



Alberta
College of
Pharmacy



Pharmacy robberies and burglaries

Table of contents

Introduction	1
Prevention	2
Ask the experts	2
Display deterrent signage	2
Take physical measures	2
Video surveillance systems	3
Trackers	3
Alarms	3
Personal property	3
Staffing	3
Protect patients and staff with policies and procedures	4
Time-delayed safes	5
Additional tips	5
FAQs	5
During a robbery	8
After a robbery or burglary	9
Report a robbery or burglary to ACP	10
Additional resources	11
Appendix A	12

Introduction

Robberies and burglaries of pharmacies in Alberta are an unfortunate reality. These events can be traumatizing and sometimes dangerous for pharmacy team members, patients, and other visitors to the pharmacy. It's crucial for pharmacy owners, licensees, and team members to take preventative measures to protect staff and members of the public. It's also important for pharmacy team members to know what to do in the event of a robbery or burglary.

First, it should be noted that a robbery and a burglary are two different things.

- A robbery is a crime where someone takes something of value directly from someone else. During a robbery, the victim is present. Robberies often involve intimidation, a threat of violence (which may or may not include a weapon), or an act of violence.
- A burglary (also referred to as break-and-enter) is the act of gaining illegal access to a structure, such as a place of business, to carry out any other serious offence. A victim does not have to be at the scene of the crime for a burglary to have taken place.

Prevention

Creating safer and more secure pharmacies benefits pharmacy team members, patients, and other visitors by reducing the risk of physical and/or emotional harm. A safer environment also helps pharmacy professionals to better ensure the security of the prescription drug supply in their communities; helping to keep drugs “off the street” and potentially reducing (or at least not contributing to) issues of non-medical use and substance use disorder.

ACP has worked with law enforcement to develop the following resource for pharmacy professionals to help prevent robberies and burglaries, including recommendations for physical measures, advice to develop policies and procedures for your pharmacy, and tips on what to do in the event of a burglary or robbery.

Ask the experts

- Use an independent contractor to provide an objective evaluation on safety and security issues with your pharmacy.
- Local police services can be an excellent resource. Police are willing to come to the pharmacy and provide recommendations to protect the premises and ensure the safety of pharmacy staff.

Display deterrent signage

- Display signage showing that you are protected by an alarm company.
- Display the signs on exterior doors and throughout the pharmacy.
- Consider posting a sign in prominent areas of your pharmacy (entry doors and at dispensary) that says, “This pharmacy stocks only a minimal amount of narcotics (or alternatively ...does not stock narcotics at all). We require 24-hour advance notice from our patients requesting these medications.”

Take physical measures

- Consider secondary, secure locations to store narcotic inventory, out of plain sight. Keep inventory of drugs typically targeted in robberies and burglaries (such as codeine-containing syrups) to a minimum. Educate your regular customers that when they require large quantities, they will need to give you adequate notice.
- Install deadbolt locks, tamper-resistant door bars, metal or metal clad doors, shatterproof glass or plexiglass, bars over windows, and/or metal security gates or curtains.
- For a smaller pharmacy where staff have a view of the door, remote locking doors can greatly enhance site safety, especially when used in combination with exterior video. Its also a great tool to not allow anyone to leave or enter the pharmacy immediately after an event, or if there is some threat or hazard outside the store that merits locking the doors.
- Install interior and exterior security lights. Leave them on overnight, or between pharmacy closing to pharmacy opening the next day. Some suggested lighting locations for the interior of the pharmacy include the following:
 - Interior—pharmacy entry areas, cash register areas, pharmacy operations area, the entrance to and the interior of the office area.
 - Exterior—entries, parking lots, and exposed walls. Consider installing “vandal-proof” lenses or protective coverings for outside flood lights.
- Consider keeping a back-up pharmacy phone in storage in case offenders destroy or remove the phones from the pharmacy.

Video surveillance systems

- A noticeable surveillance system can be an effective deterrent, especially if the cameras are visible.
- Ensure video systems are up to date and in working order.
- Cameras should be included in both the interior and exterior of the building. Staff should be trained on how to use the system.
- A height-strip camera at the pharmacy entrance should be used—this is often the most useful footage for police.
- Live monitoring of external video can enhance team members' situational awareness.
- Recording devices (e.g., digital video recorder) should be in a locked cabinet, out of plain sight, to prevent theft. The digital video recording could also be instantaneously stored off-site, to prevent the robbers from obtaining or destroying the recording.

Trackers

- Attaching a small, innocuous tag or label to prescription products that is unique to that pharmacy makes it easy to identify the products came from. Site specific product labelling is a great strategy, too.
- Trackers are a great tool when they are deployed. They need to be positioned right at the front of the safe, so it is taken by the offender or easily provided to them with the rest of the narcotics. Police have had considerable success in apprehending an offender when a tracker has been deployed.

Alarms

- A dedicated robbery alarm under the pharmacy counter and perhaps in an office at the back is ideal. If you have the resources, source out a silent panic alarm system that is connected to your local 911 dispatch.
- In the event of a bear spray attack, for example, sometimes all a victim can do is hit the alarm. Even after hitting the alarm, a pharmacy team member should call 911 soon after the offender leaves the pharmacy.

Personal property

- Always keep personal items out of plain sight. Often an offender will take other property as well, just because it's there. Keep your phone in your pocket. Keys should be kept out of sight. Purses, wallets, and bags should be locked in a cabinet.

Staffing

- Working alone in any retail setting is the single biggest factor contributing to robbery risk. Always try to have more than one team member on shift, if possible.
- If working in teams is not possible, consider keeping the front door of the pharmacy locked at all times and only allowing one customer or patient in at a time.

Protect patients and staff with policies and procedures

- Management should conduct full background checks, including credit checks and criminal record checks, on anyone applying for a pharmacy staff or cash-handling job.
- Management and staff should not discuss pharmacy procedures, cash handling, pharmacy layouts, security systems, etc., with any outsider, even family, other than law enforcement personnel and/or vendors with a valid interest in a particular system.
- Keys and passwords that provide access to the pharmacy should be strictly controlled, individualized, and never shared.
- Passwords for ordering drug inventory and passwords for accessing pharmacy information systems should be individualized and never shared.
- Regulated pharmacy professionals should not discuss inventory controls with anyone, including other pharmacy staff members, family members, and friends. Inventory controls should only be discussed with those on a need-to-know basis. Other pharmacy personnel do not need to know the measures taken to hide targeted drugs. Measures taken to hide targeted drugs should never be discussed where they can be overheard by clients.
- Deposit cheques and large bills into a time-lock drop safe as often as possible.
- Make deposits often to keep minimal amounts of cash on hand. Do not leave cash in registers overnight.
- Pharmacy-specific procedures for robberies should be posted for pharmacy team members and should be no more than about five or six steps. Team members need to be trained on and review the procedures at regular intervals.
- Train staff members to
 - Be alert and observant. They should regularly offer assistance to clients.
 - Be aware of suspicious behaviour from customers, such as the following:
 - Is the visitor looking around or up as if to see if they are being watched or observed by a camera?
 - Is the customer spending an excessive amount of time looking at the same high-priced merchandise, or loitering outside, by the cashier stations, or near the dispensary?
 - Does the customer seem secretive or uneasy when an employee asks if they need assistance?
 - Make either mental or written notes, including descriptions of any of the above noted conditions, and report any of these conditions to pharmacy management. Keep a file of these reports.
 - Follow proper procedures after discovering a robbery has occurred.

Time-delayed safes

ACP Council has approved amendments to the Standards for the Operation of Licensed Pharmacies (SOLP) requiring that community pharmacies store all drugs described in standard 5.11 in a time-delayed safe. Refer to the FAQ document to answer any questions you may have about implementation.

While the minimum requirement for the time-delay is five minutes, ACP encourages each pharmacy team to evaluate their pharmacy's specific situation and set the time-delay at the time that is most appropriate for their location. In some instances, it may be more appropriate to have the time delay set at more than five minutes.

Pharmacies must display ACP-provided signage to indicate that the pharmacy uses a time-delayed safe. If your pharmacy requires more signage, additional copies are available (see Appendix A).

Additional tips

- Try not to keep large amounts of opioids on site. Keep opioids and all drugs being targeted in the narcotic safe.
- The door of the safe must remain closed and locked except for times when pharmacy team members need to open the safe as part of the process to fill a prescription or to re-stock the safe. Once the drugs are accessed to fill the prescription or added to the safe, the safe door must be closed and locked again.
- While the time-delay locks must be set at a minimum of five minutes, police recommend that time delays should be set in accordance with the average police response time. In larger cities, the average police response time is seven to nine minutes, so setting your time-delay lock for 10 minutes would be good practice. Rural pharmacies may consider an even longer time-delay setting depending on proximity to the nearest RCMP detachment.
- For pharmacies that handle any quantity of cash, there should be a drop safe near the till. Floats should be the absolute minimum.
- Restrict access, keys, or lock combinations to as few employees as possible.

FAQs

Why are these amendments to the standards necessary?

When approving the amendments to the standards, ACP Council considered data that indicated significant increases in pharmacy armed robberies across Alberta. From September 2020 and August 2021, there were 49 pharmacy robberies in Edmonton, compared to 14 the previous 12 months. In Calgary, there were 89 pharmacy robberies from September 2020 to August 2021, compared with just four during the previous 12 months.

In addition, the Controlled Substances Program Regulatory Operations and Enforcement Branch of Health Canada reported to ACP that in the first six months of 2021, almost 70 per cent of all nationwide drug loss or theft has been reported in Alberta, compared with 20 per cent in 2020 (full year), and 28 per cent in 2019 (full year). Further, 68 per cent of robberies reported to Health Canada from January to June of 2021 occurred in Alberta.

Won't time-delayed safes aggravate robbers?

Edmonton Police Service, Calgary Police Service, and the RCMP have all indicated that the implementation of time-delayed safes in other settings has not resulted in increased violence.

Through our consultation process, we heard from many pharmacy team members who were concerned that the presence of a time-delayed safe would escalate a robbery situation to make it even more dangerous for everyone involved. Evidence from police suggests that the opposite is true. Police have told the college that criminals look for pharmacies that are easy targets with minimal security measures in place to make their robbery as fast and efficient as possible. Pharmacies with time-delayed safes are less desirable targets.

Police have assured ACP that, when properly communicated to the public via signage and a widespread public relations plan to be executed by ACP, the presence of time-delayed safes is an effective deterrent to prevent robberies from occurring.

Several years ago, a similar robbery trend was experienced in British Columbia. In 2015, the College of Pharmacists of British Columbia [introduced a requirement that all pharmacies store narcotics in time-delayed safes](#). Since implementing this policy, [pharmacy robberies for drugs have been reduced to almost nil in B.C.](#) Police are confident that we can achieve the same results in Alberta and ACP will share with regulated members any information we learn about the success of this initiative.

When are time-delayed safes required to be in place?

The amended standards came into effect on January 1, 2022, meaning that new pharmacies must comply with these standards prior to opening. Existing pharmacies have been provided a six-month transition period to comply and must have time-delayed safes that meet the standard in place prior to July 1, 2022.

What types of pharmacies need to install time-delayed safes?

All pharmacies in Alberta must install a time-delayed safe except

- pharmacies that do not stock drugs as described in standard 5.11 (and make the necessary declaration to ACP),
- institutional pharmacies, as defined in the [Pharmacy Drug Act](#), including (but not limited to) pharmacies that are operated by
 - an approved hospital as defined in the *Hospitals Act*;
 - a nursing home as defined in the *Nursing Homes Act*;
 - a correctional institution as defined in the *Corrections Act*;
 - a facility as defined in the *Mental Health Act*;
 - a diagnostic or treatment centre made available under section 49(b) of the *Mental Health Act*;
 - a regional health authority or provincial health board under the *Regional Health Authorities Act*; or
 - a hospital, a penitentiary, a correctional institution, a health or social care institution or facility or a
 - residential facility for persons who are aged or infirm or require special care, that is operated in Alberta by the Crown in right of Canada; and
- compounding and repackaging pharmacies that are not publicly accessible and that have other security measures in place.

Aren't time-delayed safes expensive?

ACP recognizes that this requirement may, in some cases, represent an additional cost to the pharmacy. Purchasing a time-delayed safe is an investment in the safety of pharmacy team members and the public, and the security of drugs. There are many costs associated with having a pharmacy robbed, including emotional counselling and time off for affected team members, replacing stolen stock, and repairing any damage that occurred during the robbery.

If your pharmacy already has a safe but does not have a time-delay mechanism, it may be possible to upgrade your safe to equip it with a time-delay mechanism. Contact your safe provider or refer to the [Alberta Pharmacists' Association website](#) for more information.

Won't the presence of a time-delayed safe disrupt my pharmacy's space and workflow?

Consultation with pharmacy chains that have implemented time-delayed safes have indicated that the impact to workflow has been minimal and manageable.

The College of Pharmacists of British Columbia, the British Columbia Pharmacy Association, and corporate pharmacies that have implemented time-delayed safes have indicated that inventory management can mitigate the issue of inadequate space.

How long does the time-delay mechanism need to be set for?

While the minimum requirement for the time-delay is five minutes, ACP encourages each pharmacy team to evaluate their pharmacy's specific situation and set the time-delay at the time that is most appropriate for their location. In some instances, it may be more appropriate to have the time delay set at more than five minutes.

What does each licensee need to do?

1. Assess your current existing storage to determine if it complies with the standards.
2. If you have a safe, but it does not have a time-delayed mechanism, contact your safe provider to see if your safe can be equipped with a time-delay mechanism.
3. If you do not have a safe that meets these requirements, or that can be upgraded with an internal time-delay mechanism, contact a safe supplier to obtain the appropriate safe. Refer to the Alberta Pharmacists' Association (RxA) website for a [list of suppliers](#).
4. Please note all safes must be affixed in place in the pharmacy either by being fastened to the floor or by being of a size and weight that does not allow them to be easily moved.
5. Please ensure your safe is large enough to store all drugs described in standard 5.11. This may affect your pharmacy's workflow and inventory control.

What types of drugs need to be stored in the safe?

All schedule 1 narcotics, all drugs designated as type 1 medications by the [Tracked Prescription Program Alberta](#) (TPP), and any drugs required by Council must be stored in the safe.

Unless listed as type 1 TPP drugs, controlled drugs, schedule 2 narcotics (such as acetaminophen with 8mg codeine), and targeted drugs including benzodiazepines are not required to be stored in the safe but doing so is a best practice if space permits.

My pharmacy has never been robbed. Why does this apply to me?

Discussions with, and evidence from, the College of Pharmacists of British Columbia, Alberta police services, and pharmacy chains that have implemented time-delayed safes indicate that time-delayed safes are most effective when the change is universal among pharmacies, and their use has been universally communicated to the public. Experience has shown that if time-delayed safes are implemented in only a select number of pharmacies, the perpetrators of robberies will change their behaviour to target pharmacies without time-delayed safes.

During a robbery

- Stay calm.
- Be cooperative—don't try to be a hero. Give the robber what they want.
- Do not obstruct the intruder.
- Move slowly and in a non-threatening way.
- Pay attention to their physical features (mannerism, age, weight, height, clothing, tattoos, scars, hair colour, and length of hair) and behaviours.
- Observe the mode of getaway; record a description of the vehicle, licence number, and direction of travel.

After a robbery or burglary

- Call 911, regardless of whether the alarm has been triggered.
- Immediately after the robbers leave, close the pharmacy and obtain names and contact information of witnesses.
- Preserve the crime scene for the police. Don't touch anything the burglars may have touched and block off any areas where they may have been to preserve any evidence left behind.
- Document your observations about the incident and the robber in preparation for giving the information to the investigating officers. If a weapon was used, record a description of the weapon.
- Post signs on doors that the pharmacy is closed.
- Call your insurance company to open a claim file.
- When the police arrive, assist them in assessing whether the premises are secure, and then turn the matter over to them.
- If there has been damage to the property, call a contractor to make repairs as soon as possible to protect the property from further damage or loss.
- Call the alarm company to reset or repair the alarm system. Determine the quantity and dollar value of your losses.
- Call a third party to assess the effectiveness of your alarm system. If it failed, find out why and what can be done to enhance the system.
- Refer any inquiries from outsiders (media, etc.) to the police.
- Do not discuss items or amounts taken with anyone other than the police, your insurance company, and those who have a need to know.
- If your losses include controlled drugs and substances, you must complete a [Health Canada Loss or Theft Report Form for Controlled Substances and Precursors](#). You must email your completed form to the Office of Controlled Substances in Ottawa within 10 days of the incident.

Report a robbery or burglary to ACP

If your pharmacy has been the target of a robbery or burglary, we request that you [voluntarily report the details to ACP](#) by completing a report.

Reporting these events will help the college look at the issue systemically and make policy decisions that will help pharmacy teams prevent or minimize the possibility of a robbery or burglary.

Details of voluntary robbery and burglary reports (including redactions if necessary) will be made available here. By sharing the details of these events, the information may help your colleagues in other pharmacies take effective preventative measures.

Additional resources

Edmonton Police Service (EPS)

- [EPS Storewatch Program](#)
 - The program is designed to assist commercial business owners in protecting their employees, their property, and their customers by lowering the risk of a robbery.
- [EPS commercial robbery tips](#)
 - EPS has created this list of commercial robbery tips to help you prevent one from happening at your business, and provide advice if you find yourself a victim of a commercial robbery.
- [EPS Crime and Trauma-informed Support Services \(CTSS\)](#)
 - The mission of the CTSS is to provide timely intervention, prevention, and supports to individuals, families, and all our communities affected by crime, trauma, and tragic events.

Calgary Police Service (CPS)

- [Robbery Prevention and Reporting](#)
 - Robberies are defined as theft with a violent component. Robberies are crimes that target both people and businesses and include an element of violence. The following tips will help reduce the risk of personal injury and increase the potential of bringing the culprit to justice.
- [CPS Victim Resources](#)
 - Victims of robbery may suffer more than the loss of property. You may feel personally violated and have feelings of fear and anger as a result of being assaulted, threatened or intimidated during the robbery. Robbery is a criminal act, so the complexities of the criminal justice system and media attention can cause additional stress. The Victim Assistance Support Team is here to assist you through this challenging time.

RCMP

- [About Alberta RCMP](#)

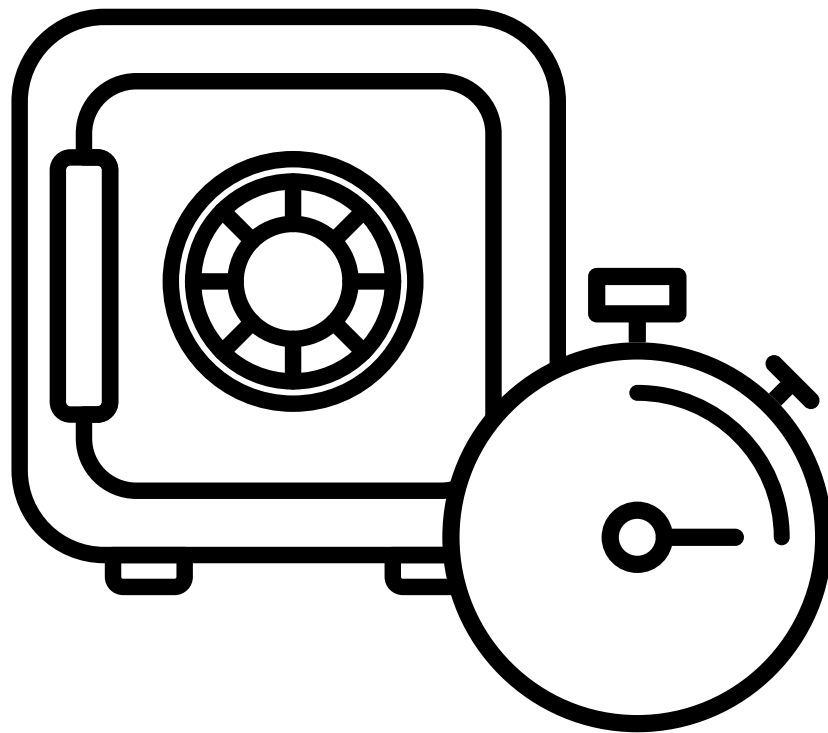
Government of Alberta

- [Help for victims of crime](#)

Internal pharmacy security

- pbahealth.com - [Tips to prevent internal theft in pharmacies](#)
- The Link - [Is your pharmacy secure? Internal narcotic security information.](#)

ATTENTION



All narcotics in this pharmacy are stored in a time-delay safe.



Alberta
College of
Pharmacy

abpharmacy.ca