FAQs

COVID-19 FOR PHARMACISTS

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.

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.

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- 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.