

Advice to Community Pharmacists on COVID-19

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INTRODUCTION

Precautions for preventing and controlling COVID-19 infections will also help prevent the spread of other common infections and protect patients and workers in community pharmacy settings, where pharmacists are advised to implement precautions and hygiene measures as soon as possible.

MAKE INFORMATIVE DOCUMENTS AVAILABLE TO STAFF AND PATIENTS

Community pharmacists should offer reassurance to the public in general, so that people can protect themselves and others, based on sound scientific evidence and rational behaviors not driven by panic. The present document complements two previous documents:

- "Q&A about COVID-19 Prevention and Testing in Lebanon: Important Matters to Discuss with Your Healthcare Professional" that should be made available for both patients/customers and staff. It is available in English and Arabic.
<https://inspect-lb.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/COVID-19-in-Lebanon-What-to-Discuss-with-Your-Healthcare-Professional.pdf>
<https://inspect-lb.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Testing-for-coronavirus-Public-Final-Arabic.pdf>
- "Q&A about COVID-19 Prevention and Testing in Lebanon: How to Advise your Patient?" that should be made available for staff.
<https://inspect-lb.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Testing-for-coronavirus.pdf>.

IMPORTANT NOTICE TO PATIENTS/CUSTOMERS

Place a notice at the entrance of the pharmacy with the main recommendations that patients/customers must adopt before entering, such as:

1. Disinfect your hands when entering the pharmacy;
2. Keep a safety distance of 1.5-2 meters between you and other patients/customers and anyone of the pharmacy staff;
3. Do not walk outside the floor markings, if any;
4. Avoid shaking hands and any close contact while in the pharmacy;
5. Prepare in advance the prescriptions you need to fill.
6. Practice respiratory etiquette if you sneeze or cough:
 - a. Cover your nose and mouth with a disposable tissue (and discard in a suitable container after use) or with a flexed elbow;
 - b. Use hand hygiene after having contact with respiratory secretions

A translated version of this notice is available in Arabic at the end of the document.

MANAGEMENT OF THE COMMUNITY PHARMACY

- Display a signage on the pharmacy door, as recommended by the Lebanese Order of Pharmacists, to avoid patients with symptoms entering the pharmacy.
- Open a window through the pharmacy door, when possible, and deliver medications through that window to decrease contact with potentially sick patients.
- Put a shield (plexiglas/glass), when possible, between you and the potentially sick patients.
- Let patients enter the pharmacy only one by one, respecting the safe distance of 1.5-2 meters.
- Put alcohol-based hand rub dispensers in prominent places around the pharmacy, especially at counters where surfaces are touched.
- Use appropriate individual protective equipment (mask and gloves, particularly in case of a close contact with a patient).
- Try to shorten shifts and organize the staff work in a way they do not overlap.
- Brief your staff and patients that if COVID-19 starts spreading in your community, anyone with even a mild cough or fever (37.3°C measured or subjective fever) should stay at home and contact the **MOPH Hotline on 1214 or 01/594459**.
- In case you cannot assure regular opening hours due to the unavailability of staff because of COVID-19, communicate the new opening hours in a visible place outside the pharmacy. The new opening hours must secure minimal service to the community in terms of medications supply.
- Display posters promoting hand-wash, respiratory hygiene, social distancing, and other preventive measures. More details and graphics are available on the joint website of the MOPH and the Ministry of Information: <https://corona.ministryinfo.gov.lb/news/list/5>
- Display a poster clearly showing the motto **“Stay at home”**.
- Designate and prepare a suitable space in case of the need to isolate a suspected patient with severe symptoms, awaiting the ambulance arrival. If there is no suitable isolation room, identify an isolated area within the pharmacy that can be used by the patient, which maintains a 2-meter space from other patients and staff.
 - Tidy and remove non-essential furnishings and items; this will assist if decontamination is required post-patient transfer.
 - Brief all staff on the potential use of the room/area and actions required in the event that it is necessary to empty room/area at short notice.

PRINCIPLES OF COMMUNITY PHARMACY INFECTION PREVENTION AND CONTROL

- Promote good cough etiquette and respiratory hygiene to prevent the spread of COVID-19.
- Keep distance where possible with people who have cold or flu-like symptoms, cover coughs and sneezes with disposable tissues or clothing (e.g., into the elbow), immediately dispose of used tissues, and clean your hands afterwards.
- Promote regular and thorough hand-hygiene by staff and patients, as it kills the virus on hands and prevents the spread of COVID-19. Hand Hygiene can be done using soap and water or a waterless alcohol-based hand rub/foam for at least 20 seconds:
 - before entering an area used by other people;
 - after using the bathroom;
 - after coughing or sneezing;
 - before preparing food or eating;

- regularly throughout the work day; and
 - after handling cash money.
- **Keep the environment clean and spray surfaces regularly** with an appropriate disinfectant. Contaminated surfaces are one of the primary means through which COVID-19 spreads.

MEASURES FOR PATIENTS AND CUSTOMERS

- Display signs/posters in the pharmacy to encourage patients to practice hand and cough hygiene, at the pharmacy and in the community generally.
- Keep a distance of 1.5-2 meters where possible. Speak to patients from a safe distance to avoid contact with respiratory droplets.
- Encourage patients not to stop any chronic medication they are taking before calling their physician (NSAIDs, aspirin, ACEIs, ARBs, etc.)
- Tell your patients not to visit the pharmacy if they are elderly or have co-morbidities. If possible, these patients should ask a family member, friend, or neighbor to come to the pharmacy for them.
- Do not dispense medications allegedly useful for the prophylaxis or treatment of COVID-19. Given the limited evidence of their efficacy, the limited available quantities, and potential side effects, these medications should only be administered under close medical supervision. In the event that efficacy is confirmed by appropriate clinical trials, their delivery would be organized by the competent authorities to reach patients at the highest risk.
- For worried patients calling the pharmacy, a stepwise table for the general population is available in English and Arabic to help you decide on how to manage their situation and direct them: "Q&A about COVID-19 Prevention and Testing in Lebanon: Important Matters to Discuss with Your Healthcare Professional"

<https://inspect-lb.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/COVID-19-in-Lebanon-What-to-Discuss-with-Your-Healthcare-Professional.pdf>

<https://inspect-lb.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Testing-for-coronavirus-Public-Final-Arabic.pdf>

MEASURES FOR PHARMACY STAFF

- Apply all the precautions with any customer or patient entering the pharmacy since infection can occur from asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic individuals.
- Make sure staff have access to handwashing facilities and alcohol-based hand rub for regular use.
- Practice effective hand hygiene, wash hands thoroughly throughout the work day or use an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Practice respiratory hygiene. If you, or any of the staff, have respiratory symptoms from any respiratory illness, stay at home.
- Make sure to have surgical masks and/or disposable paper tissues available for staff, alongside closed bins for hygienic disposal of the material.
- Wear face masks as a precautionary measure. However, unless used correctly and changed appropriately after every use, they are unlikely to protect against the spread of airborne pathogens. The use of a mask alone is insufficient to provide an adequate level of protection, and

other equally relevant measures should be adopted, particularly hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette.

- Change lab-coats more often.
- Avoid wearing accessories such as bracelets, watches, and rings.
- Practice social distancing and keep a safety distance of 1.5-2 meters between staff and patients. Speak to patients from the other side of a counter or desk where possible.

MEASURES FOR PATIENTS WITH RESPIRATORY SYMPTOMS

In case a symptomatic patient enters the pharmacy:

- Give them a surgical/procedural mask (if available) to wear.
- Refer them to their physician or the MOPH Hotline on 1214 or 01/594459 to discuss testing.
- Do not deliver NSAIDs for patients suspected to be infected with COVID-19, as the use of these medications is still controversial in such cases, and might be deleterious.
- Call the **Lebanese Red Cross (140)** if the patient has severe symptoms, such as difficulty breathing, and needs to be taken to hospital. In the meantime, isolate them in a room/space dedicated for this purpose.
- Once the suspected case has been transferred from the pharmacy premises, do not use the room where the patient was isolated, keep the door and windows open and turn off the air conditioning until the room is cleaned with a detergent and disinfectant. If no separate room was available, close the pharmacy until it is disinfected.
- Pharmacy staff in contact with a confirmed patient should self-isolate for 14 days and monitor the eventual appearance of symptoms.

HOW TO PUT ON, TAKE OFF, AND DISPOSE OF A MASK

Remember, a mask should be used by health workers, care givers, and individuals with respiratory symptoms, such as fever and cough.

1. Before touching the mask, clean hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub.
2. Take the mask and inspect it for holes.
3. Adopt a three-layer mask for an adequate protection.
4. Follow the manufacturers' recommendations to determine which side is external (usually the colored one) and the upper side (usually where the metal strip is).
5. Place the mask to your face. For ear-loops surgical mask, position the elastic bands around both ears. For tie-on type, secure upper ties at the crown of head then secure lower ties at the nape.
6. Pinch the metal strip or stiff edge of the mask so it molds to the shape of your nose.
7. Extend the mask by pulling the bottom edge to completely cover your mouth, nose and chin.
8. Do not touch the mask after wearing it. Otherwise, perform hand hygiene after touching it.
9. To take off ear-loop mask, hold both the ear loops and take-off gently from face. For tie-on type, unfasten the ties at the nape first then unfasten the ties at the crown of head. Avoid touching the outside of the mask while removing it as it may be covered with germs.

10. Discard the mask in a closed bin immediately after use.
11. Perform hand hygiene after touching or discarding the mask. Wash your hands with soap and water or use alcohol-based hand rub.

CLEANING SURFACES

Contaminated surfaces are one of the primary means through which COVID-19 spreads. Make sure the pharmacy is clean and hygienic by cleaning surfaces with detergent **and** disinfectant. This can be done either by a 2-step cleaning/disinfecting process or using a product that combines both steps.

Using a detergent

- A detergent is a surfactant that facilitates the removal of dirt and organic matter.
- Most hard surfaces, including counters can be adequately cleaned with warm water and a neutral detergent as per the manufacturer's instructions.
- Allowing the cleaned surfaces to dry is an important aspect of cleaning.
- Routine cleaning of floors with detergent and water is recommended.

Using a disinfectant

- A disinfectant rapidly kills or inactivates most infectious agents.
- Disinfectants are not to be used as general cleaning agents, unless combined with a detergent as a combination cleaning agent.
- Disinfection should always be undertaken following, and in addition to, detergent cleaning.
- Use a certified disinfectant agent or a 1/10 bleach solution (stable for 1 day).

WASTE MANAGEMENT

There are no additional controls required for disposing of waste, follow routine processes for disposal. Ensure closed bins are provided for safe disposal of tissues by staff/patients. All waste from suspected contaminated areas should be removed and double packed before disposal.

SECURING STOCK AND ACCESS TO KEY MEDICATIONS AND EQUIPMENT

- Pharmacists should secure the procurement, storage, and distribution of key medications in addition to products used for disease prevention, and diagnosis, and adjust the inventory as needed. The list includes antiviral medications, antimicrobial agents, antipyretics and analgesics, corticosteroids, and several other categories of medications.
- Pharmacists should ensure equitable dispensation of medications by preventing patients from storing unnecessary quantities, thus depriving those who need them.

SUPPLY OF MEDICATIONS

- The supply of medications should be done without anyone external to the pharmacy staff entering the pharmacy (or at least the non-public areas).
- The cases and bags used by wholesale distributors for the delivery of medications should be cleaned and disinfected before they are taken inside the pharmacy facilities.

REFERENCES AND MORE INFORMATION

1. FIP, 2020. CORONAVIRUS SARS-CoV-2/ COVID-19 PANDEMIC: Information and interim guidelines for pharmacists and the pharmacy workforce. <https://www.fip.org/files/content/priority-areas/coronavirus/Coronavirus-guidance-update-ENGLISH.pdf>
2. NSW Health, Australia, 2020 - [Community pharmacy pandemic preparedness for COVID-19](#)
3. NSW, Australia, 2020 - [Health Protection NSW](#)
4. Clinical Excellence Commission - [NSW Infection Prevention and Control Practice Handbook](#)
5. Clinical Excellence Commission - [Primary and Community Care Infection Prevention and Control](#)
6. WHO, 2020 - [Guide to Getting your workplace ready for COVID 19](#)
7. Center for Health Protection, Department of Health. Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. https://www.chp.gov.hk/files/pdf/use_mask_properly.pdf

إلى المرضى / الزبائن الكرام، يرجى:

1. تعقيم اليدين لدى الدخول إلى الصيدلية.
 2. الحفاظ على مسافة أمان تتراوح بين 1.5 و 2 متر بينك وبين المرضى / الزبائن الآخرين وأي من موظفي الصيدلية.
 3. عدم المشي خارج العلامات الأرضية إن وجدت.
 4. عدم المصافحة وتجنب أي احتكاك مع أي كان أثناء تواجدك في الصيدلية.
 5. تحضير الوصفة الطبية التي يجب شراؤها مسبقاً.
 6. إحترام وتطبيق آداب السعال:
- تغطية الأنف والفم بمنديل ورقي (Kleenex) ورميه في حاوية المهملات بعد الاستخدام أو إستخدام الكوع المثني.
 - تنظيف اليدين بعد لمس إفرازات الجهاز التنفسي.