff working in the pharmacy must follow basic hand hygiene practices to ensure the health and safety of patients and staff members.

Transmission of viruses occur when hands move from:

- Pharmacist to patients
- Pharmacist to environment (computer, cash)
- Patient to environment (payment processing terminal, cash)
- Environment to patient or pharmacist

Hand hygiene works because it breaks the chain of infection. When working in the pharmacy and patients, pharmacists should:

- Clean hands before: Touching a patient or surroundings, putting on gloves
- Clean hands after: Touching a patient or surroundings.

Hand-washing is still the best method to prevent transmission of viruses. According to Fraser Health, the correct way to wash your hands is:

- Wet your hands under warm running water
- Scrub all parts of your hands with plain soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Make sure you create a good lather and scrub fingertips and under the nails.
- Rinse hands under warm running water to remove later for 10 seconds.
- Use paper towel to pat dry hands, to turn off the tap with paper towel and to open the bathroom doors.

When hand washing equipment is not available, alcohol-based hand rub may be used. Effective use of an alcohol-based hand rub (without water) includes:

- Applying a loonie-size amount of alcohol-based hand rub
- Cleaning your hands in the same way you would with soap and water
- Drying your hands completely before performing any tasks.