

How to Prepare Pharmacies for COVID-19

COVID-19 has now spread to every state in America, and pharmacists and pharmacy technicians are on the front line.[1] On March 11th, the World Health Organization classified this rapidly spreading virus as a pandemic, the first of any coronavirus to be classified this way.[2] It is important that pharmacists and technicians working in pharmacies are prepared for counseling patients and limiting the spread of the virus within our communities.

Counseling patients about COVID-19 is also very important. Healthcare professionals must educate themselves and stay up to date on the situation. Pharmacists should remain calm when counseling and encourage patients to also stay calm.[3] Counseling should include preventative measures like staying home when sick, cleaning touched surfaces, frequently washing hands and what to do if you become sick.[1] Some pharmacies are preparing fact sheets to help educate patients about frequently asked questions and how they can stay prepared.[3]

Contact with patients within the pharmacy during prescription pickup and counseling services remains a concern. During this time, pharmacies may consider utilizing only drive-thru and curbside pickup services to help limit foot traffic within the stores. Some pharmacies are also waiving shipping costs for home delivery services.[3] Staff should maintain a 3 feet distance from patients without symptoms and 6 feet from patients with symptoms. Counters, waiting areas and other spaces should be disinfected at least once every hour or after 10 patients.[3] APhA has encouraged insurance companies to immediately remove barriers on prescription drug refills to allow for longer medication supply for patients.[4] Pharmacists should investigate this potential option to ensure patients are not unnecessarily traveling to the pharmacy for prescription pick-up during the COVID-19 outbreak.[3]

There are several resources in which pharmacists may gain access to COVID-19 updates. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website provides an overview of the pandemic including daily updates on the number of individuals testing positive by location and the death toll. The CDC website also includes ways to protect yourself and others, information on traveling, and testing information.[1] The Federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA) website provides speeches by FDA officials in regards to COVID-19 including information regarding testing kits. Other pharmacy sources that are providing additional information about the virus include the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists (ASHP), Pharmacy Times, and the American Pharmacists Association (APhA).

References:

[1] National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases (NCIRD), Division of Viral Diseases. Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19): Situation Summary. [Updated March 17, 2020] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-updates/summary.html>. Accessed March 18, 2020.

[2] WHO Director-General. WHO Director-General's opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19 - 11 March 2020. [Updated March 11, 2020] World Health Organization. Available at: <https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19--11-march-2020>. Accessed March 18, 2020.

[3] Antrim A. Tips for Preparing Pharmacies, Patients for COVID-19. [Updated March 16, 2020]. Pharmacy Times. Available at: <https://www.pharmacytimes.com/news/tips-for-preparing-pharmacies-patients-for-covid-19>. Accessed March 18, 2020.

[4] APhA Urges Insurers, PBMs to Immediately Remove Barriers on Prescription Drug Refills for Coronavirus Preparedness. [Updated March 13, 2020]. American Pharmacists Association. Available at: <https://www.pharmacist.com/press-release/apha-urges-insurers-pbms-immediately-remove-barriers-prescription-drug-refills>. Accessed March 18, 2020.

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