

Now You Can Go to the Pharmacist for These 13 Common Health Issues

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For many people in Ontario, the wait time for a doctor's appointment is longer than ever. When it's finally time for your appointment, your health issues may have been resolved or gotten worse.

Many doctors are struggling to keep up with the demand for healthcare, especially during this "triple threat" of respiratory viruses, including the flu, COVID-19, and RSV ([source](#)).

To give patients more convenient choices for how they access and receive health care, the Ontario government has announced that highly-trained pharmacists can now prescribe medications for 13 common health issues ([source](#)). This started on January 1, 2023 ([source](#)). You will not have to pay extra for this service ([source](#)).

Now, pharmacists can offer prescriptions for:

- hay fever (allergic rhinitis);
- oral thrush (candidal stomatitis);
- pink eye (conjunctivitis; bacterial, allergic and viral);
- dermatitis (atopic, eczema, allergic and contact);
- menstrual cramps (dysmenorrhea);
- acid reflux (gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD));
- hemorrhoids;
- cold sores (herpes labialis);
- impetigo;
- insect bites and hives;
- tick bites (post-exposure prophylaxis to prevent Lyme disease);
- sprains and strains (musculoskeletal); and
- urinary tract infections (UTIs) ([source](#)).

You can still go to the doctor's office for these issues, but you now have the choice to go to your pharmacist instead and get prescription medication sooner.

This new initiative is intended to help reduce how many people go to the doctors' office for relatively simple health issues, which gives doctors more time to see patients with more complex health issues ([source](#)). As a result, many Ontarians now have more convenient access to healthcare, including those in rural areas where there are even fewer available

doctors ([source](#)). It's important to note that pharmacists can only prescribe medication to you if you have an Ontario Health Card, also known as an OHIP Card ([source](#)).

Another piece of good news is that Ontario pharmacies and grocery stores will continue to provide free Rapid Antigen Tests (RATs) until June 30, 2023 ([source](#))! This program was scheduled to end in December 2022, so this program has been extended for six more months ([source](#)).

Ontario Health Minister Sylvia Jones made this announcement on December 1, 2022 ([source](#)). She also announced that the provincial government will provide free tuition for nursing students and pay for college and hospital costs ([source](#)).

The provincial government will give the Michener Institute over \$4.6 million to “remove financial barriers for nurses wanting to upskill to work in critical care areas of hospitals” ([source](#)). In other words, if the price of tuition was the only thing holding nurses back from specializing in critical care, that barrier has been taken care of.

Ontario Premier Doug Ford shared that almost 600 nurses will be finished with this critical care specialization by spring 2023 ([source](#)). “That is 600 more nurses ready to care for our most vulnerable in ICUs across Ontario, including our pediatric ICUs,” Ford said ([source](#)).

The Michener Institute is part of the University Health Network (UHN) Hospital that trains and certifies applied healthcare professionals, including but not limited to nurses ([source](#)). In this program, nurses are prepared to join the workforce by working within the healthcare system as part of their education ([source](#)).

According to the Michener Institute's website, “during the COVID-19 pandemic many of our students were fast-tracked to their certification exams and seamlessly joined the front lines even before officially graduating” ([source](#)).

The provincial government is also investing more than \$9.4 million to support accelerated critical care nursing at numerous universities and colleges ([source](#)).

Final Thoughts

This is all great news for Ontarians who have had their care delayed due to long wait times!

Wait times are longer than ever due to shortages of healthcare workers, especially family doctors and nurses. Click [here](#) and [here](#) to read other articles about this problem.

The announcement that pharmacists can prescribe medications for common health issues should help address the shortage of family doctors in the short term. The announcement of increased funding for nursing students should help address the shortage of nurses in both the short term and the long term.

Things are looking hopeful!

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If you think you may be experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, take the self-assessment at www.ontario.ca/coronavirus. Follow all directions from your medical provider or your local health unit at the following phone numbers:

Health Connect Ontario: 811

Telehealth Ontario: 1-866-797-0000

Toronto Public Health: 416-338-7600

Peel Public Health: 905-799-7700

Durham Region Health Department: 905-668-7711

York Region Public Health: 1-877-464-9675