

Shelburne pharmacist speaks out about concerning flu vaccine shortage

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With flu vaccines in high demand amid the COVID-19 pandemic, one local Shelburne pharmacist is speaking out about the shortage in vaccines available to community members.

"We just don't have the supply right now," said Margerit Bebway, owner and pharmacy manager at Caravaggio IDA Drugs in Shelburne.

Each year pharmacies are allocated a number of flu vaccines based on the number of vaccines they gave from the previous year. Bebway says that this year, Caravaggio IDA Drugs received half of the amount that they did in 2019.

"For me it was about 200 doses," said Bebway to the Free Press. "We went through those in two weeks."

Bebway, has been the owner and pharmacy manager at the local pharmacy for five years, and says that they've never experienced a shortage like this, previously always having "more than enough". Since running out of flu vaccines Bebway has struggled to get more for her clients, and has spent much of her time on her ordering site trying to get more.

When the initial supply of flu vaccines ran out, Bebway says that they received 40 doses a day for three days before being told that the supply had been "depleted".

"I've had clinics set up all the way till Nov. 10, ranging between 40 to 80 patients per clinic and it's daily clinics," said Bebway. "I still have a list of over 500 that are waiting for me to call."

Shortages of the flu vaccine has been an ongoing concern from the public for the last few week.

Health Minister Christine Elliott addressed the concerns during a press conference on Oct. 14 saying that the province had a "good supply".

"The supplies come in on a regular basis, if not weekly, every two weeks, so they are coming in," said Elliot.

While privatized pharmacies struggle to stock up on the vaccine, major pharmacy chains are also in a similar boat, with Rexall temporarily pausing its vaccination program due to supply issues.

Premier Doug Ford said on Monday (Nov. 2), that the shortage was a sign that more people were getting their flu shots.

While she waits for more flu vaccines Bebway says at this point the focus is on ensuring patient care.

"I'm talking to a patient and telling them that I don't have any in stock?it's the fact that I'm disappointing my patients," said Bebway. "It's the reason I'm waking up in the middle of the night to try to order stock I might be able to get. I still have patients who are over 80 years old, who I haven't been able to supply to."