

COVID-19 Pandemic

A Pharmacist's Guide to Pandemic Preparedness



**PHARMACISTS
MANITOBA**

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DISCLAIMER: The information provided in this document is intended to assist pharmacists with planning for pandemic emergency preparedness and does not replace professional judgement and responsibilities. It is intended to supplement materials provided by regulatory authorities, and should there be any discrepancies, municipal, provincial, and federal laws, policies and guidelines shall prevail. The information provided in this document are current at the time of publication. The decision for use and application of this document is the responsibility of the user. Pharmacists Manitoba assumes no liability for such use and application or any resulting outcomes.

WHAT HAS PHARMACISTS MANITOBA BEEN DOING ON YOUR BEHALF REGARDING COVID-19?

From the onset of provincial communications about Novel Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19), Pharmacists Manitoba continued to be in contact with Manitoba Health, Seniors and Active Living on the role of pharmacy professionals and pharmacies as essential and critical service providers in our health care system. Pharmacists Manitoba staff have been active in a variety of ways advocating and promoting your value toward population health and in maintaining continuity of care. In addition, Pharmacists Manitoba has frequently highlighted the risks pharmacy professionals at the front-line face every single day and calling for their inclusion on the list of essential practitioners requiring access to government-supplied personal protective equipment (PPE).

Key highlights of our activities include:

- Direct communication with the Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living
- Participation on CPhA's Pharmacy Leader Stakeholder Forum
- Establishing Pharmacists Manitoba as a critical service provider in Manitoba and pharmacy representation on the Manitoba Emergency Coordination Centre
- Communication with the Non-Insured Benefit Branch, Provincial Drug Programs, regarding drug supply concerns and issues
- Requests for inclusion of pharmacy professionals on the list of essential front-line practitioners to access government-supplied PPE
- Communication of issues and concerns regarding preparedness and planning for community pharmacy professionals
- Ongoing communication and sharing of resources with all provincial professional pharmacy associations

Pharmacists Manitoba continues to dialogue with the Manitoba government and we will continue to provide updates to members on these and other initiatives and requests as they become available.

PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

As the most accessible front-line healthcare provider, we all recognize that pharmacy professionals play a critical role in providing patient care and supporting the needs of our healthcare system. During a pandemic, it is important that pharmacists, technicians and assistants ensure that patients are receiving the care, education and guidance that they want and need. This document has been developed to assist pharmacy professionals with developing and implementing a plan to address the COVID-19 pandemic by ensuring continuity of care for patients, as well as minimizing the risks to pharmacy staff and the economy. As always, every pharmacy, situation and patient presentation will be different and unique, and thus, professional judgement will need to be applied and documented for your solutions to patient-specific situations that are not clearly defined by either standards of practice or regulation.

Care for patients is at the heart of the pharmacy profession. During the pandemic, you put yourself at even higher risk than you normally experience in the course of your work. We acknowledge the dedication and professionalism that underscores your service to public health. We also see your humanity and the vulnerability inherent in that service and are here to support you through this journey. Although the current version of this guide may not apply to all pharmacy settings, Pharmacists Manitoba will be working closely with the College of Pharmacists of Manitoba (CPhM), Canadian Pharmacists Association, Canadian Society of Hospital Pharmacists (CSHP) Manitoba Branch, provincial professional pharmacy associations and other stakeholders to continue to update this document.

In an effort to share information and best hospital pharmacy practices regarding COVID-19, CSHP has set up a special Pharmacy Specialty Network (PSN). You can join the COVID-19 PSN through www.QID.io.

The COVID-19 PSN is open-access for all members to post to and share information. A dedicated page on the CSHP website with additional resources is available at <https://www.cshp.ca/covid-19>.

LINKS TO KEY RESOURCES

- [Pharmacists Manitoba COVID-19 webpage](#)
- [Canadian Pharmacist Association COVID-19 Information for Pharmacists](#)
- [College of Pharmacist of Manitoba webpage](#)
 - [Pharmacist’s Professional Duty during and Emergency, Disaster or Pandemic Ethical Framework](#)
 - [Guidelines for ensuring pharmacy accessibility during a health crisis, or pandemic](#)
- [Manitoba Health, Seniors and Active Living COVID-19 webpage](#)
- [Shared Health Manitoba COVID-19 webpage](#)
- [Public Health Agency of Canada COVID-19 webpage](#)

BACKGROUNDER ON COVID-19 PANDEMIC

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is the disease caused by a new strain of coronavirus (novel coronavirus) called Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2).¹ Coronaviruses (CoV) are a family of viruses that are responsible for causing illnesses such as the common cold, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (SARS-CoV), and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (MERS-CoV).¹ These viruses are zoonotic, meaning that they are transmitted from animals to humans.¹

What are the symptoms of COVID-19?

Common symptoms of COVID-19^{1,2} include:

More common	Other potential symptoms
Fever	Sore throat
Dry cough (new or exacerbated)	Nasal congestion
Shortness of breath	Runny nose
Other breathing difficulties	Aches and pains
Tiredness or fatigue	Diarrhea

However, some individuals may be infected but are asymptomatic.² For others, the onset of symptoms is usually gradual and minor in nature.² It is estimated that 80 per cent of infected individuals will recover without any special treatment required, however, 1 in 6 may develop difficulty in breathing and become seriously ill.² Risk factors for serious illness include older adults and those with underlying medical conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, lung disease or cancer.²

What is the difference between seasonal influenza and COVID-19?

As both influenza and COVID-19 may present with very similar presentations, it is important that individuals who meet criteria for COVID-19 testing under the current [screening tool](#) are referred for further testing in order to confirm or refute a diagnosis of COVID-19. In other words, symptoms alone (in the absence of travel-related risks or close contact with someone who has travelled or has tested positive) should not trigger you to recommend that a patient needs to get tested for COVID-19 – cough/cold and seasonal influenza still persist in the general population. Table 1 highlights some of the similarities and differences between the two viruses:

Table 1: Influenza versus COVID-19^{3,4}

CHARACTERISTIC	INFLUENZA	COVID-19
CAUSE	Different types and strains of influenza virus	Severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2)
SYMPTOMS	Respiratory disease Fever, cough, body aches, fatigue, diarrhea Ranges from asymptomatic to mild, to severe to death	Respiratory disease Fever, cough, body aches, fatigue, diarrhea Ranges from asymptomatic to mild, to severe to death
ROUTES OF TRANSMISSION	Via contact, droplets and fomites	Via contact, droplets and fomites
SPEED OF TRANSMISSION	Serial interval (time between successive cases): 3 days	Serial interval (time between successive cases): 5-6 days
TREATMENT	Antivirals Symptomatic treatment	No known treatment; symptomatic treatment only
PREVENTION	Annual flu vaccine Handwashing, coughing into crook of elbow, social distancing, staying home when sick, etc.	No vaccine available Handwashing, coughing into crook of elbow, social distancing, staying home when sick, etc.
AT-RISK POPULATIONS	Children, pregnant women, older adults, individuals with underlying medical conditions or are immunosuppressed	Older adults, individuals with underlying medical conditions or are immunosuppressed
MORBIDITY AND MORTALITY	Estimated 1 billion cases worldwide Mortality rate <0.1%	Approximately 413,467 cases worldwide (as of March 25, 2020) ⁵ Mortality rate estimated to be between 3-4%

What impact will the pandemic have on the public?

As much is still being discovered about COVID-19, the exact impact it would have is yet to be determined. However, various factors may affect the impact that it may have on the general public including:⁶

- Virulence: determines illness severity and who is most at risk
- Population characteristics: some areas may have a larger proportion of individuals who are at higher risk of complications, such as older adults and individuals with underlying medical conditions

- Infection control: to-date, there is no vaccine to prevent or medication to treat COVID-19, however, implementation of infection control measures can influence the course of the disease
- Public attitudes and behaviours: adherence to infection control measures by the public, e.g. avoiding mass gatherings, staying home when sick, etc. will reduce the spread of the illness

IMPACT ON PHARMACY PROFESSIONALS AND PHARMACY OPERATIONS

It is important to bear in mind that the impacts of COVID-19 on pharmacy professionals and each practice setting will be highly variable and unique. As such, this section may not address all of the potential impacts but is intended to serve as a guide to help you best provide care for your patients and to protect yourselves and your staff in the process.

Depending on the practice setting, more time may be required for pharmacy professionals to:⁶

COMMUNITY PHARMACIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Answer questions regarding COVID-19 prevention, symptoms, and treatment Provide counselling on symptomatic treatment options Actively screen and triage/refer patients to public health for further assessment Dispense prescriptions for symptomatic treatments Handle requests from individuals attempting to stockpile medications Manage potential drug shortages Manage workflow and staff absences due to illness or caregiving obligations
HOSPITAL PHARMACIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Manage the increase in patients admitted to hospitals due to complications (including an increase in prescription volume and consultation requests for infectious diseases and drug monitoring) Manage potential drug shortages Manage workflow and staff absences due to illness or caregiving obligations
LONG-TERM CARE PHARMACIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Manage the increase in patients in self-isolation in LTC homes (including an increase in prescription volume and consultation requests for infectious diseases and drug monitoring) Manage potential drug shortages Manage workflow and staff absences due to illness or caregiving obligations

Active and Passive Screening

All community pharmacies should undertake [active screening](#) (over the phone, voice recording, on websites, and for any patients presenting to the pharmacy staff with illness symptoms) and passive screening ([signage](#) at points of entry to the pharmacy) using the latest [screening tool](#) for COVID-19.

A patient who screens positive over the phone must be advised to call Health Links – Info Santé (204-788-8200 or toll-free 1-888-315-9257). However, due to the extremely high volume of calls, pharmacy professionals should provide patients with realistic expectations of potentially very long wait times to speak to someone and that the Ministry of Health, Seniors and Active Living is working on increasing capacity to address this issue. Regardless, patients are advised not to show up to the hospital or assessment centre unannounced.

Designated assessment centres are located in dedicated spaces that will facilitate high-quality care, to protect broader patient populations. For a list of assessment centres in your area, consult the [Community Screening Locations](#) page on the Government of Manitoba COVID-19 website. Additional assessment centres may be established across the province in the coming weeks. Regions without an assessment centre will continue to be serviced by their local hospital or primary care settings. Those who require screening, assessment, and/or testing after hours will be referred by Health Links – Info Santé to urgent care sites and emergency departments. It is important that in all communications with patients, the message should consistently be

that symptomatic patients need to call Health Links – Info Santé BEFORE going directly to an assessment centre. Symptomatic patients are urged NOT to go directly into a health care or public health facility, as doing so puts others and the health care system at risk. Health Links – Info Santé will provide them with a risk assessment and instructions on next steps.

If a patient either meets the [criteria](#) for presumptive COVID-19 through active screening by the pharmacist or self-identifies as meeting the case definition while at the community pharmacy:

- The patient must be separated from other visitors and staff so that they are at least 2 metres apart (use a separate room where available).
- If available, a surgical/procedure mask should be provided to the patient.
- Like all health providers, pharmacy professionals are required to call Health Links – Info Santé and to coordinate a plan for patient transport to an assessment centre such as a designated hospital for a more in-depth assessment and confirmation of COVID-19.
- If the patient is very ill, the pharmacy staff must **call 9-1-1** and let the operator know that an ambulance is required for an ill patient who is **suspected to have COVID-19**. Once an ambulance has been called, the pharmacy should attempt to call the local public health unit to report the case.

Suspected Cases

If wait times for reaching the public health unit are excessively long and the patient is not sick enough to warrant a 9-1-1 call, instruct the patient to return home immediately to self-isolate and for them to contact Health Links – Info Santé (204-788-8200 or toll-free 1-888-315-9257).

Ensure Continuity of Care – What to Do Regarding Signatures for Rx Deliveries

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. Alternatively, the pharmacy should arrange for the delivery of medications if this service is available.

Pharmacists should consult CPhM's Practice Direction on [Drug Distribution](#) for guidance. While the Practice Direction on *Drug Distribution* stipulates that when using a mail or courier service, a signature by the patient or agent is required upon receipt of a delivered prescription, professional judgement should be applied and if a signature is not possible due to self-isolation reasons, then a message like "*Signature not received upon delivery due to patient self-isolation for COVID-19*" should be documented on the delivery log and prescription record. In general, medications should be delivered to the patient without direct contact with a self-isolated patient. If the patient is not under self-isolation but merely wants home delivery for convenience or to avoid public exposure, professional judgement should also be exercised. If a non-COVID-19-positive patient is still unwilling to provide a signature due to fear or anxiety, the delivery person should not obligate them to sign upon delivery and should again document the reason for non-signature. The pharmacy owner or designated manager should determine the most appropriate process, considering the particulars of the medication with respect to security and storage and articulate this process to the pharmacy team (e.g. medications should not be dropped off in a mailbox for retrieval at a later time).

Example Scenario – Delivery by the Pharmacy:

- It is advisable for pharmacy staff to confer with patients in self-isolation in advance of delivery and to arrange for an appropriate protocol, such as a plan to leave the medication in a mailbox or other container by the door to the patient's residence.

- A signature for receipt upon delivery will not be practical due to patient self-isolation. Therefore, documentation of the reason for lack of a signature will be required on the delivery log and prescription record (e.g. “*Signature not received upon delivery due to patient self-isolation for COVID-19*”).
- If a patient is not under self-isolation but is nonetheless fearful of exposure and refuses to sign, the documentation can be something like “*Signature not received upon delivery due to patient fear of exposure to COVID-19*”).
- Upon delivery and depositing the medication at the door, the delivery driver should call the patient immediately to advise them to immediately retrieve the medication. This is particularly important for medications that are temperature-sensitive or for narcotic/controlled substances.

In all cases, the pharmacist should ensure appropriate patient care is maintained (e.g. follow-up with the patient over the phone and provide any necessary counselling).

Patient Education

Pharmacists have a shared responsibility with other front-line healthcare providers for informing and educating the public on COVID-19, including promoting infection control and preventative measures. As one of the most trusted of all healthcare professionals, pharmacists should ensure they remain up to date with current information about COVID-19 in order to provide concise and credible information to patients. Pharmacists should be prepared to provide counselling and education to address patient concerns with regards to symptom identification, supportive management, and when and where to seek medical attention.⁶

Pharmacists Manitoba recommends reviewing daily the [Pharmacists Manitoba coronavirus webpage](#) as well as the [CPhM website](#), and coronavirus webpages from [MHSAL](#) and [Shared Health](#), including subpages for both the public and healthcare professionals for more information.

Other valuable resources include [Public Health Agency of Canada](#), [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), and [World Health Organization](#). An excellent collection of COVID-19 resources for pharmacists is available on the [ID Stewardship website](#). Pharmacists should be aware that many subscription resources such as [Up-to-Date](#) and the [Sanford Guide to Antimicrobials](#) have made their COVID-19 resources open-access.

In addition to educating the public about COVID-19, it is also important for pharmacists to assist patients with their pandemic planning as it relates to medications. Useful tips for pharmacists to provide patients include:⁷

- Keep common over-the-counter medications on-hand such as medications for fever, colds, and allergies.
- Check to make sure prescription medications are up to date. This does not mean stockpiling medications, but rather ensuring they have adequate supply, e.g. if they only have 7-10 days’ worth of medication left, they should call the pharmacy to request a refill.
- Inform patients about the pharmacy’s delivery service, if available, that can deliver medications to them if they are unable to come to the pharmacy.
- Advise patients to call the pharmacy if they have any questions or concerns, especially if they are ill, rather than coming into the pharmacy.

Communication

Pharmacists should ensure that there are open lines of communication with staff, patients, and other organizations (government, associations, etc.).

- **Staff**

Depending on the size of the pharmacy, consider daily calls or written communications providing staff with current information about COVID-19 and how it may be impacting the pharmacy. Be transparent about the fact that policies and procedures may need to be changed urgently but commit to keeping staff apprised as best as you can. Ensure staff understand their roles and responsibilities, prevention and management measures, and the business continuity plan.⁶

- **Patients**

Ensure that you have placed posters accordingly [warning patients not to enter the pharmacy if they are unwell](#), or what to do if they arrive at the pharmacy counter and are experiencing symptoms related to COVID-19. It is also recommended to place posters [advising patients how they can help reduce the risk of transmission of or exposure to COVID-19](#). It would be advisable that the message at the entrance into the pharmacy includes a phone number where they can reach pharmacy staff and assure them that you will help them to get their medications.

Any messaging provided to the public should be appropriate, accurate, up-to-date and consistent.⁶ Pharmacists Manitoba recommends consulting the [Pharmacists Manitoba coronavirus webpage](#) as well as the [MHSAL](#) and [Shared Health](#)'s coronavirus webpages for more information.

- **Other organizations (government, associations, regulatory bodies, etc.)**

Stay current with communications issued by other organizations including Manitoba Health, Seniors and Active Living, Shared Health, Public Health Agency of Canada, local public health units, associations (e.g. Pharmacists Manitoba, Canadian Pharmacists Association, CSHP Manitoba Branch) and regulatory bodies (e.g. CPhM). This can help pharmacists provide accurate and concise key messaging to patients.⁶

Involvement with local community planning

Consider working with your local municipal government to provide support. Reach out to public health staff in your community to offer assistance and highlight awareness of your role in the community to protect the health of patients. Consider contacting other local healthcare providers such as family physicians, nurses, and other pharmacists to discuss how you can support each other and work together as a team to manage the pandemic in your local community.

Protection of Pharmacy Staff and Patients

Due to the nature of the work as accessible front-line healthcare providers, pharmacists and pharmacy staff may be exposed to COVID-19. In order to reduce exposure and to protect your health and that of others, pharmacy staff should undertake additional measures to prevent the spread of the virus.

Personal Measures

Personal measures that pharmacy staff should undertake to prevent the spread of illness include:⁸

- Frequent handwashing with soap and warm water or use of an alcohol-based hand sanitizer (with a minimum of 60 per cent alcohol) if handwashing is not an option, especially after direct patient interactions, handling payment methods, etc.
- Frequent washing of lab coats
- Sneezing or coughing into your sleeve
- Avoiding touching your eyes, nose or mouth
- Avoiding contact with individuals who are ill
- Staying at home if you are unwell

Droplet and Contact Precautions

If available, pharmacies should continually attempt to obtain personal protective equipment (PPE) (e.g. surgical or procedure masks, gloves, hand sanitizers) from their wholesalers/distributors to keep on hand at the pharmacy in case it is required (e.g. encountering a patient who meets the [criteria for COVID-19 testing](#) through active screening by the pharmacist while at the pharmacy). Pharmacists Manitoba is actively advocating to the Ministry of Health, Seniors and Active Living that pharmacy professionals be included as part of the healthcare provider supply of PPEs. We will continue to keep members posted on this effort.

Environmental Cleaning

COVID-19 is spread by respiratory droplets from infected individuals when they cough or exhale and are breathed in by another person.² These respiratory droplets can also land on objects and surfaces and infect another person who touches these objects or surfaces and then their eyes, nose or mouth.² Therefore, it is important that policies and procedures are developed to ensure routine cleaning of the pharmacy, especially commonly touched surfaces and items such as phones, keyboards, sinks, countertops, cash registers, door handles, prescription counting trays, spatulas, etc.⁶

If a patient screens positive in a pharmacy, patient-contact surfaces (i.e., areas within 2 metres of the patient who screened positive) needs to be disinfected as soon as possible. These would include areas for prescription drop-off and pick-up and debit-credit card pin pads.

For more information about environmental cleaning, please refer to [MHSAL's Routine Practices and Additional Precautions: Preventing the Transmission of Infection in Health Care](#).

Additional Measures

Recognizing that each pharmacy and situation is different, below are some suggestions that could be implemented if the pharmacy can and chooses to:

- Place hand sanitizers at each patient contact point to be used after each patient interaction (e.g. at the prescription drop-off counter, cash register, counselling room, etc.).
- Use [signage](#) on front doors warning patients not to enter the pharmacy if they are unwell and to call the pharmacy instead if they have questions, concerns, or to arrange delivery of medications.
- If possible, keep a 2-metre distance between staff and patients during interactions.
- Cancel or postpone non-essential pharmacy offerings such as clinic days.
- Encourage all patients who come into the pharmacy for service to call the pharmacy for all future interactions or questions.

- On automated refill systems, include a message that those who are ill or in self-isolation should not come into the pharmacy to pick up their medications but should instead call the pharmacy to speak to a staff member to make alternate arrangements.
- Wear gloves or wash hands immediately after handling items from patient (e.g. returned old vials, cups from patients on opioid agonist therapy).

Developing a Plan

Importance of Planning

Planning is an important step to ensure pharmacies can continue to provide care to their patients and to protect the health of pharmacy staff and patients. Preparation can also help you to better cope with any economic, social and environmental strains related to the pandemic.⁶ Pharmacists must have a plan to deal with the increased number of patients seeking help, advice, and pharmacy services as well as the potential impact that the pandemic may have on pharmacy operations. Plan for various scenarios but realize that you may have to be flexible and adapt/change plans if the situation requires it.

Management of Drug Shortages

Drug shortages are a serious and growing concern that have been increasing in the last 3 to 5 years.⁹ A pandemic may increase drug shortages due to factors such as:

- Increased use of some drugs (e.g. cough and cold remedies, fever reducers)
- Stockpiling of prescription medications
- Disruptions in supply chain due to staff shortages, road closures, global impacts on non-Canadian suppliers of pharmaceutical raw materials, etc.

Effective March 19, 2020 and until further notice, pharmacists in Manitoba may only provide a one month (to a maximum of 35-day supply) in a 28-day period for all drugs. This restriction applies to all prescriptions, regardless of whether the patient pays or has a private or public drug plan that pays for the prescription. The [notice from MHSAL](#) is available on the CPhM website.

Pharmacists must plan for the potential impact that drug shortages will have on their business operations (e.g. increased time spent by pharmacists to find alternatives and make recommendations to physicians). It is important to note that despite a pandemic, pharmacists are expected to continue to act responsibly and professionally, e.g. not ordering large quantities and stockpiling at the pharmacy, using professional judgement to make decisions on quantities to dispense, etc., in order to ensure that all patients can have access to the medications that they need.⁶

Another component to managing drug shortages is dealing with public concerns. Pharmacists have a very important role to play in communicating with patients to provide reassurance and consistent messaging. Pharmacists should:⁶

- Ensure that the patient has an adequate supply of medication to ensure continuity of care but discourage stockpiling of medication as it can create drug shortages and can lead to medication wastage (e.g. expired medications) and lack of availability for other patients,
- Reassure the patient that should a drug shortage occur, the pharmacist will work with their prescriber to determine suitable available alternatives, and
- Inform patients that pharmacy staff are continuously monitoring drug shortages in order to respond quickly to ensure that patient care is uninterrupted.

Business Continuity Planning^{10,11}

A business continuity plan will help you act quickly during an emergency and should help your pharmacy recover quickly as well if you experience unanticipated downtime. The business continuity plan should describe how the pharmacy intends to maintain its critical operations and minimize the impact of a pandemic or other emergency. The plan is about minimizing risk, and should include necessary resources, key contact lists and procedures that staff should follow.

A business continuity plan will help to set expectations for all staff, and when possible, pharmacies should try to maintain business as usual and supply medications for patients with chronic conditions. Realizing that you may not be able to do everything yourself, please remember to think outside the box when writing your plan. For example:

- Is there anything that can be done in collaboration with other local business owners (not necessarily other pharmacies)?
- Can you work with your closest pharmacy neighbor and agree to support each other and their patients if one of you needed to shut down temporarily?

The following are important elements for the development of a business continuity plan.

1. Pandemic Plan Coordinator/Committee

The first step in developing a business continuity plan is to identify an individual who will have the responsibility for managing this plan. To support this individual, it is recommended that a committee or working group be established, with representation from all the departments for the development, communications, and scheduled review of this plan.

Participants of the working group should have the necessary expertise to help identify the pharmacy's essential services and functions, recommend solutions, and resulting impacts

2. Identify Essential Operations/Functions/Services & Build Contingency Plan

A pandemic will have widespread impact on human resources across all sectors, which may affect essential infrastructural services such as sanitation, water, telecommunications, financial services, power, transportation, and food supply. The pharmacy should already have contingency plans in place for disruption of some of these services. It is important that they are incorporated into the plan.

As the most accessible health care providers in the community, as was the experience with SARS, it is expected that there will be an increase in demand for pharmacy services. This should be taken into consideration when determining minimum staffing levels for business continuity.

During a pandemic, approximately 35% of the workforce may become ill. Absenteeism may be due to the employee's own illness, employee staying home to care for sick family members, or fear of going to work. It would be prudent for planning purposes to estimate up to 50% absenteeism during the peak of the pandemic.

Tables 2 and 3 can be used by the pharmacy to identify its essential operations/functions/services, the minimum staff required to provide those services, the core skills or requirements to perform the task, and the potential human resource surge capacity to cover absences. When determining pharmacy surge capacity, consider if resources from non-urgent services can be diverted to support the essential services. Table 4 can be used to develop your contingency plan for maintaining essential services.

Table 2: Essential Operations/Functions/Services

PRIORITY RANKING	ESSENTIAL OPERATIONS/FUNCTIONS/SERVICES	SKILL SET REQUIRED TO PERFORM TASK	MINIMUM REQUIRED STAFFING LEVEL	CURRENT STAFFING LEVEL	REMAINING STAFFING WITH POTENTIAL OF 35 TO 50% ABSENTEEISM	POTENTIAL SURGE CAPACITY



Table 3: Non-urgent Operations/Functions/Services

NON-URGENT OPERATIONS/FUNCTIONS/ SERVICES	HOW LONG CAN THE PHARMACY DO WITHOUT THESE SERVICES	MINIMUM REQUIRED STAFFING LEVEL	CURRENT STAFFING LEVEL	WITH POTENTIAL OF 35 TO 50% ABSENTEEISM, REMAINING STAFF THAT CAN BE TEMPORARILY REALLOCATED TO SUPPORT ESSENTIAL SERVICES

Table 4: Contingency Plan for Maintaining Essential Services

ESSENTIAL OPERATIONS/FUNCTIONS/ SERVICES	PERSON RESPONSIBLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION	ACTION LIST	RESOURCE LIST	TRAINING NEEDS

3. Human Resources

There are a few human resource issues specific to a pandemic that should be addressed, such as policies for employee compensation, sick/family/medical leave, self-quarantine, return-to-work after illness, vacation, over-time and flexible work hours.

4. Communications to Staff

Communications to staff about the pandemic and what actions the pharmacy should/will take are important; these discussions should educate them about:

- Facts about COVID-19 pandemic, including signs and symptoms and modes of transmission
- Your pharmacy's pandemic plan and its activation process
- Everyone's roles and responsibilities upon activation of the pandemic plan
- Applicable policies and procedures

Regular staff meetings should be arranged to address different topics, giving staff an opportunity to absorb and understand the process and bring back their questions and concerns. Remember that, operationally, many things can change very quickly based on the rapidly evolving status of pandemic in Manitoba, Canada and globally.

There are a number of resources available on the [MHSAL](#) and [Shared Health](#) COVID-19 webpages that may be useful in communicating with your staff.

5. Communications to Patients

During a pandemic, it is expected that there will be an increase in the number of calls from patients and customers requesting health information, prescription renewals, etc. As part of the pandemic planning process, consider what type of communication approaches the pharmacy might want to implement to manage and address customer needs, including referrals to other available resources such as websites, Health Links – Info Santé, and local public health units. If there are any temporary interruptions (direct or indirect) to the provision of pharmacy services that have been activated by municipal, provincial and/or federal pandemic plans, you will need to determine how this will be communicated to your staff and customers.

Pharmacies are reminded of the various communication vehicles that can be utilized by the pharmacy for pandemic specific messages, and these include:

- Voicemails
- Answering machines
- IVR
- Store Signage
- Prescription labels
- Information pamphlets
- Pharmacy website

6. Trial Run

Once the plan is in place and all pharmacy staff have been trained on their roles and responsibilities, a date

should be set for a trial run (time permitting). Issues arising from the trial run can feed into revisions of the plan.

7. Activation of the Plan

Individuals with decision-making authority to activate and terminate the pandemic plan need to be clearly identified for all staff. A notification system will need to be developed to communicate plan activation and termination.

8. Prevention Activities

Prevention is absolutely essential to maintaining a healthy workforce. Prevention strategies should be implemented prior to and continued after a pandemic has been declared.

Infection control strategies to prevent the spread of COVID-19 include:

- Practice good hygiene (e.g. handwashing)
- Maintain a clean workplace environment (e.g. regular and frequent use of disinfectant cleaning supplies, particularly for high-traffic areas in the pharmacy)
- Encourage ill employees to remain at home until they are no longer infectious
- Use of personal protective equipment, if available
 - e.g. surgical masks, gloves, alcohol-based hand sanitizers
 - Continually check wholesaler/distributor inventory to see if supplies have been replenished
- Do not shake hands with anyone
- Maintain social distancing where staff remain at least 2 metres apart from each other and/or from patients
- Ask patients waiting for a prescription in the pharmacy to stay away from the pharmacy counter until summoned.

9. Pharmacy Closure

If it is determined that your pharmacy cannot operate, ensure there is a plan to communicate this closure to customers with as much advanced notice as possible. If feasible, connect with local neighborhood pharmacies and health services so that they may be prepared to assist your patients if needed. You may also wish to consider whether you are able to secure your pharmacy for a longer period. Please consult CPhM's Practice Direction on [Permanent and Temporary Pharmacy Closure](#) and [COVID=19 FAQ](#) for more information.

**THE FOLLOWING CHECKLIST IS INTENDED AS A GUIDE TO HELP YOU START
PLANNING FOR WHAT YOU MAY NEED AND IS NOT EXHAUSTIVE.**

Checklist for Pharmacy Owners/Managers

	Not Started	In Progress	Complete
GENERAL PANDEMIC PLANNING			
Identify a pandemic coordinator and/or team with defined roles and responsibilities for preparedness and response planning.			
Ensure the plan is accessible to all staff, states the triggers for activation and cessation, and that all staff are aware of when it will start and when normal business will resume.			
Identify the critical activities undertaken by your business, ranked by order of importance, which would have to continue during a pandemic, as well as the employees and other inputs that support those activities (e.g. raw materials, suppliers, sub-contractor services/products, logistics, process controls, security). Consider how internal resources could be re-allocated to ensure those activities are maintained.			
Discuss with your suppliers/sub-contractors whether they have robust Business Continuity plans in place – your organization is only as good as those on whom it depends.			
Review your supply chain arrangements. Consider multiple suppliers for key products.			
Consider your cash flow and speak with your bank manager and creditors at an early stage. For example, if there is a delay in prescription payments will your cash flow be sufficient? Will you have access to extra finance if needed to purchase additional supplies or if shortages increase market value of goods?			
Review your standard operating procedures (SOP) and decide what may need to change during an emergency.			
For larger companies, make sure staff are confident to work in other locations.			
Cross train staff where possible to avoid situations where only one person is trained to carry out a task.			
Ensure there are arrangements for accessing keys and security codes if usual staff are all absent.			
Identify vital business consumables (till rolls, fax paper, etc.) and consider keeping extra supplies in stock.			
Identify ways of preventing or dealing with stock shortages (i.e., rationing of OTC remedies to prevent panic buying, maximum 30 days' supply of medications).			
Consider organizing carpooling for staff, perhaps with other local businesses in case public transport is affected or fuel is rationed.			
Identify employees and key customers with special requirements and incorporate the requirements of such persons into your preparedness plan.			
Identify methods of gathering reliable information on current pandemic status (i.e., World Health Organization, MHSAL, Shared Health, Public Health Agency of Canada)			
Consider keeping details of staff who may be able to help in an emergency (i.e., former employees, recently retired pharmacists, those on family leave, etc.). Determine what training they need.			

Policies to be Implemented			
Guided by advice issued by Government, establish policies for sick-leave absences unique to a pandemic, including policies on when a previously ill person is no longer infectious and can return to work after illness (i.e., when they are no longer showing symptoms and feel better).			
Establish policies for flexible worksite (e.g. LTC consulting pharmacists may be able to conduct reviews from home, pharmacists may call patients for follow-up from home, etc.) and flexible work hours (e.g. staggered shifts).			
Guided by advice from Government, establish policies for reducing spread of illness at the worksite (e.g. promoting respiratory hygiene/cough etiquette, and asking those with illness symptoms to stay at home).			
Guided by advice from Government, establish the current policies for employees who are suspected to be ill, or become ill at the worksite (e.g. infection control response, sick leave policies).			
Set up authorities, triggers, and procedures for activating and terminating the company's response plan, altering business operations (e.g. reducing operations as necessary in affected areas), and transferring business knowledge to key employees.			
Guided by advice from the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (which would be informed by the latest information from the World Health Organization and/or advice from Health Departments), establish policies on travel to affected geographic areas and develop policies on managing employees working in or near affected areas when an outbreak begins (and later on in the pandemic).			
Resources to Protect Employees and Customers			
Review your business insurance policy to determine if it will cover liability for spread of disease among staff.			
Assess measures you have in place to assure the safety of staff and premises if law and order become an issue.			
Identify minimum staffing levels needed to continue safe operation and determine a course of action if below the minimum levels.			
Plan to restrict the number of non-essential face-to-face meetings with others (i.e., training programs, business meetings, etc.).			
Identify methods of infection control in the pharmacy (i.e., extra surface cleaning, cough etiquette, social distancing). Pharmacists and their staff will also play a vital role in providing messages of cough etiquette and hand-washing to the public.			
Review and service air conditioning units to ensure premises are well ventilated.			
Communication to Employees			
Disseminate easily-accessible information about the pandemic to your workforce which is appropriate to the stage of alert (e.g. signs and symptoms of COVID-19, modes of transmission when this information is available), personal and family protection and response strategies (e.g. hand hygiene, coughing/sneezing etiquette, contingency plans). This should be based on the information already available on the MHSAL website.			
Disseminate information to employees about your pandemic preparedness and response plan for your business, including their role in this plan.			
Ensure staff contact list is up to date. Include details of after-hours numbers, cell phones and emergency contact information for each. Set up a phone tree, where you call two people, they each call two other people, etc.			
Ensure your SOP specifies methods of contacting staff who are off work through illness, bereavement, family obligations, etc.			
Consider using technology such as text messaging or email to communicate with staff.			

Coordination with the Community at Large			
Find out about pandemic planning in your region and locality, for example through local public health units, regional resilience teams and local resilience forums and liaise with agencies and local responders.			
Ensure that the College has up to date contact information for the pharmacy, including the names of the pharmacy professionals practicing at your location.			
Establish a SOP so that information from MHSAL (found on both the Pharmacists Manitoba and CPhM websites) and others is disseminated quickly.			
Establish plans to communicate with customers, especially if opening hours change.			
Consider recorded messages to deal with common queries and how provincial messages such as “remain at home if you are symptomatic to limit infection spread” can be supported.			
Communicate changes in service, for example, cessation of any non-essential services.			
Consider using technology such as text messaging, email or websites to communicate with customers.			
Security			
Ensure you can secure your pharmacy if it needs to close for a long period of time.			
If you use a security company (i.e., an alarm system linked to a company) check to ensure that the supplier will be able to fulfil its contract.			
Ensure key holder details are up-to-date and readily retrievable.			
Ensure your plan contains details of how you will assure safety and security of staff and customers.			

APPENDIX I
CONTACT INFORMATION FOR KEY INDIVIDUALS

Fill in the contact information of key individuals and include in the pharmacy pandemic plan.

Full Name	Role/Responsibility	Home Telephone Number	Cellphone Number

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