

Vaccinations: An Expanding Role for Your Community Pharmacist

As the profession of pharmacy continues to evolve, pharmacists are establishing themselves as important members of the healthcare system. Having been recently given legislation to administer vaccinations, pharmacists can now provide a vital service to the public by decreasing the incidence of several diseases. In the past pharmacies were only permitted to host clinics, such as a flu shot clinic, where other healthcare providers (nurses, etc.) administered the vaccine. Now however, upon receiving appropriate training and certification, pharmacists can give vaccines in their respective pharmacies.

So how does pharmacists as immunizers benefit you the public? Even with the current immunization programs in Canada, many people are not up to date with their vaccinations. When you think about the services provided to the healthcare system, it makes sense for pharmacists to be giving vaccines. Working in the community, pharmacists are available for extended hours in close contact with their patients, making them easily accessible. Considered by many people as medication experts, pharmacists are also a valuable source of information, able to answer various vaccine-related questions. Furthermore, given the access pharmacists have to their patients' medication profiles; they have the ability to identify individuals that would benefit from certain vaccinations. Such examples include the pneumonia vaccine for those with respiratory diseases, the shingles vaccine for those over the age of 60, and the flu shot for those with diabetes. Finally, through the use of a vaccination profile pharmacists are able to keep record of a patient's immunization history, which can remain accessible for several years. This helps to ensure a patient receives the right vaccine at the right time.

So what types of vaccine services can be provided by your pharmacist. As the cold weather sets in for another winter, several individuals are planning trips to more tropical destinations. Many however are unsure about which vaccines may be required. Booking a travel consultation with your certified immunization pharmacist, you can not only receive the necessary vaccine(s) but also some helpful health-related advice to ensure your trip is as enjoyable as possible. Take for instance the following scenario. A newly married couple was in the midst of planning a honeymoon vacation to Mexico. Unsure if they required any vaccinations they booked a consultation with their community pharmacist. At that time it was determined that they both required a combination Hepatitis A and B (Twinrix®) vaccine. With his new certification, the pharmacist was able to safely administer the vaccine, while providing helpful advice to prevent and treat traveler's diarrhea. This is only one example of the vaccination services that may be offered at your pharmacy. Others may include a pharmacist operated clinic, where select vaccines are given, such as the flu shot or the new shingles vaccine.

Are there certain policies that pharmacists must adhere to when providing injections? In order to become certified, a pharmacist must first complete an accredited education program made up of both theoretical and practical material. It is important to know that this process is required to be updated every 3 years. Pharmacists are also required to maintain current certification in both CPR and first-aid, to ensure they possess the knowledge necessary to handle emergency situations. Some additional rules include the following: Pharmacists are not permitted to vaccinate children under the age of 5, and can only give vaccines via the intramuscular (IM) and subcutaneous route (SC). They are not authorized to give injections by other routes, such as intravenous (IV) or intradermal.

As the role of Canadian pharmacists continues to evolve, new opportunities are becoming available. Being one of the most accessible healthcare professionals, pharmacists providing injections will definitely improve public access to vaccines, complementing services already provided by family physicians and the VON. If you have any questions regarding pharmacists as immunizers, or would like to book a consultation, be sure to contact your certified pharmacists at Ryan's Pharmacy in Nackawic, or at The Medicine Shoppe Pharmacy in the Fredericton Co-Op. Remember your health is our number one priority!

Daniel Pike
Pharmacist