

Guide

Community pharmacy – Coronavirus disease (COVID-19)

Community pharmacies provide a highly accessible and essential front-line health service to the general public. This places pharmacists in an important and unique position to contribute to the COVID-19 pandemic response. This guide may be used to assist community pharmacies in their operational planning to assist with the response to COVID-19.

Background

The coronavirus is a large family of viruses which are known to cause respiratory infections. The symptoms of COVID-19 can range from mild illness to severe respiratory illness. The common symptoms of COVID-19 include; fever, sore throat, cough, fatigue and shortness of breath.

How is COVID-19 spread?

COVID-19 is most likely to spread from person-to-person through:

- close contact with a person while they are infectious or in the 24 hours before their symptoms appeared.
- close contact with a person with a confirmed infection who coughs or sneezes.
- touching objects or surfaces (such as door handles or tables) contaminated from a cough or sneeze from a person with a confirmed infection, and then touching your mouth or face.

If a patient presents with respiratory symptoms

It is recommended that pharmacies display external signage requesting that people who are unwell/displaying respiratory symptoms remain outside and contact the pharmacy by telephone.

If someone does enter the pharmacy displaying any respiratory symptoms, it is recommended that they are immediately asked to leave the pharmacy and wait outside. Direct contact should be avoided and the recommended social distance of at least 1.5 metres maintained. Determine their requirements and ensure they remain outside until their business is completed.

If the person is severely unwell, ring 000 to access medical assistance.

Infection prevention and control measures

A community pharmacy is considered a static environment as people spend little time in close contact, reducing the risk of the spread of COVID-19. However good infection prevention and control measures and practicing social distancing, are important to help prevent the spread of COVID-19.

What should community pharmacies do?

- Establish processes to support social distancing (a distance of at least 1.5 meters) within the pharmacy where practicable. This is one of the most effective measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19.
- Promote and enable effective hand hygiene by staff. This includes washing hands thoroughly and frequently throughout the work day particularly after coughing, sneezing, using tissues, before and after eating, and after going to the toilet.
- Ensure staff have access to handwashing facilities and alcohol-based hand products.
- Clean surfaces regularly with a detergent solution, rinse thoroughly and dry with paper towel or other disposable cloth.
- Use disinfectants in addition to, not in place of detergents.
- Display posters in the pharmacy encouraging patients to follow recommendations for hand hygiene, cough etiquette and respiratory hygiene while in the pharmacy and in the community.
- Ensure staff members who are sick do not come to work and remain at home.
- Consider alternative models for providing essential medication, such as home deliveries or drive through pick-up.

Contact tracing

When an individual returns a positive result for COVID-19, Queensland Health will undertake contact tracing to prevent the virus spreading further through the community. As part of this process, the individual with the positive result will be contacted by a member of the contact tracing team to determine close contacts. A community pharmacy is not expected to contact or advise other patients who have attended the pharmacy.

Obtaining surgical masks

Community pharmacies may be eligible to access a supply of surgical masks when commercial supply is unavailable. The surgical masks are distributed through Primary Health Networks (PHNs) and cannot be sold as commercial stock.

For more information contact the Coronavirus Health Information Line on 1800 020 080 or submit a request via the Australian Government Department of Health general enquires form.

Stock shortages

The Commonwealth, States and Territories are actively working together to develop a nationally consistent framework to assist Pharmacists during the pandemic.

The demand on medications has increased in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. To ensure fair and equitable access to medications, the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) released a media statement on 19 March 2020, supporting pharmacists to limit dispensing of

certain prescriptions to a one-month supply at the prescribed dose, and the sale of certain over-the-counter medications to a maximum of one unit per purchase.

Medications which are on the affected products list can be found on the Australian Government, Therapeutic Goods Administration website, <https://www.tga.gov.au/media-release/covid-19-limits-dispensing-and-sales-pharmacies>

Influenza vaccination

This year the influenza season will coincide with the COVID-19 pandemic. Whilst the influenza vaccine will not prevent coronavirus infection, it can reduce the severity and spread of influenza, which may make a person more susceptible to other respiratory illnesses.

Pharmacists play an important role in promoting and providing influenza vaccination within community. Pharmacies need to consider and implement infection control and prevention measures during influenza vaccinations clinics.

For more information

Given the evolving nature of this situation, you can stay up-to-date with the latest information via the following websites:

- <https://www.qld.gov.au/health/conditions/health-alerts/coronavirus-covid-19>
- <https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert>

The Australia Department of Health has also released a series of fact sheets on a range of topics as part of the National Health Plan, which can be accessed at:

- <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-national-health-plan-resources>

Queensland Health will continue to work closely with professional bodies, such as the Pharmacy Guild of Australia and the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia, to ensure pharmacists have access to up-to-date information. Information can be accessed at:

- <https://www.psa.org.au/coronavirus/>
- <https://www.guild.org.au/resources/business-operations/COVID-19-Information>