



Open letter to the Government of Canada

Re: Access to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for Pharmacy Professionals During the COVID-19 Pandemic

March 18, 2020

The Canadian Pharmacists Association (CPhA) appreciates the measures taken by the Canadian government to minimize the spread of COVID-19 and ensure public safety. However, we are concerned these measures may not be enough to protect frontline pharmacists and the patients they serve.

Community pharmacists and staff are on the frontlines of patient care every day. Pharmacists are the most accessible health care providers and the first and most frequent point of contact for many Canadians, particularly those with chronic disease and other risk factors that make them more vulnerable to the effects of infection with COVID-19. As regulated health care professionals, pharmacists have an ethical responsibility to protect their patients from harm and ensure their continuity of care.

Over the past few months as the pandemic has evolved, pharmacists have been educating patients on appropriate hand hygiene and other infection prevention and control measures to protect themselves and those around them. They are also employing passive and active screening protocols in pharmacies across the country. However, we are hearing from pharmacists that Canadians continue to self-identify at their community pharmacies with symptoms or exposure risks.

During emergencies such as this unprecedented pandemic, pharmacies are working around the clock to ensure that Canadians are safe with respect to medication use and timely access to medications. With provinces starting to declare states of emergency and urging businesses to limit operations, pharmacies in Canada and in other countries are some of the few remaining places where Canadians can access critical supplies and services. We also know that as the rates of infection continue to rise, straining our hospitals, medical clinics and public health support infrastructure, the potential exposure in pharmacies will grow. This is why it is critical that the government of Canada recognize pharmacies as essential health services and protect pharmacy staff so that they can, in turn, protect Canadians and help in containment efforts.

We understand that pan-Canadian efforts are underway to coordinate the supply and appropriate use of personal protective equipment (PPE). We urge the Government of Canada and Public Health Agency of Canada to ensure that pharmacists are recognized as essential health care providers with respect to the supply and allocation of PPE.



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The World Health Organization has recommended that all health care providers in direct contact with patients suspected of having COVID-19 disease should be wearing PPE – gloves, gowns, and appropriate facial masks, to minimize their risk of exposure and infection.¹ The World Health Professions Alliance and other groups internationally have called on governments to prioritize support for frontline health care workers, like pharmacists.² In Italy, pharmacists are wearing masks. In the United Kingdom, the government is providing pharmacies with gloves and aprons in addition to fluid repellent masks.³ In the United States, there is discussion about making pharmacies drive-through only or installing protective shields.

We appreciate that there are global supply challenges for PPE for all health care providers and understand the need for careful stewardship and triage of these scarce resources. During these unprecedented times, we are asking public health officials to exercise proactive measures and join other global leaders to expedite an action and allocation plan, recognizing community pharmacy as an essential service.

Yours sincerely

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¹ https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331215/WHO-2019-nCov-IPCPPE_use-2020.1-eng.pdf

² <https://www.whpa.org/news-resources/statements/world-health-professionals-calling-governments-prioritise-support>

³ <https://www.pharmaceutical-journal.com/news-and-analysis/news/pharmacists-to-receive-packs-of-gloves-aprons-and-masks-as-protection-against-covid-19/20207808.article?firstPass=false>