

COVID-19 UPDATES

Symptomatic testing to continue

Alberta has paused plans to cease COVID-19 testing at the end of September as case numbers continue to soar.

The province's Chief Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Deena Hinshaw, confirmed on Thursday that testing for symptomatic patients will continue to be available at Alberta Health Services assessment centres. Discussions about the role of primary care in COVID-19 testing are also ongoing, she said.

"The COVID-19 testing change tentatively scheduled for September 27 has been paused in recognition of the need to maintain these measures for longer than originally anticipated, as well as a need to take more time to work through the challenges related to testing that primary care has articulated," said Dr. Hinshaw. "Work is underway with primary care leaders to address these challenges and enable a future successful transition."

Dr. Hinshaw originally announced that symptomatic testing, as well as mandatory 10-day isolation for symptomatic patients or those with a positive test result, would come to an end in early August. The change was originally postponed until September 27. The following measures remain in place:

- Symptomatic or confirmed COVID-19 patients must isolate for a minimum of 10 days.
- Quarantine for close contacts is no longer mandatory but continues to be recommended.
- Contact tracers are no longer notifying close contacts about exposure to COVID-19. Positive cases continue to be notified; individuals testing positive are being asked to inform their own close contacts. Contact tracers continue to investigate cases in high-risk settings.

[More details.](#)

Webinar to address impact of fourth wave

The latest information on COVID-19 testing, vaccine exemption requests, public health restrictions and the implications for primary care will be discussed in next week's PCN COVID-19 and mental health webinar.

The popular webinar series returns on Monday, September 13, from 6-8 p.m., with a special focus on navigating the fast-changing landscape in the midst of the fourth wave.

Hosts Dr. Rick Ward and Dr. Christine Luelo will be joined by Dr. Hinshaw. Dr. Valerie Taylor will lead a mental health report on fecal transplants for treatment-resistant depression.

[Register.](#)

COVID-19 notifications, follow-up

Effective Friday, September 10, Calgary area PCNs will no longer notify family physicians when a patient tests positive for COVID-19.

Local PCN access clinics worked collaboratively to launch the initiative in the early days of the pandemic, prior to notifications being available via other sources.

Access clinic staff also contacted each COVID-19-positive patient to ask if they had a family doctor. That service — which became largely redundant when test booking forms were amended to allow patients to identify their physician — is also being discontinued.

Many patients who were contacted in recent months indicated they had already been contacted by multiple providers, including AHS and their family doctor's office. However, PCNs will continue to assist patients to find a family doctor, as needed, and Bow Valley PCN will continue to monitor unattached patients at this time.

PCN member physicians and teams cared for almost nine out of 10 COVID-19-positive patients in the first three waves of the pandemic — more than 70,000 in total. Calgary and the surrounding areas have consistently had the lowest hospitalization rates in Alberta, at about three per cent.

Over the past year, primary care clinics and physicians have developed their own plans and processes for following and treating patients, both virtually and in person. Please reach out to your PCN for more information about your local PCN access clinic or strategy and the services they provide to member physicians and clinics.

Rapid review: Vaccine exemptions

The COVID-19 Scientific Advisory Group has published a review on medical exemptions for COVID-19 vaccines.

The review found there were almost no medical reasons for someone not being able to receive one of the COVID-19 vaccines, although some conditions should be reviewed prior to decisions being made. Examples include:

- Patients with a documented severe allergic reaction (anaphylactic) to a first dose or known vaccine ingredient should be seen by an allergist. They may need to take a different version of the vaccine.
- Those with a rare reaction to the first dose, such as myocarditis, should wait to receive their second dose until advised to do so.

- Selected patients, such as pregnant women, those living with certain chronic diseases, and those with particular first-dose reactions, should receive an mRNA vaccine rather than a viral vector vaccine.
- Support should be provided for patients and physicians who need assessment for possible reasons of delay, exemption or a different vaccine.

[Read the review.](#)

You may also wish to review the Calgary Zone's medical exemptions [decisions guide](#). The University of Calgary has released an updated COVID-19 in pregnancy bulletin. [Read it here.](#)

Elective surgeries, outpatient procedures cancelled

All elective surgeries and most planned outpatient procedures were cancelled in Calgary hospitals this week due to surging COVID-19 cases and staffing issues.

Staff are being deployed to intensive care units and critical care. Urgent and emergent procedures, as well as prioritized cancer surgeries, are continuing.

Patients are being contacted directly, and procedures will be rescheduled "as soon as possible," Alberta Health Services said.

Quick links

COVID-19 in Pregnancy rural video conference series

On Tuesday, September 14, from 8–9 a.m., the University of Calgary CME rural video conference series will tackle *COVID in Pregnancy*. Drs. Stephanie Cooper, Eliana Castillo and Verena Kuret will examine current data, management pathways and address vaccination. This event is free and open to all physicians and health professionals. Email ruralcme@ucalgary.ca to request a link for the event.