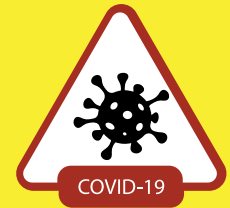


Staffing and Business Considerations if a Pharmacy Team Member Becomes Ill



The Canadian Pharmacists Association (CPhA) and the Neighbourhood Pharmacy Association of Canada (Neighbourhood Pharmacies) have developed a short list of key considerations for pharmacy managers/owners to help prepare them for next steps if a pharmacy staff member is exposed to or infected with COVID-19.

However, in all cases, guidance and direction from local public health units supersedes all key considerations in this document. Furthermore, pharmacy regulators in some provinces have already issued COVID-19 guidance, which must be consulted prior to proceeding with any measures outlined here. Following that, any additional corporate policies (including guidance from a central office, if applicable) must also be followed.

While governments have provided guidance to Canadians on what to do if they suspect they may have COVID-19, guidance is less specific for businesses providing essential services and their staff. Pharmacies are considered essential services during the COVID-19 pandemic, meaning that pharmacies must attempt to remain open and provide care to patients to the best of their ability. Guidance and best practices on protective measures that pharmacies should put in place to reduce the spread of infection and safeguard their staff in order to remain open are beyond the scope of this document. Please consult CPhA's [Suggested Best Practices for Protecting the Front Line](#) for more information.

STAFF REDUCTIONS

As part of business continuity planning, pharmacy owners/managers should identify which staff (or minimum numbers of staff) are critical to ensuring continued provision of services. Staff absences due to illness, self-isolation requirements or caring for ill family members should be expected.

- Consider each staff person and the consequences of that person being unable to report to work for 14 days. Can that person's work be reassigned, postponed or temporarily replaced? Consider the consequences of closing the pharmacy for two weeks due to insufficient staff. What can you do to ensure that patients will still be able to get their medications? Consider reciprocal arrangements with other local pharmacies (i.e., a "buddy" pharmacy), especially if you are in a remote location where patients have fewer options.
- If staffing levels permit, consider creating at least two separate teams of pharmacy staff on separate shift cycles with no overlap. That way, if an entire team must self-isolate, the pharmacy will still be able to provide some level of service.
- Speak to your bank ahead of time to understand your business and finance needs if the business must be closed for a period of time, or you experience a disruption in your usual cash flow.
- Investigate your legal obligations to employees and understand the differences between a termination, a layoff and short-term disability. Understand your human resources (HR) policies for employees who are ill.
- Investigate the financial relief programs available (to businesses and/or employees) in your jurisdiction.

STAFF SELF-ASSESSMENT

Consider that:

- All Canadians, including pharmacy staff, are reminded that they must self-isolate for 14 days following any travel, and may not work during this time.
- All Canadians, including pharmacy staff, are reminded to contact their local public health unit if they develop symptoms of COVID-19. Ensure your staff have access to an appropriate COVID-19 symptom assessment tool and reporting procedures; these may differ by jurisdiction. Public health will provide guidance to individuals on isolation requirements, whether testing is recommended and any other next steps.
- Testing for health care workers is prioritized. Pharmacy staff are encouraged to inform public health of their occupation.
- Be aware that individuals in some jurisdictions may not be required to report COVID-19 symptoms to their employer.

Remember:

Symptomatic health care workers cannot work. Pharmacy staff members (and potentially their colleagues) may be instructed to self-isolate while waiting for their test results.

TAKE DIRECTION FROM LOCAL PUBLIC HEALTH UNITS

Pharmacy managers/owners may be informed that one of their staff members has been exposed to or infected with COVID-19. This may be through a notification process via local public health units or reported by the employee themselves. It is generally the responsibility of the local public health unit to trace contacts and contact those who might potentially be infected.

Pharmacy managers/owners should direct their staff member to contact their local public health unit immediately if they have not already done so.

Pharmacy managers/owners should also notify their local public health unit themselves if an employee in the pharmacy has been exposed to or infected with COVID-19. Public health will provide direction on the next appropriate actions. As pharmacies are essential services during the pandemic, every effort to ensure continued operation will be considered on a case-by-case basis. If corporate incident management protocols have been put in place, ensure those are followed as well.

Other considerations:

- Be prepared to inform public health about the anticipated impacts on your patients, taking into consideration the unique aspects of your pharmacy. (e.g., how far away is the next nearest pharmacy, do you offer special services (e.g., methadone), do you serve a nursing home, etc.).
- Be prepared to implement immediate cleaning and disinfecting procedures. This could include closing off areas visited by the symptomatic staff member, opening outside doors and windows and/or using ventilating fans to increase air circulation in the area. It may also include instructions to wait up to 24 hours (or as long as is practical) before beginning cleaning and disinfection. Ensure that you discuss with your third-party cleaning service when the pharmacy can be in use following deep cleaning and disinfection (as some products used during cleaning may require a short period of wait time prior to re-opening). For more specific guidance on cleaning and disinfecting, consult the Centers for Disease Control's document [Cleaning and disinfection for community facilities](#).
- Be prepared to close the pharmacy temporarily, either at the direction of public health or as result of having too few staff to deliver essential services. One important step will be to post signage at the pharmacy entrance to notify patients about the closure. Consider adding signage indicating where patients can obtain their medications (e.g., from your "buddy" pharmacy). Also specify instructions for patients who receive opioid agonist therapy or other daily dosing. You must also notify your regulatory authority, which will provide additional jurisdictional details specific to temporary pharmacy closures.
- Be prepared to consider the impacts of temporary closure on operations including:
 - Phone and fax
 - Deliveries (both to patients and from suppliers)
 - Compliance packs
 - Patient counselling
 - Urgent customer needs
 - Patients undergoing opioid dependence treatment
- Above all, ensure your pharmacy team is prepared for a closure due to a positive COVID-19 case. This includes an understanding of the closure plan, having a list of your employees' contact information with cell numbers and email address and a way to communicate closures to staff who may not be available during the incident and closure, and how you will access the store schedule remotely should an incident occur. Maintain regular communication with your pharmacy team during this time and seek guidance from your central office resources, as applicable.

NOTE: While public health will ultimately be responsible for determining the level of risk of exposure and/or investigation status of a potentially infected individual, pharmacy owners/managers may wish to familiarize themselves with potential exposure scenarios and level of risk. Several organizations have developed [pharmacy-specific flowcharts](#) and [staff assessment guides](#). Additional assessments for [health care workers in general](#) are also available.

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Prepared by

