

Ministry of Health

# Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Guidance for Community Pharmacies

Version 1 – February 13, 2020

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

## What you need to know

- Pharmacies should undertake active screening over the phone (asking questions about symptoms and travel/exposures) and passive screening (signage) of patients for COVID-19.
- If a patient screens positive over the phone:
  - the patient 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 medication should be delivered to the patient by either of the means above without direct contact with the patient (e.g. placed in mailbox).
- A patient who presents at a community pharmacy and self-identifies as meeting the screening criteria for COVID-19 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 mask. Pharmacy staff should avoid close contact with a patient who screens positive.
- Pharmacy professionals should notify their local public health unit that a patient has screened positive.
- All testing for COVID-19 will take place in hospitals or arranged in consultation with the [local public health unit](#).
- 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.

# Screening

Community pharmacies play an important role in supporting the response to suspected cases of COVID-19. Community pharmacies are being requested to conduct passive screening and active phone screening of all patients.

## 1. *Passive screening*

- Signage should be posted at the point of entry to the pharmacy and at reception areas for patients with symptoms and a relevant exposure history to self-identify, perform hand hygiene, wear a procedure/surgical mask, and have access to tissues and a waste receptacle.

## 2. *Active phone screening*

### Sample Screening

Is the patient presenting with:

1. Fever, and/or new onset of cough or difficulty breathing,  
**AND** any of the following:
2. Travel to mainland China in the 14 days before the onset of illness

**OR**

Close contact with a confirmed or probable case of COVID-19

**OR**

Close contact with a person with acute respiratory illness who has been to mainland China in the 14 days before their symptom onset.

- All patients should be screened over the phone before arriving at the pharmacy whenever possible. A voice recording communicating screening criteria should be implemented.

### **3. What to do if a patient screens positive by phone?**

- If a patient screens positive over the phone:
  - the patient 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 medication should be delivered to the patient by either of the means above without direct contact with the patient (e.g. placed in mailbox).
- A patient who screens positive over the phone should be advised to call telehealth or their local public health unit. The pharmacist should also report to the local public health unit (see Reporting).

### **4. What to do if a patient self-identifies at the Pharmacy?**

- A patient who presents at a community pharmacy and self-identifies as meeting the screening criteria on signage should be separated from other persons and staff so that they are at least 2 meters apart (use a separate room where available) and given a surgical/procedure mask. Pharmacy staff should avoid physical contact with a patient who screens positive.
- The local public health unit should be contacted to plan for patient travel and further COVID-19 assessment.
- Patient-contact surfaces (i.e., surfaces within 2 meters 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).

### **5. What to do if a patient has travel history to Hubei province or mainland China within the last 14 days but is asymptomatic?**

- Any asymptomatic patient with a travel history to Hubei province, China in the past 14 days should be advised to stay home/self-isolate and contact their local public health unit for further direction on activity restrictions.

- If an asymptomatic patient has a travel history to another affected area in the past 14 days (e.g., mainland China, outside Hubei) and they have concerns about possible exposures to COVID-19 cases in affected areas in the past 14 days, they should call their local public health unit.

## Occupational Health & Safety and Infection Prevention & Control Advice for Community Pharmacy Settings

Within Pharmacy settings, the ministry recommends the use of Routine Practices and Additional Precautions (contact, droplet) for a patient who self identifies as screening positive. These precautions include:

- use of gloves, gowns, procedure/surgical mask and eye protection
- hand hygiene

For more information on Routine Practices and Additional Precautions, pharmacies should refer to [PIDAC Routine Practices and Additional Precautions In All Health Care Settings](#)

### Occupational illness

In accordance with the Occupational Health and Safety Act and its regulations, an employer must provide a written notice within four days of being advised that a worker has an occupational illness, including an occupationally-acquired infection, or if a claim has been made to the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) by or on behalf of the worker with respect to an occupational illness, including an occupational infection, to the:

- Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development
- Joint Health and Safety Committee (or health and safety representative), and
- trade union, if any.

Occupationally-acquired infections and illnesses are reportable to the WSIB.

## Testing

At this time, pharmacies are not licensed to conduct testing for COVID-19.

## Reporting

Pharmacy professionals registered with the Ontario College of Pharmacists should use routine reporting procedures to contact their local Public Health unit. COVID-19 is a designated disease of public health significance (O. Reg. 135/18) and thus reportable under the [Health Protection and Promotion Act](#).

## What is known about the COVID-19

Coronaviruses (CoV) are a large family of viruses that cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-CoV), Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS-CoV), and COVID-19. A novel coronavirus is a new strain that has not been previously identified in humans.

Coronaviruses are zoonotic, meaning they are transmitted between animals and people. Detailed investigations found that SARS-CoV was transmitted from civet cats to humans and MERS-CoV from dromedary camels to humans, likely through bat reservoirs. Several known coronaviruses are circulating in animals that are not infectious to humans.

On 31 December 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) [was informed](#) of cases of pneumonia of unknown etiology in Wuhan City, Hubei Province in China. A novel coronavirus (COVID-19) [was identified](#) as the causative agent by Chinese authorities on January 7, 2020.

Common signs of infection include fever, respiratory symptoms such as cough, shortness of breath and breathing difficulties. In more severe cases, infection can cause pneumonia, kidney failure and even death.

Recommendations to prevent infection spread include performing hand hygiene (either use of alcohol-based hand rub or hand washing with soap and water), respiratory hygiene and cough etiquette (e.g., covering mouth and nose when coughing and sneezing, using tissues to contain respiratory secretions).

While we may see many cases with travel history to the impacted region, the overall risk to the community remains low. There is currently no evidence of sustained COVID-19 transmission in the community in Ontario.

## For more information

If you have any questions, please consult the ministry's [website on COVID-19](#), the ministry's [Guidance for Health Workers and Health Sector Employers on COVID-19](#) or contact your local [Public Health Unit](#).

## 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 are experiencing fever and/or cough or difficulty breathing and have a travel history to mainland China in the last 14 days or have had contact with a person who has the above travel history and illness symptoms (see screening procedures above). Similar messaging should be communicated on telephone messages and websites.
- Have procedure/surgical masks, tissues, waste container and alcohol-based hand sanitizer available to patients and staff in pharmacies.
- 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.
- Community pharmacies have a shared responsibility for informing and educating the public on COVID-19, including promoting infection control and preventative measures.