Considerations for Pharmacies during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic is important. During the pandemic, pharmacy staff can minimize their risk of exposure to the virus and reduce the risk for customers by using the principles of infection prevention and control and social distancing. As a vital part of the healthcare system, pharmacies can reduce the risk for customers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Use strategies to minimize close contact between staff and customers by using the following strategies:

- Minimize physical contact with customers and between customers at checkout areas in the pharmacy. For example, consider use of self-checkout kiosks and touchless payments.
- Reduce risk during COVID-19 testing and other close-contact services. Filling prescriptions: Pharmacists and pharmacy technicians should always wear a facemask while they are in the pharmacy for source control.
- Advise staff who are sick to stay home and request home delivery or send a well family member or friend to pick up their medicine.
- Encourage the use of, and have hand sanitizer and disinfectant wipes available at registers.
- Discontinue the use of magazines and other shared items in pharmacy waiting areas. Ensure instructions for concentration, application method, and contact time for all cleaning and disinfecting products.
- Reduce use of shared items. Consider sending customers home with earplugs or eyewear they can wear while the prescription is being filled.
- Encourage all prescribers to submit prescription orders via telephone or electronically. The pharmacy can minimize contact with other customers. Some states have passed legislation that waives the requirement for prescription legibility (these laws vary by state). In these states, electronic prescriptions can be received by the pharmacy without a legible prescription. The electronic prescription can be printed or delivered by email.
- Pharmacy staff should not be required to wear face masks in areas of the pharmacy where the staff is not in direct contact with customers and other staff in the pharmacy, such as in pharmacy storage areas.
- Considerations for Pharmacies during the COVID-19 pandemic include:
  - Drug distribution and dispensing
  - Disposal of infectious waste
  - Immunizations, which require face to face encounters.
  - Filling prescriptions

Reduce risk during COVID-19 testing and other close-contact services

Pharmacies, like all healthcare settings, have an important role to play in protecting public health during the COVID-19 pandemic. The lack of physical contact with customers and between customers is necessary to prevent the spread of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. Follow the manufacturer’s instructions for concentration, application method, and contact time for all cleaning and disinfecting products.

Conclusion

The principles of infection prevention and control and social distancing are necessary in all healthcare settings, including pharmacies, during the COVID-19 pandemic. These strategies will help minimize the risk of exposure to SARS-CoV-2 and reduce the risk for customers.

Additional Resources

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases (NCIRD)
- OIG
- FOIA

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