

Joint statement: Community pharmacy response to COVID-19

Community pharmacies are an essential front-line access point for the public who require medicines, advice, information and possible referral to medical practitioners or hospitals. As such it is imperative that during this time, we do everything we can to protect our pharmacy personnel so that we can keep our doors open and at the same time provide a safe environment for individuals needing pharmaceutical care.

COVID-19 Infection Prevention Guidelines for the Pharmacy

The Golden Rule:

1. Any pharmacy personnel who are sick and suspect they may have COVID-19 must STAY HOME and follow the standard NDoH COVID-19 protocols; and

2. Customers/patients who have flu-like symptoms or think they may have COVID-19 must NOT ENTER the pharmacy and should be advised to follow the standard NDoH COVID-19 protocols.

NOTE: Latest evidence-based guidance on the use of masks and gloves:

WHO¹: Should I wear a mask to protect myself?

Only wear a mask if you are ill with COVID-19 symptoms (especially coughing) or looking after someone who may have COVID-19. Disposable face mask can only be used once. If you are not ill or looking after someone who is ill, then you are wasting a mask. There is a world-wide shortage of masks, so WHO urges people to use masks wisely.

FIP²: Is wearing rubber/latex gloves while out in public effective in preventing the new coronavirus infection?

No. Regularly washing your bare hands offers more protection against catching COVID-19 than wearing rubber gloves. You can still pick up COVID-19 contamination on rubber gloves. If you then touch your face (mouth, nose or eyes), the contamination may infect you. (World Health Organization, 2020).

Taking this into consideration the wearing of masks and gloves, unless otherwise indicated, is discouraged and strict hygiene and infection control is advised.

Pharmacy personnel must implement the following infection control measures;

- frequently wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds
- use alcohol-based hand sanitizers as often as necessary
- disinfect hands before and after attending to patients
- avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth
- wipe down phone handset with disinfectant after every call taken. Discard the wipe after use

¹ Q&A on coronaviruses (COVID-19) <https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-coronaviruses>

² FIP – COVID-19 Information and interim guidelines for pharmacists and the pharmacy workforce, Pag 30 of 48 <https://www.fip.org/files/content/priority-areas/coronavirus/Coronavirus-guidance-update-ENGLISH.pdf>

- disinfect the dispensing surface, the patient pen and the computer keypad with disinfectant and then spray hands with sanitizer before calling a patient to the counter
- to allow for social distancing of at least ONE metre between pharmacy personnel and patients/customers place black tape or some form of marking on the floor
- to maintain one metre spacing between patients/customers place decals on the floor for patient to stand on when in a queue
- encourage customers/patients to utilise hand sanitiser spray at queuing points such as at the dispensary, clinics and pay points
- avoid handling medical aid cards / loyalty cards rather request the patient scans the card or reads the information to you
- disinfect the counting tray and counting spatula between dispensing and do not count any medication on a counting tray using a pen
- have a dedicated patient pen at every dispensing counter for customer use which is wiped off after every patient – do not share personal pens with anyone else. Keep pens out of mouths
- discourage children from sitting on the dispensary counter or touching the dispensary screen
- wipe down patient seating area with disinfectant at least twice a day
- place good respiratory hygiene posters at strategic points which encourage patients/customers to cover their mouth and nose with your bent elbow or tissue when they cough or sneeze
- encourage electronic payment rather than handling cash
- allow customers to insert and remove their own credit/debit card into machine at pay points
- disinfect pay points, cash registers, credit/debit card machines
- cashiers should spray hands with sanitizer before attending to the next customer
- encourage pharmacy personnel to get vaccinated against influenza
- vulnerable patients such as those over 70 years of age be encouraged to stay home. Medicines can be collected by a caregiver or delivered by the pharmacy

In order to ensure equitable access to medicines for all South African citizens, the Pharmacy First Working Group and the Pharmaceutical Society of South Africa, in consultation with the Department of Health, are requiring community pharmacists to apply limits on dispensing and sales of prescription and over-the-counter medicines.

1. The supply of prescription medicines be limited to ONE month's supply at the prescribed dose
2. Only dispense multiple repeats in exceptional circumstances for vulnerable patients strictly in accordance with the legislated criteria
3. S1 and S2 medicines, especially cold and flu remedies, analgesics and bronchodilator inhalers must be dispensed per individual and supplied according to the recommended treatment period e.g. 5 days' supply
4. Front shop items such as masks, alcohol-based hand sanitiser and sanitising wipes should be limited to a maximum of 6 per person
5. High demand items such as alcohol-based hand sanitisers must be sold responsibly – fines are in place to deal with profiteering

Useful links:

Important localised information and various toolkits are available on the national COVID-19 website at www.sacoronavirus.co.za

WHO information on corona virus pandemic <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

FIP Guidelines on COVID-19 available at www.fip.org/coronavirus

NDoH WhatsApp for current information on COVID-19 : 0600 123 456 (send message saying Hi to receive the main menu)

This guideline has been developed through a collaboration of Pharmacy First Working Group:

