

# Pharmacy Services in B.C.

Last updated: **June 13, 2024**

Pharmacists are an important part of your health care team and offer a variety of services. Over 409,000 people have been treated for minor ailments or gotten free contraceptives from pharmacists since June 2023. [Book an appointment](#) or [walk-in to a pharmacy](#) to find out more.

## How pharmacists can help you

Pharmacists are an important part of your health care team. They are able to:

- Assess and prescribe for 21 [minor ailments](#)
- [Prescribe contraceptives](#) (birth control)
- [Renew or change your prescriptions](#)
- [Give vaccines and other drugs](#) by injection

Most pharmacy services are free. All you need is your [Personal Health Number \(PHN\)](#). This number is on your [BC Services Card](#) or CareCard. There are [1,400 community pharmacies in B.C.](#)

Pharmacists are licensed professionals. They are bound by the same confidentiality rules as a family doctor or nurse practitioner. Your health information and conversations are private and confidential.

The cost of drugs and the fee for dispensing them can vary between pharmacies. You may want to compare prices and services before you fill a prescription. Register for [Fair PharmaCare](#) if you need help paying for medications.

## Get help with a minor ailment

Pharmacists can assess and prescribe medications for urinary tract infections (UTIs), allergies, acne, cold sores, pink eye, sprains and strains, fungal infections, headaches, heartburn, hemorrhoids, hives and itching, impetigo, menstrual pain, nicotine dependence, pinworms, shingles, rashes and yeast infections.

The pharmacist may help with a treatment plan, prescribe medication, or identify a condition that another health provider can help with. The service is free for B.C. residents when provided in person, in a pharmacy.

For severe symptoms or medical emergencies, seek immediate medical attention or call [9-1-1](#).

[Review the minor ailments symptoms checklist.](#)

## Get contraceptives (birth control)

Pharmacists can prescribe and provide many types of contraception (birth control). These contraceptives are [free for B.C. residents](#) at pharmacies:

- Most prescription contraceptive pills
- Intrauterine devices (IUDs) – hormonal and copper
- Hormonal implant
- Hormonal vaginal ring
- Contraceptive injection
- Emergency contraception

While the pharmacist can provide IUDs and implants, you will need to arrange a visit with a doctor or clinic for insertion. Pharmacists can administer the hormonal contraceptive injection.

Read about [contraception \(birth control\)](#).

You can visit a pharmacy for assessment and prescriptions, or [book an appointment](#) ahead of time.

## Get immunizations and injections of prescribed medications

Pharmacists can give most vaccines and administer drugs by injection for people 4 years of age and older, including:

- Influenza (flu), COVID-19, shingles, measles, pneumonia, human papillomavirus (HPV), tetanus and more
- Medications prescribed by a health care provider, such as B12 or hormone therapy

Call your pharmacy or visit their website to book an immunization or medication injection. Most are free.

## Change a prescription or get an emergency supply

Pharmacists can often renew or change your prescription. If a pharmacist renews or changes your prescription, you must pick it up at the same pharmacy location.

### Renew your prescription

A pharmacist may be able to renew your prescription if you used up all your medication and have no refills left, and:

- Your condition is stable on the same medication at the same dosage for 6 months or longer
- Your prescription was issued in the past 24 months
- The prescriber is still practicing in B.C. If not, a pharmacist **may** be able to find a prescriber to renew it

Pharmacists cannot:

- Renew or change cancer chemotherapy prescriptions
- Renew prescriptions for narcotics and controlled drugs for longer than originally prescribed

## Change your prescription

A pharmacist may be able to change your prescription dose, formulation, regimen, or substitute it for a similar drug. Pharmacists cannot change prescriptions for narcotics, or controlled or targeted substances.

## Get an emergency supply

Prescriptions are valid for up to 2 years from the date they were written. If you have run out of medication and your prescription was written more than 2 years ago, your pharmacist may be able to provide an emergency supply until you can get a new prescription from a doctor or other prescriber.

## Get coverage under BC PharmaCare

[BC PharmaCare](#) helps B.C. residents pay for:

- Prescription medications
- Medical devices and supplies
- Pharmacy services

The [Fair PharmaCare plan](#) is based on income. The lower your family income, the more help you get. All you need is your Social Insurance Number to register. [Register now for Fair Pharmacare.](#)

### View your prescription history

You can access your B.C. prescription records dating back to 1995 through the [Health Gateway app](#).

# Minor ailment checklist

For severe symptoms or medical emergencies, seek immediate medical attention or call [9-1-1](#)

If your symptoms match one of the minor ailments, [visit a pharmacy](#) for an assessment or [book an appointment](#).

## Acne (mild)

- Symptoms include small red bumps; pimples filled with pus; whiteheads; blackheads
- Read more about [acne](#)

## Allergies and hay fever

- Symptoms may include stuffy or runny nose (usually clear and watery); sneezing; itchy nose, eyes, and/or throat (unrelated to cold or flu)
- Read more about [allergies \(allergic rhinitis\)](#)

## Canker sores (oral ulcers)

- Small, shallow, painful, recurrent sores on lining inside the mouth, cheek or on the tongue. Sores usually have red border with white or yellow centre
- Read more about [canker sores](#)

## Cold sores

- Begins with itching, tingling, or burning sensation at border of lip. A cluster of fluid-filled, painful blisters soon appear (usually within 24 hours), surrounded by redness
- Read more about [cold sores](#)

## Fungal infections

- Jock itch: Large, round, red patches with bumpy or scaly, defined borders, usually on upper inner thigh or groin. May spread to buttocks or stomach/abdomen. May feel itchy or burning
- Athlete's foot: Inflamed or blistered skin between toes and sometimes other areas of the feet. May be cracked or scaly. May feel itchy or burning
- Ringworm: Circular rash with well-defined bumpy or scaly border. Usually occurs on neck, trunk or limbs. May feel itchy or burning
- Fingernail or toenail infection. Commonly appears as thick, brittle nail with yellow/white or orange/brown-coloured vertical streaks. May have pain or

discomfort

- Read more about [jock itch](#), [athlete's foot](#), [ringworm](#) and [fungal nail infections](#)

## **Headaches**

- Symptoms include mild to moderate pain, tightness on the sides of head and across forehead, without nausea or vomiting
- Read more about [headaches](#)

## **Heartburn (acid reflux/ GERD)**

- Symptoms include burping, stomach acid rising from stomach into mouth; burning feeling in stomach or lower chest
- Read more about [heartburn \(gastroesophageal reflux disease/GERD\)](#)

## **Hemorrhoids**

- Symptoms include itching, burning, swelling, or a lump around anus/rectum, with or without pain; and/or bright red blood during or after a bowel movement (spotting on toilet paper or drops of blood in toilet bowl)
- Read more about [hemorrhoids](#)

## **Hives and itching, including from bug bites (urticaria)**

- Small bumps or blisters that may be painful, itchy and/or swollen; may feel like a sharp burning pain or stinging
- Read more about [dry skin and itching](#)

## **Impetigo**

- Small blisters on skin that ooze fluid, then dry to form yellow-brown crust; usually appears around nose and mouth; may itch, but usually not painful
- Read more about [impetigo](#)

## **Menstrual pain**

- Pain and cramps in the lower abdomen/belly; and/or pain in the lower back before or during period
- Read more about [menstrual cramps](#)

## **Nicotine/tobacco dependence**

- Urges, cravings, restlessness, anxiety, difficulty concentrating, related to nicotine/tobacco use
- Read more on [how to quit using tobacco products/smoking](#)

Pharmacists can start you on a free 12-week course of nicotine patches, lozenges or gum. They can also prescribe the oral medications varenicline or bupropion, which

[PharmaCare may help pay for.](#)

### **Pink eye (conjunctivitis)**

- Red eye(s) plus watery or thick discharge (tears) that is white, yellow or green, and/or scratchy, burning, itching; or the feeling of something in the eye
- Read more about [pink eye](#)

### **Pinworms (also called threadworms)**

- Itchy anus and belly pain are common, although some people have no symptoms
- Note: Diagnosis usually involves visual inspection or the use of adhesive (tape) to trap eggs
- Read more about [pinworms](#)

### **Shingles**

- Burning, tingling or numbness on one side of face or body a few days before painful, blistering rash appears
- Read more about [shingles](#)

### **Skin rash from eczema, allergic reactions and other reasons**

- Symptoms may include dry, red and itchy skin; cracked and oozing blisters; scaly and patchy skin
- Includes diaper rash; seborrheic (scalp), reaction to irritant (contact), allergic reaction, and eczema
- Read more about [eczema \(atopic dermatitis\)](#) and [allergic reactions](#)

### **Sprains and strains**

- Pain, swelling or tenderness (mild to medium severity), redness or bruising; limited range of motion with muscle weakness; injury associated with overworking or straining
- Read about [ankle sprains](#), [tendon injuries](#), [calf muscle injuries](#), [achilles tendon problems](#), [knee injuries](#), [muscle cramps](#)

### **Thrush (oral fungal infection)**

- White or cream-white spots/patches on lips, inside mouth, on tongue and/or roof of mouth; patches have cottage cheese-like appearance and can be scraped off; symptoms may include dry mouth and/or loss of taste
- Read about [thrush](#)

## Upset stomach (indigestion)

- Symptoms include heartburn, nausea, bloating, stomach discomfort, feeling full soon after eating, burping up food, stomach acid or gas
- Read about [indigestion \(dyspepsia\)](#)

## Urinary tract infection (uncomplicated)

Symptoms typically include:

- Frequent urination, pain while urinating, and difficulty holding in urine; cloudy or foul-smelling urine
- If you are pregnant or male, please visit a physician or nurse practitioner.
- Read more about uncomplicated urinary tract infections in [teenagers and adults](#), [in children](#) and [complicated urinary tract infections](#) (cannot be assessed by a pharmacist)

## Yeast infection (vaginal candidiasis)

- Vaginal itch, irritation and redness with white, cottage cheese-like discharge
- Read about [vaginal yeast infection](#)

# For Health and Service Inquiries

If you have any questions about your health or services near you, contact [8-1-1](#).

For inquiries about pharmacy services and PharmaCare coverage, contact the Service BC call center. Agents cannot answer questions about specific medical conditions or treatments.

**Call:** 1-833-882-0022

**Hours:** Monday to Friday, 8:00 am - 4:30 pm

**Translation Services Available**

Telephone for the Deaf: Dial [7-1-1](#)

[Video Relay Services \(VRS\) sign language interpretation](#) is free for people who are deaf, hard of hearing or speech impaired.

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