



Temporary Method for Transmitting Prescriptions via Unsecure Email During COVID-19

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We understand that some prescribers are working away from their regular premises, without access to their usual phone system, fax system, or EMR/e-prescribing system. As a result, some are using emails to communicate prescribing directions in order to continue providing patient care.

The Ontario College of Pharmacists, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario (CPSO) and the College of Nurses of Ontario (CNO) are reinforcing to registrants that prescribers should, whenever feasible, use appropriate and established channels, such as phone, fax, or secure e-prescribing systems in communicating prescription directions to pharmacies.

However, during these exceptional times, pharmacists may receive prescriptions via unsecured email as prescribers may not have access to these established channels.

Given the extraordinary circumstances of this global pandemic and the urgency to provide timely patient care, the College recommends that pharmacists facilitate the dispensing process once they have validated, in their professional judgment, that the source is authentic and that the content is appropriate, even if received via unsecured email. This method of transmitting prescriptions is acceptable only as a temporary measure to support timely access to patient care during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The following principles should be applied:

- The pharmacist has a responsibility to ensure it is a valid prescription and that patient privacy is respected
- The prescriber has a responsibility to obtain patient consent to send a prescription through unsecured email and should only transmit an emailed prescription to the pharmacy of the patient's choice
- Unsecured email cannot be used for drugs listed under the Narcotic Control Regulations. As a reminder, verbal prescriptions are now permitted under [Health Canada's short-term Sec. 56\(1\) exemption under the CDSA](#).
- Both prescribers and pharmacists are expected to follow their standards of practice at all times, including appropriate documentation and record-keeping

As with any prescription they receive, pharmacy professionals should always assess it as a whole, including the content and appropriateness specific to the patient, and use their professional judgment to determine whether to dispense.

Learn more:

- [CPSO FAQ for Physicians on Prescribing during COVID-19](#), including the use of email
- [CNO FAQ for Nurses on Prescribing during COVID-19](#)
- [OCP Tips for Identifying Fraudulent Prescriptions](#)
- [Communicating Personal Health Information by Email](#) (Information and Privacy Commissioner)

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