

COVID-19 UPDATES

Phase 2B underway

Albertans born in or before 1963 with high-risk underlying health conditions can begin booking appointments through participating [pharmacies](#) effective Tuesday, March 30, although new bookings will be on hold until their current waitlist have been fulfilled.

Alberta Health Services (AHS) will start booking appointments for eligible patients born in or before 1959, with additional years to be added in sequence as more vaccine arrives, on Monday, April 5:

- Book [online](#)
- Call 811

People who need help getting to their appointment can call [211](#) once they have a time and location booked to get connected to transportation supports.

Alberta has a detailed [clinical breakdown](#) of the health conditions eligible in Phase 2B.

For the coming Phase 2C, AHS has added a [printable FAQ](#) to the vaccine sequencing for health-care workers [page](#) to clarify:

- Who is eligible
- Multiple eligibility scenarios for volunteers, contractors, remote work, and health-care workers on leave
- Allowance for caregivers of children not eligible for vaccine due to age, but fitting 2B risk
- What is considered a patient care facility

AstraZeneca eligibility update

Alberta has [temporarily paused](#) the use of AstraZeneca (COVISHIELD) for people under 55 so that Health Canada can further investigate reports of blood clots, termed Vaccine-Induced Prothrombotic Immune Thrombocytopenia (VIPIT).

Based on available evidence, VIPIT:

- Appears about four to 20 days after immunization
- Does not appear linked to pre-existing risk factors for clotting
- Has a currently reported frequency range of one in 25,000 doses (Norway) to one per million doses (U.K.)

Symptoms include:

- Severe headache that does not go away
- Seizure
- Difficulty moving part of the body
- New blurry vision that does not go away
- Difficulty speaking
- Shortness of breath
- Chest pain
- Severe abdominal pain
- New severe swelling, pain or colour change of an arm or a leg

If a patient develops one or more of these symptoms within four to 20 days of an AstraZeneca shot, an urgent hematology consult would be indicated. The Ontario COVID-19 Science Advisory Table has [diagnostic and treatment](#) information, including a section in lay person language.

When supply resumes, AstraZeneca will remain available for people 55 and over as they are at greater risk for severe outcomes of COVID-19 (which include a significant risk of blood clots and other complications) than these possible vaccine-related side effects. Under 55 this risk benefit analysis is not currently as strong.

Vaccinating homebound Albertans

Effective Monday, March 29, AHS began offering the vaccine to [homebound Albertans](#) eligible under Phase 1 and 2A.

AHS Public Health or Home Care will administer the vaccine, depending on the health zone. The program will expand to people eligible in Phase 2B as it comes into effect.

- Only homebound Albertans are eligible for this program
- Home Care will reach out to existing clients to arrange immunization
- Homebound individuals who are not Home Care clients but may be eligible can contact 811 directly

Calgary Zone webinar

The launch of the community vaccination campaign and the recent surge of variant cases will be front and centre in the next PCN COVID-19 and mental health webinar.

Scheduled for **Tuesday, April 6**, (note change to Tuesday!) from 6 to 8 p.m., the event — which is streamed live on YouTube — will feature the latest information about the next steps in vaccination roll-out, impacts to consider for your office and the longer term role for primary care.

Hosted by Dr. Rick Ward and Dr. Christine Luelo, the webinar will also feature a discussion of:

- Variant outcomes
- The risk of reinfection

- The nuances of isolation

The mental health moment will include a presentation on child and adolescent mental health (including safe and appropriate use of pharmacology).

[Register](#).

Rapid review: Double masking and improved fit

The AHS Scientific Advisory Group's (SAG) [review of literature](#) on double masking in the community — wearing a cloth mask over a medical mask — did not find clinical evidence of effectiveness.

As a result, SAG do not recommend the practice.

The review did identify public health guidelines and a recent laboratory-based simulation study that offer guidance about improving masking in community settings, including:

- A tight-mask fit is essential to reduce leakage — both in the source of transmission and the exposed individual
- Devices, such as “mask fitters,” or maneuvers, such as knotting the ear loops, have been suggested to improve fit

The layering of two medical masks is explicitly discouraged as it would not improve fit.

Quick links

Rapid review: Post-COVID-19-vaccine transmission

The AHS SAG's [rapid review](#) of the scientific research on COVID-19 transmission after immunization found the vaccines are highly protective against severe COVID-19 and some early studies show promise that vaccinations will reduce transmission. Until more studies are finished, it is important to maintain current precautions.

National immunization toolkit

The Alberta Medical Association's Accelerating Change Transformation Team participated in a pan-Canadian collaboration to create a [national immunization toolkit](#), which is complementary to the [AMA's toolkit](#), with information to help clinics establish themselves as COVID-19 immunization sites.

COVID Corner notifications

On Wednesday, May 12, the next webinar in the University of Calgary's series is set to take place. Sign up for [notifications](#).