

Questions and Answers for Supplying of Publicly Funded Oral Antiviral COVID-19 Treatment in Ontario Pharmacies

Updated April 25, 2022

This Questions and Answers document accompanies the most recent Executive Officer (EO) Notices on the Supplying of Publicly Funded Oral Antiviral COVID-19 Treatment in Ontario Pharmacies available on the [ministry website](#).

For more information:

- Access the ministry website for [COVID-19 antiviral treatments](#) in Ontario
- For Health Network System claims issues, pharmacy staff may contact the ministry's Ontario Drug Benefit (ODB) Help Desk and refer to the [Ontario Drug Programs Reference Manual](#)

Overview

1. How will the public know which pharmacies in Ontario are providing publicly funded oral antivirals for treatment of COVID-19?

Only pharmacies with a Health Network System account and billing privileges under the *Ontario Drug Benefit Act* are eligible to dispense the publicly funded Paxlovid™. It is up to each eligible pharmacy to decide whether it will participate in this publicly funded initiative. The public may wish to contact their local pharmacy to see if they have any in stock prior to showing up with a prescription and confirm if the pharmacy provides publicly funded Paxlovid™.

Pharmacies that dispense publicly funded Paxlovid™ will be listed on the ministry website as soon as available at [this link](#).

2. How do pharmacies obtain Paxlovid™?

Pharmacies can order the publicly funded oral antiviral Paxlovid™ (at no cost) through participating pharmaceutical distributors (Shoppers Drug Mart or McKesson). Pharmacies should contact a participating pharmaceutical distributor for details on the ordering process.

Eligibility

3. Who is eligible to receive Paxlovid™?

Please refer to the most recent Executive Officer (EO) Notice on the Supplying of Publicly Funded Oral Antiviral COVID-19 Treatment in Ontario Pharmacies available on the [ministry website](#) for information about patient eligibility.

Drug-drug interactions leading to potentially serious and/or life-threatening reactions are possible due to the effects of ritonavir on the hepatic metabolism of certain drugs. Contraindications and interactions must be carefully considered before Paxlovid™ is prescribed and dispensed.

4. Do pharmacists have to confirm whether the patient has a positive COVID-19 test result prior to dispensing Paxlovid™? If so, what documentation is required?

Yes. While pharmacists are dispensing publicly funded oral antiviral Paxlovid™ pursuant to a valid prescription provided by an authorized prescriber (e.g., physician or nurse practitioner) who has clinically assessed the patient for drug therapy, pharmacists will be required to document that the patient has a positive COVID-19 test result and the date of the test prior to dispensing Paxlovid™. This can be done by checking the patient's test results in the Ontario Laboratories Information System (OLIS) or by asking the patient to confirm whether they have a positive result. A copy of the test result or documented verbal confirmation from the patient must be obtained and retained for post-payment verification purposes.

5. Do pharmacists have to confirm whether the patient meets the other eligibility criteria for Paxlovid™ (e.g., starting therapy within 5 days of symptom onset, etc.)?

Yes, pharmacies must assess a patient's eligibility to receive publicly funded Paxlovid™ prior to dispensing the drug and submitting a claim for a dispensing fee. Please refer to the most recent Executive Officer (EO) Notice on the Supplying of Publicly Funded Oral Antiviral COVID-19 Treatment in Ontario Pharmacies available on the [ministry website](#) for information about patient eligibility and pharmacy documentation requirements.

6. If a patient is in need of a COVID-19 test but is otherwise eligible for publicly funded Paxlovid™ (and presents with a prescription), what should the pharmacist do?

Along with the valid prescription, patients must have a positive COVID-19 test to receive publicly funded Paxlovid™. A positive result on any of the following test types is sufficient to confirm COVID-19:

- A point-of-care antigen test administered by either the patient or a health care provider
- ID NOW™ or another point-of-care polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test
- A lab-based PCR test

NOTE on Testing Guidance for pharmacies participating in the Publicly Funded COVID-19 Testing Services in Ontario Pharmacies program: refer to the [Testing Guidance](#) for all updates on eligibility for molecular testing (PCR or rapid molecular testing), including high-risk individuals eligible to receive Paxlovid™.

A reminder regarding self-collected specimens: follow all specimen handling and labelling instructions to ensure specimens are handled and shipped properly. Rejected or cancelled specimens could lead to individuals not receiving treatment with Paxlovid™ within five days of symptom onset.

If a health care provider has pre-assessed a patient for Paxlovid™ and provides them with a prescription to be filled if they present with COVID-19 symptoms later on, pharmacists can either:

- administer a COVID-19 test (ID NOW™ or another point-of-care PCR test or a point-of-care antigen test) if their pharmacy is currently participating in the Publicly Funded COVID-19 Testing Services in Ontario Pharmacies program in pharmacies and the patient meets the eligibility criteria for testing; OR
- direct the patient to one of the options below:
 - A [clinical assessment centre or testing centre](#)
 - A primary care provider

Note: A positive patient-administered rapid point-of-care antigen test is acceptable to confirm COVID-19.

7. Is there any follow-up required after Paxlovid™ has been dispensed?

As with any prescription dispensed, pharmacists must follow the Ontario College of Pharmacists' Standards of Practice, which may require following up with the patient according to their individual needs.

8. Can a person who does not have an Ontario health card number still receive Paxlovid™ at a pharmacy?

Yes. Paxlovid™ can be dispensed to someone **without** an Ontario health card number provided they have other valid identification confirming their name and date of birth and they live, work, or study in Ontario or they are here for an extended stay, and if they meet the other applicable eligibility criteria. Please refer to the [ministry website](#) for the EO Notice entitled "Supplying of Publicly Funded Oral Antiviral COVID-19 Treatment in Ontario Pharmacies".

9. Can a patient be an ODB recipient and not have an Ontario health card number?

Yes. There may be circumstances where a patient who is an eligible ODB recipient does **not** have an Ontario health card number, such as an individual who is issued a temporary health number by the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services that is used until the Ontario health card is issued, or an individual who is not eligible for an Ontario health card number but has a paper Drug Benefit Eligibility Card. In these cases, the temporary eligibility number must be used for the HNS claim submission.

10. Can a pharmacist still submit a claim for payment for supplying publicly funded Paxlovid™ if a patient forgot to bring their Ontario health card number?

No. If the patient has an Ontario health card number, then the pharmacist needs the patient's Ontario health card number in order to submit the claim for payment through the HNS.

Ministry Payment

11. How much does the ministry pay pharmacies for dispensing Paxlovid™?

The ministry will pay the pharmacy a dispensing fee of \$13.25 for dispensing publicly funded Paxlovid™ to an eligible patient, when a claim for payment is submitted through the HNS. Note: Primary pharmacy service providers of LTC homes are reimbursed through the LTC home capitation model and will not be paid a dispensing fee. Except in emergency situations, secondary pharmacy service providers (i.e. those that do not have a contract with a LTC home) are also not eligible for a dispensing fee for supplying publicly funded Paxlovid™ to LTC home residents. Pharmacies not eligible to receive a dispensing fee must submit claims for Paxlovid™ with a zero dollar fee.

Pharmacist Training

12. Are all Ontario pharmacists able to dispense publicly funded Paxlovid™ to eligible Ontarians?

Paxlovid™ is a prescription medication and as such can be dispensed by any Part A pharmacist (or registered pharmacy student or intern under the supervision of a pharmacist) in Ontario.

(Note: Pharmacists (emergency assignment or EA) are able to practise to the [full scope](#) of their certificate of registration and must be supervised by a Part A pharmacist.)

All pharmacies with a Health Network System (HNS) account and valid HNS Subscription Agreement are eligible to dispense publicly funded Paxlovid™ to eligible Ontarians. Pharmacies are required to ensure that patients meet applicable eligibility criteria (see Questions #5 and #6).

Similar to other prescription drugs, Paxlovid™ must be dispensed in accordance with the Ontario College of Pharmacists' Standards of Practice, which include: patient identification, a review of the patient's drug history, counselling on how to take it and possible side effects, documentation and follow-up if needed. Pharmacists must ensure they have sufficient knowledge, skills and expertise when dispensing any medication including Paxlovid™. Pharmacists are reminded that every prescription must be reviewed for completeness and appropriateness, and to review patient personal health information for drug therapy problems, drug interactions, therapeutic duplications and any other potential problems.

13. What other resources are available regarding Paxlovid™?

The following are useful resource information regarding Paxlovid™:

- [COVID-19 Science Advisory Table's Clinical Guidelines](#): Full recommendations on use and who is at higher risk of severe COVID-19.
- [Nirmatrelvir/Ritonavir \(Paxlovid™\): What Prescribers and Pharmacists Need to Know](#): Key information to help prescribers determine whether Paxlovid™ is right for their patients
- [Paxlovid Product Monograph](#): Full details on interactions and contraindications
- [Liverpool COVID-19 Interactions \(covid19-druginteractions.org\)](#): List of common drug-drug interactions

Pharmacies may also consider contacting the [Ontario Pharmacists Association](#) for resource information.

Pharmacy Participation

14. Will all Ontario pharmacies provide publicly funded oral antivirals for treatment of COVID-19?

All pharmacies are eligible to order and dispense Paxlovid™ pursuant to a valid prescription.

However, only pharmacies with a Health Network System (HNS) account and valid HNS Subscription Agreement with the ministry are eligible to order and dispense publicly funded Paxlovid™.

15. What other procedures must be followed during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Pharmacy professionals should continue to follow the guidelines set out by public health officials. Pharmacies have a shared responsibility for informing and educating the public on COVID-19, including promoting infection prevention and control measures. Resources can be found on the [Ontario College of Pharmacists](#) website as well as [Ministry Guidance at this website](#).

Documentation Guidelines

16. What are pharmacists required to document when dispensing Paxlovid™ to eligible patients?

Please refer to the most recent Executive Officer (EO) Notice on the Supplying of Publicly Funded Oral Antiviral COVID-19 Treatment in Ontario Pharmacies available on the [ministry website](#) for information about pharmacy documentation requirements.

17. What will happen if I forget to document or misplace the documentation?

If there is no documentation, incorrect or incomplete documentation, the dispensing fee and the Pharmaceutical Opinion Program fee (if applicable) that is billed and paid may be subject to recovery by the ministry.

Claim for payment through the Health Network System

18. How are claims for Paxlovid™ submitted through the HNS?

Please refer to the most recent Executive Officer (EO) Notice on the Supplying of Publicly Funded Oral Antiviral COVID-19 Treatment in Ontario Pharmacies available on the ministry website for information.

Restrictions

19. Can pharmacists submit claims for Paxlovid™ manually to the ministry, using a paper claim?

No. The ministry does not accept paper claims unless 3 intervention codes are required in order to process the claim. All claims must be submitted electronically using the HNS.

20. If the pharmacist recommends to a prescriber that a patient should receive Paxlovid™ is the recommendation to the prescriber billable under the Pharmaceutical Opinion Program?

Yes. A recommendation to the patient's prescriber that a patient requires Paxlovid™ as drug therapy may be considered as a billable service under the Pharmaceutical Opinion Program (POP). (Note: If the prescriber does NOT agree with the recommendation that the patient receive Paxlovid™, then a POP cannot be billed.) Please refer to EO Notice

“Supplying of Publicly Funded Oral Antiviral COVID-19 Treatment in Ontario Pharmacies” for the appropriate PINs to use. These POP PINs are to be used for any eligible individual who receives a prescription for Paxlovid™, including non-ODB recipients.

In addition, if a pharmacist identifies that a patient is taking drug therapy that may interact with Paxlovid™ and after consulting the prescriber and exercising professional judgment, does not dispense Paxlovid™, this may also be billable under the POP.

For more information on the POP, please refer to the [Professional Pharmacy Services Guidebook](#) located on the ministry’s [website](#). Pharmacies are responsible for ensuring that any POP billed complies with the applicable guidelines and policies.