

How the Coronavirus is affecting the US Drug Supply

The coronavirus began in Wuhan, China which is a epicenter for many of the pharmaceutical manufacturing of key ingredients in many medications such as antibiotics, oncology, and antivirals sold by third-party companies including Asymchem, Inc. Asymchem, in addition to other companies, currently has not ordered a drug shortage crisis because they were far enough from the outbreak to continue working immediately after the mandated break was lifted. Currently, Asymchem claims to be okay on supplies by stocking up for one month in advance of each shipment, but a second phase of supply issues should be anticipated and potentially coming. Shortages are not usually the result of a four-week delay, but for many of the facilities, staff are not plentiful due to the quarantine so productivity and output took weeks to return to normal. Some of the precautions manufacturers are taking is to have employees eat meals alone, wear masks to work, regularly check temperatures once or more times per day, and avoid gatherings.¹

Another aspect contributing to the shortage struggle was the manufacturing material restrictions between provinces and cities resulting in unmet deadlines and inability to speed up manufacturing, but many companies have adjusted to safety precautions and making the most out of their production capacity for the time being. Many of the U.S. drugmakers such as Pfizer and Mylan are anticipating the reduction in manufacturing products due to the virus as well, and the FDA has identified 20 products or ingredients in danger of shortage because they are manufactured exclusively in China.¹ The FDA is to be notified by manufacturers when a drug is 6 months for shortage status due to a 2012 law, FDASIA, but there are no repercussions against companies for lack of reporting or an explanation required for why the drug is in shortage.² Overall, drug shortages related to the coronavirus manufacturing may still appear but it is unlikely they will appear immediately or simultaneously with one another because not all manufacturers were affected at the same magnitude during the outbreak.

Reference:

1. Lupkin S. How Coronavirus Is Affecting The U.S. Pharmaceutical Supply. NPR. <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2020/03/12/814623335/how-coronavirus-is-affecting-the-u-s-pharmaceutical-supply>. Published March 12, 2020. Accessed March 17, 2020.
2. Food and Drug Administration Safety and Innovation Act (FDASIA). U.S. Food and Drug Administration. <https://www.fda.gov/regulatory-information/selected-amendments-fdc-act/food-and-drug-administration-safety-and-innovation-act-fdasia#supplychain>. Accessed March 17, 2020.

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