

COVID-19 UPDATES

Primary care eligible for PCRs

Eligibility for PCR tests was further restricted earlier this week, but primary care providers are still able to order tests, it has been confirmed.

In response to growing demand and long waits for appointments, it was announced that only selected groups of patients and staff are now eligible for PCRs. Primary care providers and frontline staff who provide direct patient care, as well as symptomatic pregnant Albertans, are among those who qualify for confirmatory [PCR testing](#). The following are eligible:

- Continuing care residents, health-care workers and frontline staff in acute, primary and continuing care settings, shelters and correctional facilities who meet at least one of the following criteria:
 - Need confirmation of a rapid test
 - Have COVID-19 symptoms
 - Are part of an outbreak investigation in which public health has requested lab-based PCRs
- Symptomatic community patients who would be eligible for Sotrovimab treatment if positive:
 - Those who are not immunized and are:
 - Age 55 and older
 - Age 18 and older with one of the following conditions: diabetes, obesity, chronic kidney disease, congestive heart failure, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease or moderate to severe asthma
 - Children ages 12 to 17 who are referred by a pediatric infectious disease specialist
 - Pregnant
 - Those who are immunosuppressed, regardless of vaccination status
- Symptomatic household members of someone who works in continuing or acute care
- Emergency department and hospital patients of all ages who meet the following criteria:
 - Inpatients who develop new COVID-19 symptoms in hospital
 - Patients being admitted for symptoms consistent with COVID-19
 - Patients in the emergency department with respiratory illness where a test will change treatment plans
- Patients from isolated and remote First Nation, Inuit and Metis communities, and those travelling to those communities for work
- Asymptomatic continuing care residents coming from other health-care settings
- Pediatric and adult asymptomatic transplant donors and recipients, prior to transplant
- Pediatric and adult oncology patients, prior to starting chemotherapy
- Symptomatic pregnant patients; newborns born to COVID-19 parents
- Returning international travellers who became symptomatic within 14 days of their arrival

To help direct Albertans to the resources they need, more information is now being given about what type of care to seek and how to take care of symptoms at home via the [online assessment tool](#). The tool connects patients to a new [patient self-care page](#) and the Alberta Medical Association's [red-amber-green tool](#).

Virtual care codes bulletin

Alberta Health has released a [bulletin with more information](#) about the changes to virtual care codes.

The bulletin references changes that allow inclusion of indirect patient care time and complex modifiers. It also advises that modifications to the Claim Assessment System (CLASS) are still in progress, so physicians continue to be asked to hold complex modifier eligible claims for care provided starting January 1, 2022, until further notice. An updated bulletin will be issued "as soon as possible." [Read the bulletin](#).

The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta has approved a revised [Virtual Care Standard of Practice](#). Please also reference the [advice to the profession](#) document and the [Alberta Medical Association message](#).

KN95 masks, PPE

KN95 masks, N95 respirators and a well-fitting procedure/surgical mask are all considered safe practice for continuous masking. A [seal-tested KN95 mask](#) is considered a safe and effective alternative for a fit-tested N95 respirator; use a well-fitting procedure/surgical mask if neither are available. Do not double-mask in any combination as there is an increased risk of self-contamination.

KN95 masks are among the no-cost PPE items available via your PCN. Multiple brands of masks have been sourced for this. Some may be marked "non-medical," which is indicative of commercial grade particle filtering respirators. The commercial grade/non-medical masks are not specifically tested for splash resistance, which is a requirement of those sold as medical/surgical respirators. For the purpose of protection against COVID-19, KN95s, like N95s, provide [95 per cent or greater particulate filtration efficiency](#). Further questions can be directed to phc@ahs.ca.

Please contact your PCN for information about how to order no-cost PPE, which is being made available on a short-term basis. Face shields, gowns and KN95 respirators are available, in limited supplies, between now and February 28, 2022. [More details](#).

Moderna recommended for boosters

Due to limited supply of the Pfizer vaccine, Albertans aged 30 and older who are eligible for a booster dose are being encouraged to have the Moderna vaccine, regardless of which vaccine they received for their first or second dose. The goal is to protect the Pfizer supply for patients under 30.

Moderna is approved for those aged 12 and over. Pfizer vaccine is the preferred option for those aged 12 to 29, due to a lower risk of myocarditis. Albertans aged 12 to 29 can still have the Moderna vaccine, if preferred, provided the risk of not receiving the vaccine is higher.

Quick links

AMA webinars

On Tuesday, January 11, the AMA hosted a webinar titled, *Omicron Update: A Deeper Dive on Community Management*. A recording is [available here](#). Omicron webinars from [Monday, January 3](#) and [Thursday, December 23](#) are also online.

PCN webinar cancelled

Due to the multiple webinars available via the AMA, as well as the imminent return of COVID Corner, the PCN Omicron webinar scheduled for Monday, January 17 has been cancelled.

Pathways, guidance

COVID-19 pathways are in the process of being updated. In the meantime, please consult the updated [guidance document](#) for the latest COVID-19 information for community providers. The AMA's [red-amber-green tool](#) is also a useful resource for patients, while AHS has a new [self-care guide for patients](#).

Family Medicine Summit

A schedule of events and list of speakers has been unveiled for this year's Family Medicine Summit, which will take place from Friday, March 4 to Sunday, March 6. [More information](#).