



National  
Pharmacy  
Council

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# COVID-19 PANDEMIC

**Information and guidelines for pharmacists, pharmacy technicians and other pharmacy staff**

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Covid-19 pandemic: Information and guide for pharmacy professionals/ March 2020

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

The pharmacy workforce plays an important public health role and is a vital asset in combatting the spread of COVID-19. Pharmacies are first point of contact for the public and a place where people can expect to receive accurate and reliable information about the virus prevention and treatment. Pharmacies also have to manage and assess how best to provide continued care to their patients with additional demands on their services and staff.

The National Pharmacy Council recognizes the challenges faced by pharmacists and the contributions being made by them and the wider pharmacy staff at a time when there is high demand on healthcare services, supply of medicines and advice.

The following information and guidelines from the National Pharmacy council and other sources is available to support pharmacists, pharmacies and members of the public during this critical period.

## 2 GENERAL PRECAUTIONS AND HYGIENE BACKGROUND

When someone who has Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) coughs or exhales, they release droplets of infected fluid. Most of these droplets fall on nearby surfaces and objects such as benches or telephones. People could become infected with COVID-19 by touching contaminated surfaces or objects and then touching their eyes, nose or mouth. If they are standing within 1.5m of a person diagnosed with COVID-19 they could become infected by breathing in droplets coughed out or exhaled by the infected person. In other words, COVID-19 spreads in a similar way to all respiratory viruses like the common cold and influenza.

Most persons infected with COVID-19 experience mild symptoms and recover without medical intervention. However, some go on to experience more serious illness and may require hospital care. Risk of serious illness rises with age: people over 40 seem to be more vulnerable than those under 40. People with weakened immune systems and people with chronic conditions such as diabetes, heart and lung disease are also more vulnerable to serious illness or complications.

Infection prevention and control precautions for COVID-19 will also help prevent the spread of other common infections which present to pharmacies and protect your patients and staff. All

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pharmacies in Rwanda are recommended to implement these precautions and hygiene measures as soon as practicable.

## **2.1 Infection prevention and control in the pharmacies (Hospital & community)**

### **2.1.1 Promote good cough etiquette and respiratory hygiene.**

Good respiratory hygiene prevents the spread of COVID-19. People have to 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 elbow), dispose of used tissues, and clean your hands afterwards.

### **2.1.2 Promote regular and thorough hand-hygiene by staff and patients.**

Hand hygiene 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 hand rub/foam for at least 40 seconds.

### **2.1.3 Handwashing.**

Wash your hands:

- 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.

### **2.1.4 Keep the environment clean.**

Contamination on surfaces touched by staff and patients is one of the main ways that COVID-19 spreads.

**Encourage sick staff members to remain at home**

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## 2.2 Hand hygiene and respiratory hygiene in the pharmacies

### 2.2.1 For patients Coming to Pharmacies

- Display signage/posters in the pharmacy to encourage patients to practice hand hygiene, cough etiquette and respiratory hygiene whilst in the pharmacy and generally in the community.
- **Put alcohol-based hand rub dispensers in prominent places** around the pharmacy especially at counters where surfaces are touched.
- Alternatively direct patients to places where they can wash their hands with soap and water for the minimum of 40 seconds.
- Use social distancing of 1.5m where possible. Speak to patients from a safe distance to avoid contact with respiratory droplets.

### 2.2.2 For pharmacy staff

- Ensure staff have access to hand washing facilities and alcohol-based hand rub
- Practice effective hand hygiene, wash hands thoroughly throughout the work day or use an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Practice cough etiquette and respiratory hygiene.
- If you have respiratory symptoms from any respiratory illness, stay at home.
- Ensure that surgical masks and / or paper tissues are available for staff, for those who develop a runny nose or cough at work, along with closed bins for hygienically disposing of them.
- **Social distancing** is an effective measure, and should be used where practicable.
- Within a pharmacy environment this may mean attempting to keep a distance of 1.5 meters between staff and patients where possible. Speak to patients from the other side of a counter or desk where possible.
- Pharmacists (Clinical Pharmacists) undertaking direct clinical services should do so following standard precautions.

### 2.2.3 Patients who present with symptoms of respiratory tract infection

On presentation to the pharmacy, the symptomatic patient should:

- Self-identify at the distance of at least 1.5 M.



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- Be given a surgical/procedural mask (if available) to wear during the pharmacy presentation. Masks can be obtained from your pharmacies
  - Be referred to Health care facility or call toll no 114 to discuss COVID-19 testing or consider ambulance if the patient has severe symptoms such as difficulty breathing.

#### **2.2.4 Masks**

Pharmacy staff are advised to not wear face masks as precautionary measure. P2/N95 respirator masks are not required to be worn by symptomatic patients unless they are immunocompromised and have been directed to do so by their treating specialist. Unless masks are used correctly they are unlikely to protect against airborne pathogen spread.

### **2.3 Cleaning**

Regular environmental cleaning in the pharmacies is important for reducing the risk of transmission of pathogenic organisms, it is particularly important in containing the risk of spread of COVID-19. Contamination on surfaces touched by staff and patients is one of the main ways that COVID-19 spreads.

Pharmacy staff can ensure that the pharmacy is clean and hygienic by cleaning surfaces using a detergent and disinfectant. This can be either by a 2-step cleaning/disinfecting process, or using a product that combines both steps.

#### **2.3.1 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.

#### **2.3.2 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.



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- Disinfection should always be undertaken following, and in addition to, detergent cleaning.

## 2.4 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 and patients.

## 3 PHARMACY-MEDIATED ACTIVITIES

### 3.1 Responsibilities and role of community pharmacy

Community pharmacies in outbreak-affected and unaffected countries are often the first point of contact with the health system for those with health-related concerns or simply in need of information and reliable advice.

Community pharmacists have the shared responsibility of:

- Storing appropriate stocks of pharmaceutical products (medicines, masks, etc) to supply the demand
- Informing and educating the public
- Counselling
- Referring
- Promoting disease
- Promoting infection control

### 3.2 Responsibilities and role of hospital pharmacy

Hospital pharmacies in outbreak-affected and unaffected countries play an important role in:

- Storing appropriate stocks of relevant medicines and other medical products and devices to supply the demand
- Collaborating with other healthcare professionals in providing patient care and support
- In-hospital prevention and infection control
- Informing and counselling
- Ensuring the responsible use of the pharmaceutical products supplied. For example, ensuring that healthcare professionals consistently wear their masks correctly.



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### 3.3 How to prepare alcohol-based hand rub formulations

Pharmacists and pharmacy technicians have knowledge and skills in compounding alcohol based hand rub which can be cost-effective and effective to the community, for detailed information on how to prepare hand rub formulations, including calculation and formulation methods and a step-by-step guide for local producers, refer to the WHO's Guide to Local Production: WHO-recommended Hand rub Formulations, (**Attachment III**).

#### **Please Note:**

Though, the National Pharmacy Council acknowledges the important work that pharmacy professionals are doing on the frontline, it also reminds all pharmacy professionals not to engage in a kind of unprofessional and unethical activities that may lead to a lack of public trust in our noble profession. For the last days there have been claims from the public where pharmacists have been acquiring and dispensing low quality products and hiking prices for products used in the prevention of the disease. NPC is investigating such cases and anyone implicated in those kind of unethical behavior will be sanctioned.

NPC continues to follow closely the prevailing situation and commit to collaborate with relevant local authorities in preventing the spread of the disease and to ensure that pharmacy professionals have up-to-date and accurate information about the disease and are on frontline as well in combatting the spread of COVID-19 in our country.

For More information on COVID-19 prevention and Control Kindly refer to the following attachments.

**Attachment I: FIP GUIDELINES**

**Attachment II: MOH Guidelines on COVID-19 containment**

**Attachment III: WHO guidelines for alcohol based formulation for local production**