

COVID-19 UPDATES

Paxlovid updates

Paxlovid eligibility has expanded as work continues behind the scenes to transition prescribing to primary care.

Although some family physicians in the Calgary area are expected to begin prescribing in the community as early as May, the Calgary Zone is working to ensure that plans align with the principle of supporting care to remain in the medical home.

Further clarification of the provincial direction related to testing and testing criteria, among other things, is required. That will include a decision on whether PCR testing remains mandatory or whether an antigen result would be accepted to determine eligibility.

While we wait for details to be confirmed, the following updates may be helpful:

- **Support for eligible patients:** If you receive questions from your patients, a dedicated Health Link line (1-844-343-0971) continues to be available. Alberta Health Services continues to provide testing; Paxlovid must be started within five days of the onset of COVID-19 symptoms. The Monoclonal Antibody Prescription Program (MAPP) will be available to patients and providers when primary care begins to take on prescribing. Primary care providers can contact MAPP through RAAPID if they have questions about prescribing in complex situations. MAPP will also play a role in coordinating care for unattached patients.
- **Eligibility:** Criteria has been expanded to include people living in Long-Term Care and Designated Supportive Living, as well as Indigenous patients who are 45+ and have received either one dose of vaccine or are unvaccinated. [More details](#).
- **Pharmacies:** A map and list of pharmacies providing Paxlovid can be [found here](#).
- **Webinar:** On Wednesday, April 27, from noon to 1 p.m., a webinar will be held to explore what Paxlovid is and when it should be prescribed, as well as what processes clinics need to have in place to support prescribing. [More details](#).

More information about Paxlovid is available via [AHS](#) and a [patient FAQ](#).

Influenza, COVID-19 testing

In the wake of a spike in influenza cases in the Calgary area, physicians are reminded that flu testing is not available at COVID-19 assessment centres.

COVID-19 outpatient treatments need to be started within five days and influenza antiviral treatment within 48 hours of symptom onset; PCR testing is still currently required for Paxlovid treatment. Physicians are asked to use their clinical judgement about use of oseltamivir (Tamiflu), based on the likelihood of influenza transmission in the local area.

In acute care, when a patient has influenza-like illness (ILI) symptoms and testing is needed for clinical management, it must be requested in addition to COVID-19 testing. Influenza testing is included for all swabs submitted for residents with respiratory symptoms in continuing care sites only until the respiratory pathogen responsible for outbreaks is identified.

Calgary and South Zones recently reported influenza outbreaks at continuing care sites. The latest influenza statistics are [available here](#).

Fourth doses available next week

Fourth doses of COVID-19 vaccine will be available in Alberta next week for Albertans aged 70 and older, First Nations, Métis and Inuit people aged 65 and older, and all seniors in congregate care.

The change comes into effect on Tuesday, April 12, and aligns with National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) recommendations. Those who require a fourth dose to meet international travel rules are also eligible.

The recommended interval for fourth doses is at least five months since the third dose. Appointments are available via the [Alberta Vaccine Booking System](#), calling 811 or via participating pharmacies.

Novavax, Moderna options added

Effective Tuesday, April 12, Novavax's Nuvaxovid vaccine will be available to patients in Alberta who are aged 18 and older.

The two-dose protein subunit vaccine, which was recently approved by Health Canada, does not use mRNA technology. Appointments can be booked by calling Health Link at 811.

Also effective April 12, children aged six to 11 will have the option of receiving the Moderna mRNA vaccine. Previously, only Pfizer was offered. The change was made to align with recent NACI recommendations. Appointments for that age group can be booked through the [Alberta Vaccine Booking System](#), calling 811 or via participating pharmacies.

Rapid tests: More rapid tests have been delivered to pharmacies and AHS assessment centres in Alberta. Patients can search for a location nearby at alberta.ca/CovidRapidTests.

Reminder: Specialist Link holiday service

Specialist Link tele-advice services, including the COVID-19 line, will be closed on Friday, April 15, for the Easter weekend. Only selected services will be available on Monday, April 18. [More details](#).

Quick links

Paxlovid webinar

As mentioned above, on Wednesday, April 27, from noon to 1 p.m., the latest COVID Talks for Docs webinar will address *What you need to know about Paxlovid*. [More details](#).

COVID-19 pathway updated

The COVID-19 [adult pathway](#) has been updated to include information about Inter-Professional Outpatient Program (IPOP) clinics in Calgary. There's also a link to a Paxlovid FAQ.