

A Call for Support for Materials and Supplies to Sustain Family Practices During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Last updated April 14, 2020

Background

Family physicians play an integral role in providing health care in community settings and in emergency departments at all times, but especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Public Health Agency of Canada has recommended that health care workers use personal protective equipment (PPE) appropriately when interacting with or treating patients who are known or suspected to be infected with COVID-19.¹ However, shortages of PPE, which includes gloves, gowns, and masks, hinder family physicians' abilities to follow this guidance as they provide essential services to their patients. The lack of PPE is especially challenging for doctors who provide care to patients in vulnerable circumstances.²

Current efforts/challenges

Due to the lack of supply and surging demand for PPE, family physicians have been forced to acquire PPE from other sectors and ration limited stocks.³ While many family physicians are providing virtual care to their patients, they still require PPE when delivering in-person care (such as administering vaccinations and treating vulnerable patients).

A survey the Canadian Medical Association conducted between March 30 and 31, 2020, indicated:

- One in five physicians expected to run out of critical supplies such as respirators and face protection in two days or less if new stock was not acquired
- Seventy-one per cent of physicians providing community care had ordered supplies in the past month but only 13 per cent had received their orders or had confirmation that the supplies had been shipped
- Of those waiting for supplies, only 11 per cent were aware of alternative government sources of supplies⁴

To increase PPE supplies, the federal government has:

- Provided \$2 billion in federal funding to ensure that health care providers have adequate supplies of PPE⁵
- Released a national plan to mobilize Canadian manufacturers to meet the growing need for medical supplies⁶
- Waived some regulatory requirements (temporarily) to expedite access to PPE, hand sanitizer, disinfectants, and swabs to limit the spread of COVID-19⁷
- Approved an Interim Order process allowing manufacturers to submit applications without submission fees and to be granted authorization to import or sell COVID-19–related medical devices⁸
- Supported innovative manufacturing approaches such as 3-D printing to respond to the increased need for PPE⁹

Action required

- The College of Family Physicians of Canada urges the federal government to acquire and deploy PPE effectively to community-based family practices and acute care settings.
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- and retool processes to focus on PPE.
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- of PPE.
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- gowns, masks, gloves, hand sanitizer, etc.) from federal and/or provincial health authorities to ensure they can safely treat patients, as they did during the SARS crisis in 2003.²
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- allow for realistic planning by health care providers and facilities.

Contact us

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