

Measures taken in the wake of the corona crisis concerning community pharmacies in Austria

The precautions taken in Austria's community pharmacies to protect against an infection with the corona virus have proven to be extremely successful.

We reacted quickly and implemented efficient protective measures for customers and the pharmacy staff. These include restrictions on access to the pharmacies, safety distances between customers, often indicated by floor markings, plexiglass walls at the counters, hand disinfection and last but not least the formation of two pharmacy teams, which alternate according to a predetermined plan that they do not come into contact with each other. If an illness occurs in one of the teams, the other can step in.

✓ Pharmacy: Non-contact prescription of medication

For the duration of the corona pandemic, social insurance enables patients to receive their prescription medicines at the community pharmacies without having personal contact with the prescriber. Health insurance physicians have the temporary option of issuing prescription even without personal contact with the patients. The information about which medication should be dispensed is sent electronically to the pharmacy via e-medication.

The required medication can be picked up in the community pharmacy without a paper prescription stating the patient's name and social security number. If possible, it should be stated with which health insurance company the patient is insured. Another person (e.g. a relative, caregiver) can also collect the medication. Alternatively, there is the possibility (no obligation) that doctors (if technically possible) send the prescription to a pharmacy by fax or mail.

The technical options for prescribing medication without personal contact have been implemented by the Federal Government in connection with the current corona pandemic.

These measures protect high-risk patients, relieves doctors and the health system and of course restricts the spread of the coronavirus. Furthermore, it ensures the supply of prescription medicines to the public.

This solution will be applicable for the duration of the pandemic.

For the time of the pandemic, the authorization requirement for medicinal products is relaxed: If prescriptions from the green area are exceeded for the 1-month requirement according to the reimbursement code, the chief medical authorization requirement does not apply. Furthermore, the mandatory medical license is suspended for prescriptions of the 1-month requirement from the yellow area. Prescriptions from the yellow area, which go beyond the 1-month requirement, as well as medicines from the no-box and from the red area, still require the approval of the chief medical officer. This applies both to health insurance prescriptions and hospital prescriptions without prescription rights.

Do medicines prescribed by an optional physician still have to be recognized by health insurance providers? No, for the duration of the corona pandemic medicinal products from the green and yellow areas of the reimbursement code can be dispensed without recognition.

✓ **Helpline and emergency e-mail address for pharmacists**

For emergencies that occur in connection with the new type of corona virus we have installed a helpline +43 (0) 1 404 14-444, Monday to Friday from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. In addition, an email address covid19@apothekerkammer.at has been set up for emergencies, which is also accessed outside of these times.

✓ **Regular updates from the Austrian Chamber of Pharmacists**

The Austrian Chamber of Pharmacists provides information and recommendations to pharmacists and the public on the website www.apothekerkammer.at. Furthermore, the Austrian Chamber of Pharmacists keeps pharmacists informed on current developments in connection with the corona virus via newsletter. This information helps pharmacists to deal better with the daily challenges of the current crises.

You also find regularly updated FAQs on our website.

✓ **Hospital pharmacists in Austria produce corona swab tests**

Hospital pharmacies produce COVID smears responding to the governments intent to carry out more tests.

✓ **Reliefs concerning distance sale**

As a matter of principle medicinal products have to be dispensed in the pharmacy premises if they don't have a license for distance sale. However, during a pandemic, sick patients are not able to go to pharmacies in person therefore the patient can contact the pharmacy by phone. Subsequently the pharmacists conduct counselling about possible medicines and their effects over the phone. We recommend organizing the delivery of the required medication as far as possible. Precautions to prevent contagion must be taken when delivering the medication (e.g. depositing the medicine on the doorstep).

✓ **Increased protection for community pharmacies**

The Austrian Chamber of Pharmacists was able to ensure protection of community pharmacies by the police as part of the patrol service.

✓ **Protective Equipment for pharmacies**

For weeks we have been working intensively to get protective masks for the pharmacy staff. Unfortunately, so far, the few masks available on the Austrian market were, without exception, reserved for the clinical area. Pharmacists are until now not included in state provided personal protective equipment. Many pharmacies use plexiglass screens, masks and hand disinfectant to protect themselves.

From Monday, 6 April people entering supermarkets and grocery stores are required to wear face masks covering the nose and mouth. From Tuesday, 14 April you must cover your mouth and nose when using public transport and when entering a shop.

✓ **Pharmacists provide information about the Corona-Virus to the public on TV**

Pharmacists inform the public on pharmaceutical topics related to the pandemic on TV.

✓ **Personnel reinforcement for the pharmacies**

In the current situation, the job placement service also provides pharmacy students who can help out in pharmacies or in the wholesale sector.

✓ **Reliefs for narcotic prescriptions and drug addiction prescriptions**

By decree of March 18, the Federal Ministry of health created some reliefs in the area of opioid substitution therapy for the duration of the corona crisis. The additional “validation” by a medical officer for permanent substitution prescriptions is no longer required. More generous dispensing rules for opioid substitution treatment like dispensing a larger quantity that the patient does not have to come every day to the pharmacy, also apply.

The rules concerning prescriptions of opioids for pain-patients also have been relaxed. During the crisis its possible that the doctor sends the prescription per fax or mail to the requested pharmacy. E-medication in this field is not possible.

✓ **Special Recommendations to avoid infections of employees in community pharmacies**

The Austrian Chamber of Pharmacists recommends the following organizational measures to avoid infections of employees in the pharmacy: If it's possible, the employees should be divided into two groups. The change between the groups should take place either once a day or during the lunch break, daily or weekly. It is important that the pharmacy is disinfected between changes of duty by the group on duty.

✓ **Temporary release of untaxed alcohol for disinfectants**

After weeks of negotiations and interventions at all political levels, the Austrian Chamber of Pharmacists was able to achieve that the use of untaxed alcohol for disinfectants is released by legislature. Also, the bureaucratic effort for pharmacies in connection with application to the customs offices was eliminated.

The alcohol tax law is changed so that alcohol, which is used for the production of disinfectants for hygienic hand and surface disinfection is sufficiently denatured and therefore no alcohol tax applies.

✓ **Flyers and posters for pharmacies**

Documents aimed at customers and recommending appropriate behavior:

Hygiene: Flyer "Minimize risks!"

Behavior in front of / in the pharmacy: information poster "We are always there for you - rules of conduct" (multilingual)

✓ **Austrian Pharmacy Owners Association**

Advices pharmacies especially in the following fields: Legal Issues, Safety Measures in Pharmacies, Economic Information, Regulatory Information, short term work. Much more information is available on the following website: <https://www.apothekerverband.at/>.

✓ **Austrian Association of Employed Pharmacists**

Advices pharmacists especially in the following fields: Employment law, collective Agreement, short term work. Much more information is available on the following website: <http://vaaoe.at/>.

Here you find all important **official information as well as all further links:**

AGES: <https://www.ages.at/themen/krankheitserreger/coronavirus/>

Ministry of Health: <https://www.sozialministerium.at/Informationen-zum-Coronavirus.html>

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