Pharmacists to Provide Travel Vaccinations to Ontario Patients

More pharmacy-based options improve patients’ access to the vaccines they need to stay healthy at home and abroad

TORONTO (December 1, 2016) - The Ontario Pharmacists Association (OPA) is extremely pleased with today’s announcement by Dr. Eric Hoskins, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, allowing Ontario patients to access a wider variety of vaccines through their local pharmacy.

“We have been working closely with the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to enable pharmacists to offer travel-related vaccines, as well as select other vaccines,” said Sean Simpson, Chair of the Board for the Ontario Pharmacists Association. “For the past four years, patients and the health system as a whole, have benefited from pharmacists’ administration of flu shots and it is great to see the Ontario government leveraging pharmacists’ skills, training and knowledge to improve patient access to care and drive vaccination rates for other preventable diseases.”

Starting on December 15, 2016, trained pharmacists in participating pharmacies will be able to provide patients with access to vaccines to protect against 13 preventable diseases. These include common travel-related vaccines (such as Hepatitis A and B, typhoid, meningococcal disease, pneumococcal disease, yellow fever, rabies and Japanese encephalitis vaccines). Pharmacists will also be able to administer human papillomavirus (HPV) and herpes zoster (shingles) vaccines to Ontarians who are not eligible for these publicly-funded vaccination programs. A complete list of vaccines that can be administered by pharmacists can be found here.

Ontarians are encouraged to speak to their pharmacist about which vaccines will be available at their pharmacy, and what costs may be associated. The majority of vaccines covered in today’s announcement are not publicly funded, “meaning that patients will need to pay for both the product and its administration – whether they are vaccinated at the pharmacy or at a doctor’s office or clinic,” explained Simpson. One notable exception is the shingles vaccine, which is free for Ontarians aged 65 to 70 when they are vaccinated at a doctor’s office or clinic.

“We are encouraged by today’s announcement, and excited to be able to offer more healthcare options to patients; however, there is still more opportunity for pharmacists to have a positive impact on patient health and provincial vaccination programs,” said Simpson. “We look forward to continuing our work with the Ministry of Health and Long-Term care to further expand the list of vaccines offered at pharmacies to include those that are publicly funded.”

Opportunity to improve vaccination rates

By expanding the types of vaccines that patients can access through their pharmacist, Ontario is building on the success and popularity of the pharmacy-based flu shot program. Since that program was introduced in 2012, more than 1.8 million flu shots have been
administered in Ontario pharmacies and that number continues to grow with each flu season.

A 2015 report prepared by the Canadian Centre for Economic Analysis/RiskAnalytica on behalf of the Ontario Pharmacists Association found that there are significant economic and health system benefits to enabling pharmacists to administer vaccines for pneumococcal disease, shingles and HPV. The report estimates that allowing pharmacists to administer these vaccines would result in an additional 4.3 million vaccines administered for pneumococcal diseases, approximately 7.6 million additional vaccinations for shingles, and 275,000 additional HPV vaccines by 2045. This represents a reduction in the number of cases of pneumococcal diseases and shingles by 17 per cent and eight per cent respectively. Increasing the immunization rates for HPV could prevent 37 per cent of the cases of genital warts, 50 per cent of the cases of cervical cancer, and 14 per cent of the cases of anal cancer in Ontario.

“Patients trust that pharmacists have the skills and knowledge to provide a variety of vaccinations, and they appreciate the convenience of being able to access this type of care outside of regular physician’s hours or clinic hours” said Simpson. “By having pharmacists provide travel vaccinations, as well as select other vaccines, we are contributing to a sustainable healthcare system, while helping patients manage this important area of their health.”

About the Ontario Pharmacists Association

The Ontario Pharmacists Association is committed to evolving the pharmacy profession, and advocating for excellence in practice and patient care. As Canada’s largest advocacy organization, and professional development and drug information provider for pharmacists, the Association represents pharmacy professionals across Ontario. By leveraging the unique expertise of pharmacy professionals, enabling them to practice to their fullest potential, and making them more accessible to patients, OPA is working to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the healthcare system.