



To: Prime Minister Justin Trudeau  
Minister of Health Patty Hajdu  
Minister of Foreign Affairs François-Philippe Champagne  
Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry Navdeep Bains  
Provincial Ministers of Health

### **re Drug Shortages in Canada**

Canada, like many other countries, has been dealing with a severe and unexplained drug shortage problem for more than a decade. It is time for the government to pay attention.

COVID-19 has raised the spectre of potentially more drug shortages because of a “run” on certain products and more especially because of the increasing reliance of the world’s pharmacy on raw materials or Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs) from China and India. The actual proportion of drugs used in Canada that may derive raw materials from Asia is unknown.

In October 2019, an official of the US Food and Drug Administration [claimed](#) that 13 percent of US pharmaceuticals are sourced in China and another 18 percent from India. But recent reports from India indicate that between 60 and 70 percent of its pharmaceutical production also relies on China; therefore, India has [banned](#) exports of some essential medicines in order to protect its national supply. This move could greatly exacerbate resultant drug shortages elsewhere.

At the time of writing, Canada [lists](#) nearly 1700 drugs currently in short supply. So far, none are reported as attributable to COVID-19, although the shortage reports themselves are often vague and lack detailed explanations. On the other hand, the US has just [reported](#) the shortage of one generic drug owing to the COVID-19; to avoid hoarding, however, it has not named the drug.

If nothing else, COVID-19 has exposed the global interdependence of the pharmaceutical industry.

Over the last decade, media attention to the issue of drug shortages has been influenced by the effects of specific shortages (e.g. Epipens, anti-hypertensives, epilepsy or leukemia drugs for children, and cancer treatments), or by specific events (e.g. the fire at the Boucherville Sandoz factory, the meningitis outbreak, Hurricane Maria, US cross border purchasing, and now trade interruptions of coronavirus). Yet all the shortages are connected.

The time has come for Canada to start paying attention to this matter. We urge Canada to:

1. Measure its shortages by providing an annual analysis of the shortages in this country. An example of such work is [here](#).

2. Join 117 other countries and develop an Essential Medicines List of products that need special surveillance with information on which drugs have only a few licensed manufacturers in order to better manage shortages
3. Take measures to reverse the declining trend and encourage pharmaceutical manufacturing at home.
4. Lead an international discussion about this global problem in an effort to uncover the causes and develop solutions.

Thank you for your consideration



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