



BOARD OF PHARMACY

Emergency Guidance to Licensees

April 15, 2020

The Board of Pharmacy realizes that our pharmacists, pharmacist interns, and pharmacy technicians are under a great deal of stress trying to take care of patients the best way possible during this emergency. We appreciate all of the hard work and dedication that each of you are exhibiting for our communities. As five (5) of the seven (7) board members are also licensed pharmacists, we are in this with you seeing first-hand some of the obstacles that need to be addressed. Because of this, the board is spending considerable time to help make sure you have the resources and answers you need to navigate this emergency as best and quickly as we can.

The board is unable to predict every scenario or question that may arise and you may have to use your professional judgment in some cases. There are legal timelines and quorums that have to be met before the board can meet to take material action so that may also impact the timeframe in which actions can be taken. The board has faith that as pharmacists, with our statutes and regulations as guard rails, you can make the right decisions for patient care when situations or "gray areas" arise.

Q. When will the emergency regulations be finalized?

A. They are finalized and went into effect on April 3, 2020 and distributed to anybody who has signed up for the Board of Pharmacy ListServ. They will be posted to the board website and the division's Covid-19 page as quickly as possible.

Q. If a pharmacy is overwhelmed, is there anything that another pharmacy can do to assist?

A. Yes. Emergency regulations that went into effect on April 3, 2020 include changes to shared pharmacy services provided during an emergency, which removes the requirement to obtain shared pharmacy services license.

Q. What else was included in the emergency board regulations?

A. There were a large number of amendments and repeals to make sure licensees had the most flexibility during these times. Briefly, some of the regulations that were amended or repealed (eliminated) during the emergency include:

- Pharmacists and pharmacist interns may administer prescription drug orders;
- Eliminated the need for a cashier to obtain a pharmacy technician license to help with some staffing;
- Introduced pharmacy technicians who hold national certification and allowed them to perform a plethora of authorized functions under the direct supervision of a pharmacist to improve workload balance;
- Introduced shared pharmacy services during an emergency that doesn't require a license;
- Eliminated the 1-year prescription order expiration date;
- Allows any quantity of a non-controlled substance prescription to be dispensed, on an original or refill, up to the total quantity on the prescription drug order;
- If a prescription has no refills on an existing, chronic, non-controlled substance and the pharmacist is unable to reach the practitioner they may continue to dispense a quantity not to exceed a 120-day supply;

- Suspended CPR certification for immunizing pharmacists and pharmacist interns during an emergency;
- Applications do not need notarization during an emergency;
- Suspended the requirement that pharmacists working for tribal health facilities do not have to register with the board.

NOTE: These represent very brief overviews and do not represent all of the changes that were made. Licensees should review all of the regulations released for the complete detail.

Q. What can my facility do to help prevent the spread of Covid-19?

- Wash your hands frequently, for at least 20 seconds, with soap and water.
- Use a hand sanitizer than contains at least 70% alcohol.
- Avoid touching your face.
- Maintain, as much as possible, distance between fellow staff.
- Clean the work area regularly, at least hourly. Use a timer to help remind all staff it's time to wipe down as much as possible, i.e. phones, computers, dispensing areas, cash registers, countertops, etc.
- Keep appropriate distance between customers. Place markers on the floor for customers to stand and guide them.
- Associates should be encouraged to stay home if they're sick. Monitor your staff for temperature or other signs of illness.
- Establish a process for patients you know are immunocompromised or at high risk so they aren't waiting in line. Think of services your pharmacy may be able to offer that you currently don't or methods to minimize customer contact. i.e. provide curbside pick-up, offer delivery, and maximize drive-thru opportunities.
- Make hand sanitizer available to all staff and customers.
- Put up "shields" between the pharmacy and the public to block any immediate contact yet allow the patient and staff to effectively communicate.
- The ultimate outcome that every licensee should be thinking about is how to maximize distance and maintain a cleaning & disinfecting routine.

Q. What can we do to help provide guidance to our patients?

- Speak calmly and reassure patients with up to date information. Make sure you're staying up to date as much as possible because topics, situations, and mandates change rapidly during emergencies.
 - The [Alaska Pharmacist Association](#) has broad information that is continually updated that includes more than just topics related to regulatory functions of the board. You do **not** need to be a member to access the Covid-19 page.
- Talk to them about their unique prescription situation and offer additional refill quantities, if allowed by the third party. Do what you can to minimize the requirement for patients to come back to the pharmacy over and over again.
- If the patient has access to the internet, recommend patients visit the CDC "Coronavirus Self-Checker" guide to help them understand whether they should seek medical care: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/testing.html>
- Share the following CDC guidance on:
 - [How to Protect Yourself](#)
 - [Priority Covid-19 Testing](#)
 - [Cleaning and Disinfecting your Home](#)
 - [Household Checklist](#)
 - [If you have Animals](#)

Q. During this emergency, if a pharmacist is ill and has to leave the pharmacy, can a technician continue to distribute prescriptions without a pharmacist present until another pharmacist can get there?

A. This scenario has been covered with the Department of Law as a real potential under our current emergency. Unfortunately, the only law that allows this to occur is if the pharmacy is operating with a telepharmacy system. Currently, in the absence of a telepharmacy system, a pharmacy would have to close if a pharmacist is not present.

Q. Pharmacies are critical healthcare infrastructures, so we need to do everything possible to remain open, however, if the pharmacy has to close because there is no other option, what are some aspects I can think about in preparing for that scenario?

A. In preparation for a situation where your pharmacy has to close you should be thinking about:

- What other pharmacy is my backup to transfer prescriptions?
- Do I have signs made up in advance to advise patients? What other communication mechanisms will I have in place to notify the public?
- Who will provide the prescription transfers?
- Am I going to have another pharmacist or staff come to re-open and if so, do they have all the access they will need, i.e. alarm codes, keys, software access, ordering abilities, ability to report PDMP data?
- How are the prescriptions already filled going to be handled?
- Was the board notified?

Q. There is so much information about Covid-19 being published or distributed. What are the best ways for me to get the information I need for my practice site and patients?

A. The board recommends the following:

- 1) stay up to date with CDC recommendations. [click here](#)
- 2) register with the board of pharmacy listserv to receive communications from the board when released. [click here](#)
- 3) use the Alaska Pharmacist Association site as it contains more than just board of pharmacy updates. [click here](#)
- 4) stay up to date with the State of Alaska Health Mandates by signing up for notifications when they are released. [click here](#)
- 5) if you have concerns or questions you may continue to send emails to the board at boardofpharmacy@alaska.gov