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Pharmacy needs rapid antigen testing

STATE-FUNDED rapid antigen testing for pharmacy workers is needed to ensure community pharmacies impacted by COVID-19 can continue to operate, the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia (PSA) believes.

Calling on the Berejiklian Government to roll out the tests for frontline health workers, PSA NSW Branch President, Chelsea Felkai, said the welfare of pharmacists affects the health and welfare of the broader community.

Felkai noted the tests can provide results within 15 minutes, negative tests would provide health authorities and community pharmacies with the confidence to reopen affected stores sooner than if workers had to wait for the results of PCR tests.

"As we move into a new phase of the pandemic with significantly higher case numbers, rapid antigen testing will need to play a significant role in reducing isolation periods

for pharmacists and identifying infection prior to the onset of symptoms in high-risk settings," she said.

"This approach is desperately needed in rural areas.

"Many of our regional communities are already facing significant workforce shortages.

"They do not have the resources or flexibility to cope when employees need to isolate for extended periods.

"Given that PCR test results are currently taking five or six days to be returned, this potentially closes a pharmacy for an entire week.

"With community pharmacies being one of the most frequently listed public exposure sites, pharmacy employees in hot spot areas face growing concerns about contracting COVID-19 and taking it home to their families.

"Pharmacists have done a great job in protecting their staff and the community from exposure to COVID-19 in community pharmacy, by wearing of personal protective equipment and practicing distancing measures.

"Rapid antigen testing is another vital tool to further protect pharmacy staff and ensure



pharmacies remain open to service their communities.

"Rapid antigen testing can also be used as additional surveillance testing in areas of sustained community transmission.

"Currently this would be akin to Sydney's LGAs of concern and regional outbreak areas such as Dubbo, Bourke and Broken Hill.

"But as we move into Phase B and Phase C of the reopening plan, where case numbers are much higher, there is a significantly greater need for surveillance testing of health care workers including pharmacists."

Meanwhile the Therapeutic Goods Administration has issued guidance on the use of rapid antigen tests for COVID-19 - [HERE](#).



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Moderna offers timely COVAX boost

MOVES to commence the rollout of Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine (COVAX) through community pharmacies from late next week (**PD** breaking news) could give the sector a boost.

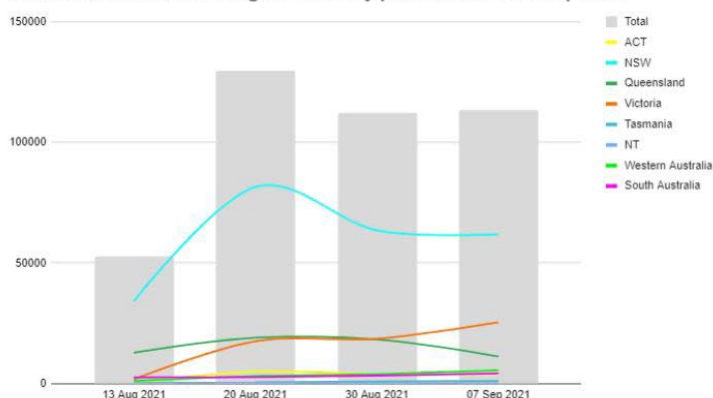
To date pharmacies have administered more than 408,000 doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine, with NSW stores leading the way, delivering 59% of that total.

However, data provided by the Department of Health yesterday showed that pharmacies in NSW, Queensland and the Northern Territory saw a decline in the numbers of doses administered over the eight days to 07 Sep, while Victorian stores experienced an increase in demand over the same period.

Speaking at a press conference yesterday, Pharmacy Guild of Australia National President, Trent Twomey, described Moderna's mRNA shot as "the vaccine we've all been waiting for", with doses to be delivered to 1,200 pharmacies by the end of next week.

He said an additional 1,200 stores would be supplied doses of the vaccine each week for the next three weeks as part of a phased introduction.

COVAX administered through community pharmacies to 07 Sep 2021



The announcement of the rollout came days after the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) gave the green-light for it to be administered to Australians aged 12 years and older (**PD** 06 Sep).

While the majority of Australian jurisdictions have implemented regulations allowing pharmacists to administer COVAX in line with TGA approvals, Pharmaceutical Society of Australia National President, Associate Professor Chris Freeman, noted rules in NSW, Queensland and Tasmania needed to be amended to enable pharmacists to vaccinate patients

aged between 12 and 17 years.

"With community pharmacists exclusively set to receive the first doses of Moderna around the country, it is crucial that they can administer the vaccine to individuals aged between 12 and 17 years from day one," Freeman said.

"This is a race, and pharmacists, as one of our most accessible healthcare workforces, must continue to play a key role in vaccinating younger Australians.

"Pharmacists should be allowed to vaccinate with all TGA-approved vaccines in all practice settings."

HSU COVAX lotto

THE NSW Health Services Union is funding a \$50,000 lottery pool to boost vaccination rates amongst its membership.

The pool has been divided into 50 \$1,000 prizes will be open to members in NSW and Queensland who can demonstrate that they have received a COVID-19 vaccine (COVAX) or that they have booked an appointment.

HSU NSW Secretary, Gerard Hayes, said the lottery aimed to recognise those who have been vaccinated, while incentivising those who have yet to get the jab, noting that vaccine hesitancy amongst health workers was declining.

"This lottery is a chance to recognise the four-in-five paramedics, health and aged care workers who have already been vaccinated," he said.

"But it also provides those who haven't with the chance to take a fresh look at the vaccine.

"We think this will be a powerful incentive for people who are reluctant and have delayed getting vaccinated."

TGA moves to curb tocilizumab use

ACCESS to tocilizumab (Actemra) is set to be severely restricted as a result of ongoing supply shortages.

In a statement issued by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) this morning, community pharmacies and private hospitals will be limited to accessing 10% of their usual supply, while public hospitals will be able to order 25% of their normal stock levels.

"Wholesalers will allocate stock to individual hospitals and pharmacies based on an average of 12 months of sales prior to when the shortage began," the TGA said.

"Customers will be limited to purchasing a proportion of their average monthly purchases.

"Roche will no longer supply

Actemra IV directly to hospitals and pharmacies.

"These allocations have been developed to support access to patients in greatest need of tocilizumab.

"We will continue to monitor stock and will review constraints monthly.

"Hospitals and pharmacies must urgently implement conservation methods to manage stock they have available."

The TGA listed Cytokine Release Syndrome, systemic juvenile idiopathic arthritis and polyarticular juvenile idiopathic arthritis as priority conditions for the use of tocilizumab, with hospitals advised to ensure stock is available for these patient groups.

SHPA backs medicines supply deals

AGREEMENTS signed by the Federal Government with Medicines Australia and the Generic and Biosimilar Medicines Association (GBMA) are vital to ensuring access to medications, the Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia (SHPA) believes.

Under the new deals manufacturers of critical Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) listed medicines will be required to hold between four and six months' worth of stock in Australia to minimise supply chain disruptions (**PD** 07 Sep).

SHPA CEO, Kristin Michaels, described the agreements as a shot in the arm for the nation's medicines supply and sustainability.

"Just last year, SHPA's COVID-19 Hospital Pharmacy Capacity Snapshots revealed more supply was needed in our national medicines reserves to meet projected demands to treat Australians with COVID-19 on intensive care wards," she said.

"Today, hospital pharmacists around the country, particularly in NSW and Victoria, have been accessing and dispensing sotrovimab and remdesivir from the National Medical Stockpile to treat hospitalised COVID-19 patients."

Michaels added that the announcements were timely ahead of the reviews of the National Medicines Policy and Pharmaceutical Reform Agreements.



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Dispensary Corner

SOMEWHAT unsurprisingly, data from the UK has found cases of new diagnosed sexually transmitted infections (STIs) have plummeted by a third during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Despite much of Britain living under various levels of lockdowns throughout 2020, 318,000 cases were recorded by Public Health England, *BBC News* reported.

Authorities noted there was a greater fall in the number of infections that needed in-person assessments, such as genital warts, than other STIs, but cases of chlamydia and gonorrhoea, which can be diagnosed with home testing kits, also fell.

While many would imagine the restrictions on movement would have significantly limited the opportunity for amorous engagements leading to the transmission of STIs, another reason for the drop in case numbers could be the 10% decline in consultations at sexual health services.

Commenting on the fall in new STI cases, Debbie Laycock, from sexual health advocacy group, the Terrence Higgins Trust, said it was good news, but warned rates could spring back up.

"Sexually transmitted infections are still circulating," she said.

"That means it's as important as ever to regularly test for STIs if you're having sex and for everyone to know that sexual health services are open for business - both face-to-face and online."

PSA presses for NIP access in Qld

EXPANDING access to National Immunisation Program (NIP) seasonal influenza vaccines through Queensland's community pharmacy network would improve outcomes for patients in the state, the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia (PSA) believes.

Under current regulations in the Sunshine State, patients age 65 years and older cannot receive the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) preferred flu vaccine through pharmacy, with the shot only available through general practice.

PSA Queensland Branch President, Shane McDonald, said opening access to NIP vaccines to pharmacists would create more opportunities for patients to access immunisations and boost healthcare across the State.

"As we prepare for 2022, allowing community pharmacist immunisers to provide NIP-funded influenza vaccines will increase vaccination rates and



herd immunity to influenza within the state, preventing death and hospitalisations in those aged over 65 years," he said.

"As we have seen since pharmacists started providing influenza vaccines, immunisation rates have risen in the adult population overall.

"Currently, over 20% of this age group is not vaccinated against influenza. We expect that

expanding access to vaccinations will see a 10-20% increase in coverage for the over 65 population.

"As we have seen during the COVID-19 vaccine rollout, pharmacists are a critical part of the vaccination workforce. It is time to align the funding and regulation of pharmacist-administered vaccinations with that of all other authorised immunisers"

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ALC, Guild deal

THE Pharmacy Guild of Australia has announced a partnership with the Australian Logistics Council (ALC) to help freight and supply chain workers gain access to COVID-19 vaccines.

The deal will see ALC members' workforces accessing the Guild Corporate COVID-19 vaccination program.

The program will enable the ALC to offer COVID-19 shots to its members through a personalised booking platform, with the organisations aiming to alleviate the pressure workers are under.



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