

# primary cares

News & updates from the Calgary Zone



## COVID-19 testing questions

With changes to COVID-19 testing announced earlier this month, physicians and clinic staff have questioned under what circumstances they would order a [laboratory requisition](#) for [eligible patients](#) to receive a molecular COVID-19 test.

PCR lab test requisitions can be submitted by primary care physicians and clinics if tests are required as part of clinical decision-making for virtual or in-person appointments. Health-care workers, workers in specific [high-risk settings](#) and people who work or live in First Nation, Inuit or Métis communities can still [self-book testing](#) without a lab requisition, while those who don't have a primary care provider can contact Health Link 811.

"We've been getting questions from physicians wondering when they would submit a lab requisition given that a positive rapid antigen test (RAT) is sufficient to prescribe Paxlovid, for example," said family physician Dr. Christine Luelo, the Calgary Zone Business Unit's Medical Director. "I think the short answer is that we don't need to be doing much PCR testing.

"One example I've shared is that if you have a patient you think has COVID-19 clinically and their RAT is negative, you might want to request a PCR to avoid losing the five-day window for Paxlovid prescribing. If the patient doesn't want Paxlovid or isn't eligible, then there's likely no value. There are other examples that may also apply. We'll start compiling a list and share it here shortly."

- **How to request a PCR:** A [lab requisition](#) should be faxed to the Health Link intake office at 403-943-6700 prior to the appointment being booked. Note: The fax number is not printed on the lab form
- **Booking the appointment:** Patients can book an appointment through the [online booking tool](#)
- **Test results:** Available in Netcare; Alberta Precision Laboratories will send reports based on a provider's indicated preference

Physicians and clinics can also [order RATs](#) at no cost.

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## Pediatric COVID-19, Long COVID pathways discontinued

Three COVID-19 pathways that included separate patient management plans for pediatric and adult patients, as well as those with suspected or confirmed Long COVID, have been consolidated into a single, [updated COVID-19 pathway](#).

Effective Thursday, July 28, the Long COVID and pediatric COVID-19 pathways developed during the pandemic and posted on [specialistlink.ca](https://specialistlink.ca) have been discontinued. The updated adult COVID-19 pathway now includes links to advice and resources related to post-COVID patient management.

The lifting of public health measures, vaccination rates, reduced severity of illness, the availability of rapid antigen tests and a shift in the management of COVID-19 were all catalysts for the decision to consolidate the pathways. The need for a pediatric pathway will continue to be monitored as new strains emerge and/or if the management landscape changes. Long COVID resources are [available here](#).

### **New a-fib pathway**

A new primary care pathway for patients with atrial fibrillation and atrial flutter can now be downloaded from [Specialist Link](#). The most common sustained dysrhythmia, atrial fibrillation, affects about one in four over the age of 40, including about 59,000 Albertans. Untreated, it is associated with a three to six times increased risk of stroke or systemic embolism and a doubling of mortality rates. Many aspects of the treatment of both conditions can be managed in primary care and not all patients require a referral. [Download the pathway](#).

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## **Monkeypox eligibility expanded**

Effective Thursday, July 28, eligibility for the monkeypox vaccine has been expanded to include all Albertans aged 18 and over who self-identify as being at high risk of an exposure.

Imvamune (smallpox and monkeypox vaccine) has been authorized for adults in Canada who are determined to be at high risk for exposure. Previously, Alberta provided the vaccine for close contacts of a confirmed case. Eligibility has been expanded to include targeted prevention prior to an exposure. Vaccine supply is limited.

- **Booking an appointment:** Call Health Link at 1-866-301-2688
  - **Eligibility:** [Click here for criteria](#)
  - **Close contacts:** If a patient is a close contact of a suspected or confirmed infection, they are advised to self-monitor for 21 days. If symptoms develop, they should self-isolate and seek care
  - **Lab testing:** [More information](#)
  - **More information:** Visit [alberta.ca/monkeypox](https://alberta.ca/monkeypox)
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## **Booster shots available**

Albertans aged 18 and over can now book appointments for a [second booster dose](#) of an mRNA vaccine.

Patients are eligible five months or longer after receiving their first booster. It is recommended that patients wait at least three months after a COVID-19 infection before receiving a booster dose. Patients can:

- [Book online](#)
- [Call 811](#)
- Visit [select pharmacies](#) for walk-in appointments
- [More information](#)

Those who received a single dose of the Janssen vaccine at least two months ago can also book a booster by [calling 811](#).

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## Calgary Zone webinar

The Calgary Zone's COVID-19 and mental health webinar series, co-hosted by Dr. Rick Ward and Dr. Christine Luelo, returns in September with an updated format.

On Monday, September 12, from 6–8 p.m., family physicians and team members are invited to join a discussion about hot topics related to primary care in the Calgary Zone. [Register](#).

With COVID-19 no longer dominating the healthcare landscape in the same way it did at the height of the pandemic, the webinar's updated format will include COVID-19 updates, as appropriate, but it will also focus on several other pressing topics related to primary care. The [mental health segment](#) will also return.

The popular virtual series was launched in March 2020, at the start of the pandemic, and has attracted more than 17,000 views to date. When registering, physicians will be asked if they'd like to attend virtually or in-person. Details about in-person attendance will be shared nearer the time.

[Register](#).

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## Quick links

### Social Media 101

On Thursday, September 15 and Wednesday, October 26, from 5:30–6:30 p.m., the Alberta Medical Association is hosting a webinar on social media. [More details](#).