

Access to antivirals key to tackling next COVID-19 wave - **Pharmaceutical Society of Australia (PSA)**

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The Pharmaceutical Society of Australia (PSA) National President Dr Fei Sim is calling on governments to do more to protect the community and prepare for an increasing number of COVID-19 infections and hospitalisations by improving access to antiviral medicines.

Dr Sim says that governments – at both state/territory and federal levels – must take a pragmatic approach to ensure high-risk patients have timely access to antivirals, to avoid the shortages and last-minute policy-making that Australia saw with the rollouts of COVID-19 vaccines and Rapid Antigen Tests.

“We cannot sit and wait for infections and hospitalisations to rise further - governments must act now. Timely access to antivirals is critical to reduce the severity of COVID-19 infection and limiting complications.

“Governments must develop a process to triage high-risk patients, refer them to a prescriber, and ensure rapid supply. What is clear is that early access to antivirals leads to far better patient outcomes.”

Dr Sim says that community pharmacists in Scotland have been able to supply antivirals like molnupiravir to high-risk COVID-19 patients since January 2022.

“Scotland’s utilisation of the pharmacist workforce to provide timely access to antivirals has had very positive impact on the health of patients who are at risk of hospitalisation or death due to COVID-19.

“It is incumbent upon the Federal Government to raise awareness with the general public of the importance of seeking antiviral treatment early.”

PSA is also calling on the Federal Government to restore funding for pharmacies to provide the COVID-19 Home Medicine Service in response to increasing infections.

“With rising petrol prices and supply costs, pharmacies cannot afford to continue providing these services for free. Restoring this funding would allow pharmacies to deliver antivirals to COVID-19 positive patients safely and quickly.

“I would like to remind all Australians to wear a mask when visiting their local pharmacy. It’s crucial that we continue to protect our frontline healthcare workers and vulnerable patients at this time.

“For many Australians, pharmacies are the first stop when they are feeling ill. It’s also where immunocompromised and high-risk patients need to go to collect their essential medicines. Please help protect your community by wearing a mask when you visit a pharmacy.”

Dr Sim has also called for frontline health workers, including pharmacists, to be eligible to receive a fourth dose of a COVID-19 vaccine.

“As some of the first to be vaccinated, health workers are more exposed than many to waning protection over time. Expanding the booster program to include pharmacists and other healthcare workers is the next necessary step.

“PSA is ready to work with the Federal government and all state and territory governments to ensure the safety of our communities, as well as our pharmacists.”

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The Pharmaceutical Society of Australia is the professional organisation of Australian pharmacists. PSA is the only government-recognised peak national body for pharmacists, representing all of the pharmacy profession in Australia.