

Impact of Tariffs on Healthcare

As global trade tensions rise, much of the public conversation has focused on inflation, markets, and geopolitics. But health researchers are warning that tariffs could have very real consequences much closer to home - in pharmacies, hospitals, and grocery stores.

A new analysis published in *The British Medical Journal* highlights trade policy as an often-overlooked driver of public health. According to the authors, tariffs influence the price and availability of medicines, medical equipment, and food, therefore shaping not just economic outcomes, but people's day-to-day health and security.

Medication and medical supply shortages

Canada's health-care system is deeply connected to U.S. and global supply chains. While pharmaceuticals themselves may not always be directly targeted by tariffs, the materials and equipment used to produce, package, and deliver them often are. Experts warn this could lead to higher costs and shortages, particularly for brand-name drugs, specialized medical devices, and equipment used to manage chronic conditions.

Rising food costs and nutrition risks

Increased costs on imported produce, metals used in food packaging, and transportation can drive up grocery prices. When food becomes more expensive, households with fewer resources are often forced to choose cheaper, less nutritious options, increasing long-term health risks and widening existing inequities.

Economic stress and health system pressure

Tariffs are often framed as job-protection tools, but job insecurity itself is a major health stressor. Layoffs or reduced work hours can lead to loss of employer-based drug coverage, pushing more people onto already strained public systems or forcing them to delay care altogether. At the same time, economic instability can reduce government revenues, limiting the funding available for health care, disability supports, and social services precisely when demand is rising.

Why this matters

Health experts are calling for governments to bring health considerations into trade policy discussions earlier, rather than treating them as an afterthought. When trade decisions are made without a health lens, the impacts are often felt first by people with disabilities, chronic conditions, and lower incomes.

Source:

1. <https://www.ctvnews.ca/health/article/from-drug-access-to-food-prices-heres-why-us-tariffs-can-affect-your-health/>

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