

FAQs

COVID-19 FOR PHARMACISTS AND PATIENTS

This document was created by Healthcare Ready in collaboration with the [American Society of Health-System Pharmacists \(ASHP\)](#) and the [National Association of Chain Drug Stores \(NACDS\)](#). It is intended to provide COVID-19 pandemic guidance and resources to pharmacies and pharmacists and their patients on prescription medications.

FOR PATIENTS

Can I get an early refill of my medication?

The [CDC recommends](#) that patients have at least a two-week supply of medications during physical distancing for COVID-19. During times of disaster and disease outbreaks, like the COVID-19 pandemic, states may take action to allow patients to receive early refills of prescription medications. To date, **all 50 states have allowed pharmacists to provide emergency refills** on a chronic medication. However, variations do exist in each state.

Variations by state may include:

- How early the prescription can be filled
- Number of days' supply that can be provided
- Type of medication (non-control vs. controlled) that qualifies for early refills
- Insurance coverage
- Requirements for provider authorization or prescription

Check with your pharmacist and your state's [Board of Pharmacy](#) for specific details in your state.

If you are insured, check your prescription insurance provider's website, or call the number on the back of your insurance card, to learn more about coverage for early refills. [America's Health Insurance Plans \(AHIP\)](#) has a [list of waivers and resources from health insurance companies](#) providing assistance during the COVID-19 outbreak. See if your insurer is on the list.

Read the [Healthcare Ready blog](#) for more tips on prescription medication preparedness during COVID-19.

- **Can I get more than a 30-day supply?**

The number of days of supply allowed varies by state and by insurance coverage – some states allow for up to a 90-day supply to be refilled. Follow the guidance above to learn more about refills in your state and allowable days of supply during this emergency. Remember there may be additional limitations by state and insurer, especially for controlled medications.

- **What if I am uninsured?**

If you are uninsured and need prescription medications refilled, you still have options.

Multiple states have [reopened the enrollment window](#) for health insurance exchanges under the Affordable Care Act. If you live in [one of these states](#), you may be able to take advantage of this option.

You may also try searching for your medication on the [Medicine Assistance Tool](#). This tool may match you with financial assistance programs for your medications, tailored to your financial situation. You may also call [2-1-1](#) – available across several localities in the U.S. – to ask about local services that may help you pay for your medications.

Is there a chance my prescription medication will not be available due to shortages?

While pandemics may impact the pharmaceutical supply chain, drug manufacturers are working to ensure their operations are stable. It is possible that you may not be able to obtain your prescription for a short time, as **“spot shortages”** may occur during a pandemic. A spot shortage occurs when a prescription medication is temporarily unavailable in your pharmacy due to high demand. Talk to your provider about alternative treatment options if this is the case. You may also search the [ASHP Drug Shortages website](#) or [FDA drug shortage list](#) to see if your medications are in shortage.

What is the best way to get my medication refilled from a pharmacy during the pandemic?

- Order your prescriptions a day or two early to allow the pharmacy staff extra time to prepare your order.
- If you use automated telephone or app-based options to place refill requests, read automated messages carefully. For example, a message that says your prescription is *“ready to be refilled”* does not mean your prescription is *“ready for pick-up.”*
- Utilize drive through, mail order, or home delivery options whenever possible.
- It is not advisable to stockpile large quantities of your medications beyond what you need for the next few weeks and months.

Can I receive virtual patient care and treatment, when appropriate, through a [telehealth visit](#)?

Yes, [telehealth](#) is a way to receive virtual care from a healthcare provider, through a phone call or video chat, for example. You can learn more about the range of services encompassed by telehealth [here](#). During the pandemic, when physical distancing is an important way to protect yourself and your community, you may want to talk to a provider about your options to receive virtual care.

Telehealth visits may occur with the provider you typically see, or other providers through a telehealth service. Several options for telehealth exist and you [may be able to get a prescription, if indicated, as a result of such a consultation](#). There may be additional restrictions to receive a prescription for a controlled substance, such as a prior relationship with the prescriber.

Telehealth availability is expanding during the COVID-19 pandemic to encourage physical distancing and protect healthcare workers and patients. Even if your physician specifically does not offer telehealth, several telehealth companies offer such services directly to patients and many pharmacies partner with other entities to deliver such care.

If you do not have a relationship with a healthcare provider, there are [telehealth companies](#) that offer telehealth services to the public. If you do not already have a doctor, read [here](#) to find companies providing telehealth services.

You may call your insurer prior to conducting a telehealth visit to understand your coverage options. You may try to find your insurer on [this list](#) to see what support they are offering, as many are now expanding coverage to telehealth services because of the pandemic.

- **Can I receive telehealth coverage if I am covered by Medicare?**

Medicare has also expanded coverage to include telehealth visits for Medicare beneficiaries. Read the [CMS Telemedicine Fact Sheet](#) for information on your coverage options.

Can I get tested for coronavirus at a community pharmacy?

The availability of and process for coronavirus testing is rapidly changing. The administration has worked to speed up COVID-19 testing by bringing together leaders from pharmacy and lab companies to offer drive through testing outside of specific pharmacies. Locations are being piloted and rolled out across specific states before becoming more widely available to the public.

If you suspect you may have been exposed to COVID-19, call your healthcare provider to let them know your symptoms. They will work with you to [determine if a test is needed](#) and how you may get one. Additionally, review information from your [state health department](#), as guidance for testing varies by state.

FOR PROVIDERS

How can I prepare my pharmacy for a long duration event like this?

Check your state Pharmacy Practice Act, [Board of Pharmacy](#), state Executive Orders or the [National Alliance of State Pharmacy Associations](#) to understand current pharmacy regulation changes due to COVID-19. All 50 states have issued adjusted regulations to support pharmacies during the pandemic.

You may also communicate with your [state](#) or [local public health department](#) to understand how you may be involved in the patient triage and testing, and what support is available to you. You may be relied on more than usual to provide care for acute needs to reduce the surge in nearby hospitals.

The following sections outlines some of the issues you may be focused on in your pharmacy.

Will stockpiling certain products and medications benefit my facility and patients?

Pharmacies should avoid purchasing excessive amounts and stockpiling medications in anticipation of potentially using them for COVID-19 prevention and treatment. Multiple state Boards of Pharmacy, Boards of Medicine, and professional associations [affirm](#) this.

Refer to the CDC's [guidance for pharmacies](#) for information to help you manage and better serve your patients during the COVID-19 outbreak.

You may also want to share [tips and resources](#) with your clients to help them be more prepared.

- You may remind patients to check public health sources such as the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#), the [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#), or their [state](#) or [local public health department](#) for trusted information about the outbreak.
- You may provide them specific information on prescription preparedness best practices, such as [early emergency refills](#).
- You may want also want to direct people to information about [insurance coverage](#) during the outbreak.

How are state and federal government adjusting regulations so I can better serve clients?

The federal government recently released [guidance](#) that authorizes licensed pharmacists to order and perform COVID-19 testing. This action will greatly expand access to necessary care and testing, especially for healthcare workers and first responders. Though barriers to care remain. More action is needed in some states to provide CLIA or laboratory authorizations and remove biomedical waste restrictions.

Multiple pharmacy organizations, including ASHP and NACDS collaborated to develop [joint policy](#) recommendations to combat the COVID-19 pandemic.

The [NACDS](#) is [tracking these state orders](#), while also urging the Administration and governors to act to:

1. Ensure pharmacies can remain open through use of technology, support from out-of-state professionals, and other allowances
2. Authorize pharmacies to provide COVID-19 treatment and vaccines
3. Ensure expanded access to pharmacy care to reduce surge pressures on hospitals, physician practices, and urgent care clinics

To that end, NACDS has developed a [Proposed Executive Order](#) that aligns directly with the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Azar's [request to governors](#), and [NACDS' letter to the President & Vice President on necessary actions](#). You may follow these efforts to understand how expanded scope of practice laws can help you prepare your facility for the uncertainty of this pandemic.

[ASHP](#) has developed recommendations for policymakers at the [state](#) and [federal](#) level to ensure pharmacy readiness for COVID-19. In addition, ASHP has a [sample list](#) of potential pharmacy public health roles outlined for local and state levels. With the passing of the CARES Act, ASHP has issued several issue briefs that summarize provisions made for [diagnostic testing and immunization](#), [medication shortages](#), and [telehealth changes](#).

How can I work with my vendors to maintain operations during the pandemic?

You may consider being in communication with your sales representative(s) to get information on how ordering processes may be adjusted due to the pandemic. There may be changes to the ordering schedule or the points of contact, for example.

- Make sure to *proactively* communicate with your suppliers to alert them of your supply needs, so they may work with you before you are at risk for a shortage.
- Communicate your priority needs and keep them updated regularly.
- When receiving deliveries from your vendors, you can try reducing the amount of staff that come into contact with vendors, where possible, and communicate with your vendors to understand how they may be adjusting their delivery process to protect their staff.
- Do not order excessive amounts, which is considered *hoarding*. Order based on your true or highly likely needs.
- If there are items you are not able to procure through wholesalers/distributors, you may need to contact a manufacturer directly.

What can I do to keep my staff safe and protected while working and while getting to work?

The health and wellness of not only patients, but also that of staff, is of utmost importance. Pharmacies may consider steps to ensure staff are able to get to work, even in the event of stay-at-home orders in a state and remain safe while they are working.

- The Department of Homeland Security's Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency issued [guidance on critical personnel during the pandemic](#), that includes pharmacy employees. Using this guidance, you may work with your local public health department and emergency management agency to ensure your staff may get to work.
- Follow the CDC's [guidance for pharmacies](#) for infection control strategies to keep employees protected while at work.
- For pharmacy personnel working in inpatient settings, decisions related to PPE and infection prevention should be guided by infection prevention and control [leadership](#) and institutional policies.

Are there strategies I can use to manage my pharmacy's use of PPE?

Each type of pharmacy will have different needs for PPE, whether it is for minimizing infection during direct patient contact or minimizing contamination of during sterile product preparation. There are resources available for both scenarios below. Follow the CDC for [strategies to optimize PPE use](#), including measures such as using delivery and curbside service to reduce the number of workers in the pharmacy who may be making patient contact.

The CDC's [guidance for pharmacies](#) outlines [key strategies](#) to protect staff and patients, while reducing PPE use, in two scenarios of patient care in the pharmacy:

- Dispensing medication:
 - Try increasing physical space between employees and clients
 - Encourage proper hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette in clients and employees
 - Perform routine environmental cleaning
- Close contact patient care (i.e., influenza testing):
 - Follow the steps above, where possible, especially proper hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette
 - Limit number of staff present during procedures to only those necessary for care and support

Should I expect shortages of critical medications, due to supply disruptions in China and other countries?

Follow the [ASHP Current Drug Shortages website](#) and [FDA COVID-19 page](#) to track shortages and updates on the drug and medical product supply chain. Federal agencies are working closely with manufacturers to understand what products may be impacted and how to surge production and determine alternatives to risk of harm from shortages is reduced.

See [NACDS' statement on increased prescribing of hydroxychloroquine/chloroquine](#) and [a joint statement from the AMA, APhA, and ASHP](#) to learn how to manage prescribing of drugs with potential implication for use in treating COVID-19.

