



ADVISORY

CONSIDERATION FOR PHARMACIES AND MEDICAL STORES DURING THE COVID-19.

Date: 30th April, 2020.

Target Audience:

- Provincial Drugs Inspectors;
- Pharmacies; and
- Medical Stores.

Purpose:

This is a guidance document for pharmacies and medical stores staff to minimize their risk of exposure to the virus and reduce the risk for customers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Healthcare facilities across the country are challenged with caring for COVID-19 patients, therefore pharmacies and medical stores becomes more vital access points for surgical masks, N95 masks, sanitizers, medicines and healthcare advices. As a vital part of the healthcare system, pharmacies and medical stores play an important role in providing therapeutic goods and health services to the public. Ensuring continuous function of pharmacies and medical stores during the COVID-19 pandemic is important. During the pandemic, pharmacy and medical store staff can minimize their risk of exposure to the virus that causes COVID-19 and reduce the risk for customers by using the principles of infection prevention and control and social distancing.

CONSIDERATION:

1. Implementation of Universal Use of Face Coverings:

- Individuals without coronavirus symptoms (“asymptomatic”) and those who eventually develop symptoms (“pre-symptomatic”) can transmit the virus to others before showing symptoms. This means that the virus can spread between people interacting in close proximity—for example, speaking, coughing, or sneezing—even if those people are not exhibiting symptoms. Therefore, everyone entering the pharmacy and medical store should wear a face mask for source control (i.e., to protect other people in case the person is infected), regardless of symptoms. Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan (DRAP) recommends persons entering pharmacies and medical stores wear a face mask. Further, face mask should not be placed on young children under age 2, anyone who has trouble breathing, or is unconscious, incapacitated or otherwise unable to remove the mask without assistance.
- Pharmacists and pharmacy technicians should always wear a facemask while they are in the pharmacy or medical store for source control. Since pharmacists are also involved in counselling of patients, they should preferably wear N95 masks.
- Cloth face masks/ surgical masks which are sold by street peddlers/ hawkers should not be provided to pharmacists and pharmacy technician for use, rather standard surgical face mask should be provided to them.

2. Sick staff should be advised to stay home.

Make sure that pharmacy and medical stores staff who have fever or symptoms that may be due to COVID-19 stay home and away from the workplace until they have recovered. It should also be ensured that sick leave policies are flexible, no punitive, and can be easily availed.





3. Prescription filling.

Components of medication dispensing such as prescription intake, patient counselling, or patient education may expose pharmacy staff to individuals who may have respiratory illness. Following workplace guidelines should be followed by pharmacies and medical stores:

- Provide hand sanitizer containing at least 80% (v/v) ethanol or 75% (v/v) Isopropyl Alcohol on counters for use by customers and have sufficient and easy access to soap and water or hand sanitizer for staff.
- Those pharmacies and medical stores which are operating within hospitals and are will integrated should encourage all prescribers to submit prescription orders via telephone or electronically, and should also develop procedures to avoid handling paper prescriptions.
- After a prescription has been prepared, the packaged medication can be placed on a counter for the customer to retrieve, instead of being directly handed to the customer.
- Touching objects that have been handled by customers should be avoided. If transfer of items must occur, pharmacy staff should wash their hands afterwards with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing at least 80% (v/v) ethanol or 75% (v/v) Isopropyl Alcohol. They should always avoid touching their eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.

4. Use of strategies to minimize contact between staff and customers and between customers.

- I. Engineering Control:** It can be applied to areas where the customer and pharmacy and medical stores staff interact, such as the pharmacy counters, to minimize close contact. This include the following:
 - Minimize physical contact with customers and between customers. Maintain social distancing (6 feet between individuals) for people entering the pharmacy as much as possible. Use signage/barriers and floor markers to instruct waiting customers to remain 6 feet back from the counter, from other customer interfaces, and from other customers and pharmacy staff.
 - To shield against droplets from coughs or sneezes, install a section of clear plastic at the customer contact area to provide barrier protection (e.g., clear plastic sheet). Configure with a pass-through opening at the bottom of the barrier for people to speak through or to provide pharmacy items, if feasible.
 - For hard non-porous surfaces, clean with detergent or soap and water if the surfaces are visibly dirty prior to disinfectant application. Frequently clean and disinfect all customer service counters and customer contact areas. Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces such as workstations, keyboards, telephones, and doorknobs.
- II. Administrative Control:** These include activities such as protocols or changes to work practices, policies, or procedures – to keep staff and customers separated. This can be done through the following:
 - Promote social and physical distancing by diverting as many customers as possible to drive-through windows, or home delivery, where feasible. Home delivery of medication may be provided to older patients and patients suffering from non-communicable disease such as diabetes and hypertension in order to avoid load of customers in the pharmacies and medical stores.
 - Limit the number of customers in the pharmacy at any given time to prevent crowding at the pharmacy counter or checkout areas.
 - Pharmacists who are providing patients with chronic disease management services, medication management services, and other services that do not require face-to-face encounters should make every effort to use telephone, tele-health, or tele-pharmacy strategies.

5. Special Consideration for pharmacies and medical stores co-located with clinics.

- Signs may be posted at the door instructing clinic patients with respiratory illness to return to their vehicles (or remain outside if pedestrians) and call the telephone number for the clinic so that proper triage can be performed before they enter the store. It may be possible to manage patients with mild symptoms telephonically and send them home with instructions for care.





- Facemasks coverings should be provided for all clinic patients if they are not already wearing one, ideally prior to entering the clinic.
- Where possible, provide separate entrances for all clinic patients. Otherwise create a clear path from the main door to the clinic, with partitions or other physical barriers (if feasible), to minimize contact with other customers.

Reference:

1. Guidance for Pharmacists and Pharmacy Technicians in Community Pharmacies during the COVID-19 Response by Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/pharmacies.html>

