

Pharmacies limited to one-month prescriptions as supply drops due to COVID-19 pandemic

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If you need a prescription filled at a local pharmacy, you should be prepared to make a monthly visit for a re-fill rather than the usual every three month visit you may be used to.

The current COVID-19 pandemic has created a modified supply in pharmaceutical products around the country, with most suppliers now offering only limited availability for products.

Most commonly needed drugs are being rationed and many over-the-counter items, like vitamin tablets, are in short supply.

You don't have to worry about not having your prescription filled, however, you may have to make more than your usual amount of trips to the drug store as prescriptions are now limited to a monthly re-fill.

"As soon as they announced that certain businesses must close, our suppliers placed immediate limits on what we can order," explained Caravaggio IDA Pharmacist / owner Margarit Bebawy. "I didn't matter what it was, it was limited."

Pharmaceutical suppliers work with pharmacies based on their usual ordering practices to determine supply and demand.

"It is based on what we were doing the year before," Ms. Bebawy said. "Some people were hoarding it because they assume a patient will need it and if they can't find it in their own pharmacy they might go to a different pharmacy. But a patient doesn't have the time to go to stores to find their medication, especially during isolation. They started limiting what we can get based on our sales over the previous year. It's done to avoid hoarding. There were also rumours that some medication might work for COVID and those would go short very fast as well."

If you feel the need to try a medication to ward off the coronavirus, your best course of action is to speak to your doctor or a pharmacist. They have the knowledge to advise you on any medication you would require and help you make an informed decision as if you do actually need to take some kind of preventative measures.

Most prescriptions are filled with a three month supply. Currently, you may have to make a monthly trip to have your prescription filled.

"This could put a financial strain on some people," Ms. Bebawy said. "Some people have to pay a fee every time they pick up a prescription. They were able to pick up a three month supply, now it's every month. We are telling our customers that we are trying to maintain a good supply for everyone. I don't want to give one person a three month supply and then when the next person comes in I don't have anything for them. We want to make sure everyone has a supply for this month."

She added, "Our patients, for the most part, have been very good about it. The government has put it out there that they are recommending one month at a time to safeguard our supply. This is across Canada, not just Ontario. We are offering curbside pickup and delivery. We are trying our best to keep things in stock."

While there has not been a shortage of prescription medication when needed, the industry is using best practice and limited supply to make sure panic buying doesn't occur.