

Ten health stories that mattered this week: Feb. 9–13

- Federal Minister of Health Rona Ambrose announced mandatory drug shortage reporting regulations. The new rules mean drug-makers must post information on current and anticipated shortages on an independent, third-party website, or face fines and penalties. Dr. Chris Simpson, president of the Canadian Medical Association, welcomed the regulations. “Persistent shortages in the supply of drugs pose a serious disruption to clinical treatment, increase medical error and put unhelpful pressure on the entire health care system.”
- The Canadian Food Inspection Agency reported an outbreak of highly pathogenic H5N1 bird flu at a farm in Chilliwack, British Columbia. The same backyard poultry flock also had cases of the H5N2 strain confirmed in December.
- Health Canada launched a new Drug and Health Product Register to provide consumers with easy access to information on medicines and vaccines. The Web tool allows users to search for information by brand name, active ingredient or drug identification number. Currently, it only provides information on the top 100 prescribed brand-name and generic drugs.
- Quebec passed a controversial health care bill to merge boards at individual health institutions into 28 regional boards. The province expects the reorganization will save some \$200 million annually, but critics fear it will put anglophone health services at risk. Health care unions and doctors’ federations denounced the Liberal government for invoking closure to force Bill 10 into law.
- Alberta Health Services CEO Vickie Kaminski announced new hiring restraint and wage freezes, after the provincial government said it will slash 9% from its annual budget to cope with a \$7-billion revenue shortfall. Kaminski also said that “more aggressive” cuts are coming, pending a review of health-worker cellphone use, sick days and severance payments.
- British Columbia has Canada’s healthiest population and, along with Ontario, ranks higher than most advanced countries in the Conference Board of Canada’s first health report card that compares Canada and 15 peer countries. BC ranked third overall, after Switzerland and Sweden, across a variety of health indicators. Newfoundland and Labrador and Canada’s three territories received the worst grades.
- An Ontario medical marijuana company is urging Canadians to return or destroy a batch of highly potent pot. Peace Naturals Project Inc. voluntarily recalled several lots of its Nyce N’EZ strain after an independent lab found that it contained as much as 13.7% tetrahydrocannabinol — much more than the 9.07% listed on the product label.
- Quebec confirmed 10 measles cases linked to a recent outbreak at Disneyland in California. So far, the outbreak has involved 114 cases in seven American states. Eight confirmed cases in Ontario are likely unrelated to the US outbreak.
- Nova Scotia patient advocates called for an end to ambulance fees. The province billed patients some \$12.2 million for ambulance service in 2013/14. According to the Nova Scotia Citizens’ Health Care Network, those fees deter people from calling an ambulance in emergencies, “adding costs to the health system due to increased complications.” — Lauren Vogel, *CMAJ*

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