

Alberta COVID-19 Pharmacy Immunization Program

Introduction

Since March 2020, Alberta Health has been working with the Alberta Pharmacists' Association (RxA) and other pharmacy stakeholders in developing and launching pharmacy based programs to support Albertans during the pandemic.

Pharmacy teams are accessible, community primary care providers and are in a position to leverage existing relationships to support the pandemic response. Alberta's community pharmacies are an important partner in the success of the COVID-19 Vaccine Response plan.

Alberta receives vaccines, including the COVID-19 vaccine, through the Government of Canada. The federal government determines on a per-capita basis how many vaccines Alberta receives, and tells us when we expect to receive the vaccines. Every province in the country is in the same situation and experiencing similar challenges regarding limited supply of the vaccines from the federal government at this time. As the vaccine supply and timing is variable and can be changed on short notice, changes to the Program may be made to reflect this accordingly.

It is the purpose of the Alberta COVID-19 Pharmacy Immunization Program (ACPIP) to provide Albertans access to vaccine in a timely manner in the communities where they live.

Eligibility for Immunization

Our government implemented a phased approach to target key populations in phases during the initial months of the COVID-19 Immunization Program. The phased approach will continue for the administration of third/additional/booster doses. The precise timeframes for each phase depend on the availability of the vaccine and vaccination rates. To determine whom is included in each phase, recommendations from the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) and the experts who sit on Alberta's Advisory Committee on Immunization are considered. Please visit <https://www.alberta.ca/covid19-vaccine.aspx> for more information about Alberta's COVID-19 immunization program and associated eligibility criteria.

ACPIP Requirements

This is a **voluntary** program for Alberta pharmacists working in community pharmacy locations.

This is a **voluntary** program for Albertans, however, immunization is **strongly encouraged** for all eligible Albertans.

The Alberta government has standardized practices for all immunization providers, regardless of whether a vaccine is provincially funded or privately purchased. As outlined in the *Immunization Regulation*, as of December 17, 2018:

- Health practitioners shall ensure that adverse events following immunization (AEFI) are reported to Alberta Health Services within 3 days of becoming aware.
- The Regulation also sets out requirements for the storage, handling and transportation of vaccines.

As of January 1, 2021, the *Immunization Regulation* requires health practitioners to ensure a report respecting immunizations and assessments is electronically submitted to Alberta Health within seven (7) days.

For the requirements of this program, Alberta Blue Cross billing claims for the ACPIP are required to be billed on the day of service provided by the pharmacy. This ensures complete, accurate and appropriate COVID-19 vaccination records for the Albertan which is critical to producing required documentation for employment, travel or other purposes.

Pharmacists have a professional responsibility to monitor Alberta Health COVID-19 daily updates and bulletins for changes to this program and/or the overall immunization strategy.

COVID-19 mRNA Vaccines

COVID-19 mRNA vaccines (i.e. Pfizer-BioNTech (Comirnaty) and Moderna (SpikeVax)) are a new class of vaccine products and pharmacists and pharmacy technicians must ensure that they have read and familiarized themselves with the technical, clinical and operational requirements of handling this vaccine. Particular attention is required for the Pfizer-BioNTech (Comirnaty) vaccine and the instructions for reconstitution and drawing up of doses with low-dead space (LDS) needles and syringes which will ensure maximization of available doses from each vial. LDS needles/syringes are not required for the Moderna vaccine.

Training resources which every immunizer is required to review are provided at the end of this program document. Additional training resources may be provided by each individual manufacturer, and their website should be reviewed for content for Health Professionals.

Pharmacists are reminded, as always, to practice within their competencies and abilities. The Alberta College of Pharmacy has reviewed the program requirements of the ACPIP.

AstraZeneca (Vaxzervria) is not a mRNA vaccine.

Inbound Logistics

COVID-19 mRNA vaccines will be shipped to participants in a thawed or thawing state and must be refrigerated in a temperature monitored fridge IMMEDIATELY upon arrival without delay. Participants should make accommodations within their workflow/operations to ensure the receiving process for vaccine is done expediently to mitigate any risk of cold chain break.

More specific information on mRNA vaccine storage and handling requirements can be found below.

- [Alberta Vaccine Storage and Handling for COVID-19 Vaccine](#)

- Drug information on approved vaccines in Canada
 - [Pfizer BioNTech](#) received approval on Dec. 9, 2020.
 - [Moderna](#) received approval on Dec. 23, 2020
 - [AstraZenca](#) received approval on Feb. 26, 2021
 - [Janssen](#) received approval on Mar 5, 2021

Client Booking for Immunization Appointments

In August 2021, the Government of Alberta introduced the Alberta Vaccine Booking System (AVBS), a centralized online appointment-booking platform designed to support Albertans booking their COVID-19 and Influenza vaccine appointments at a community pharmacy or Alberta Health Services (AHS) clinic. Any eligible Albertan will be able to schedule an immunization appointment by using the AVBS.

It is mandatory for community pharmacies to utilize the AVBS in their pharmacy operations by creating an appointment schedule for COVID-19 vaccines that is reflective of pharmacy operations, staffing and vaccine supply. Appointment schedules in the AVBS should be created in multiples to coincide with the number of doses of vaccine per vial which can be safely immunized.

More information on the AVBS can be found at <https://www.ab.bluecross.ca/provider/type/pharmacy/alberta-vaccine-booking-system.php>

Walk-in Immunization

In order to prevent vaccine wastage and to support pharmacy operations, COVID-19 vaccines may be administered to clients on a walk-in basis.

COVID-19 Vaccine Multi-dose Vials

Dependent on the type and size of needle and syringe used, it is possible to attain extra doses from the vial, however this is not consistent between all combinations of needle and syringe in the community setting. The number of doses should be maximized by program participants by using low-dead space (LDS) syringes for the Pfizer BioNTech vaccine and utilizing proper technique for withdrawing doses from each vial.

Regardless of the skill of the pharmacist, a maximum of six doses (Pfizer-BioNTech) and 10 or 14 doses (Moderna - depending on packs size) should be withdrawn from their applicable multi-dose vials. This maximum amount is dictated by Health Canada and the vaccine manufacturer.

In order to be immunized by a pharmacist, the presenting client **MUST** be asymptomatic. This should be confirmed at the time of booking as well as immediately prior to each immunization appointment in the two dose series.

Screening for eligibility (absence of symptoms or history of previous positive testing in the last 14 days) will be the responsibility of the pharmacist and will be guided by an assessment tool which can be found on the AHS website at;

<https://myhealth.alberta.ca/Journey/COVID-19/Pages/COVID-Self-Assessment.aspx>

Pharmacists must check the immunization module in NETCARE for previous administration of COVID-19 vaccine and type.

Pharmacists must check NETCARE for client history of previous testing in particular to determine if client has had a positive result in the last 14 days. If there is a positive test result in the last 14 days, then the client should be referred to an AHS Health Link for further information by calling 811.

If a client screens as being symptomatic, or at high-risk for previous exposure to COVID-19, or works or lives at a site with a declared outbreak; as per the online assessment tool protocol, clients **MUST** be advised to self-isolate and be referred to an AHS Assessment Center for testing by calling 811.

If a screening indicating the client is symptomatic or high-risk for previous exposure occurs in the pharmacy, then the pharmacy is to follow the hierarchy of controls, specifically with respect to environmental controls and cleaning.

Infection Prevention and Control

The Alberta College of Pharmacy has developed guidelines that contribute to a hierarchy of controls, which must be in place during a public health response.

AHS standard operating procedure for immunization recommends PPE consisting of mask, and face shield or goggles. Hand hygiene practices must be strictly enforced and used at all times.

Gloves are not required, but use is encouraged when possible. If gloves are used, they must be changed after each client with proper hand hygiene before putting gloves on and after removal of gloves.

Gowns are not required, but may be used at the discretion of the pharmacist.

- General Applicable Guidance on infection prevention and control
 - <https://abpharmacy.ca/COVID-19-guidance-pharmacists-and-pharmacy-technicians>
- Risk Mitigation in Workplaces
 - <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/guidance-documents/risk-informed-decision-making-workplaces->

Immunization with COVID-19 Vaccine

McKesson Canada will provide the required diluent (i.e. for Pfizer BioNTech), syringes and needles and other ancillary supplies (except PPE, unless sourced separately by the pharmacy from McKesson) for the administration of the mRNA vaccines.

The ACPIP Client Consent and Checklist will guide pharmacists to obtain informed consent for immunization with COVID-19 vaccine.

Prior to immunization, the pharmacist must ensure that all necessary supplies and ancillary items are readily available in order to avoid wastage of any doses.

Best practice include these mandatory requirements

- Low dead-space 1cc syringe for the Pfizer BioNTech vaccine
- 3cc syringe for the Moderna/AstraZeneca vaccines
- Client appropriate needle to withdraw dose from vial and administer to client
- Alcohol swabs
- Sharps Container
- Hand sanitizer
- PPE
- Workspace Infection Prevention and Control materials
- Active surveillance information and QR code (see Reporting Requirements).
- Up to date emergency training, supplies, and polices to respond to an emergency event, especially for anaphylaxis.

Guidance from the manufacturer instructions on preparing the vaccine, precautions and contraindications for administration can be found in the product monograph for each COVID-19 vaccine.

Once the vial of vaccine has been punctured, it is stable for short-term storage as per the product monographs. Pharmacists **MUST** be aware of these timelines as they are variable between different products.

ALL doses **MUST** be administered from a vial within this time, otherwise any remaining doses are spoiled and **CANNOT** be used.

DUE TO VACCINE SUPPLY LIMITATIONS, PARTICIPANTS MUST ENSURE THAT ANY POTENTIAL FOR WASTAGE OR SPOILED DOSES IS MITIGATED TO THE BEST OF THEIR ABILITIES.

Reporting Requirements

Participants are required to, **every day**;

1. Submit ALL claims for the vaccine that was administered using the date of service.

2. Submit ALL Adverse Events Following Immunization to Alberta Health Services

Should an adverse event related to immunization be observed or reported to the pharmacist at any time post-immunization, it is paramount that these events be reported to the Alberta Health Services AEFI team through <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/info/Page16187.aspx> or by calling 1-855-444-2324 (1-855-444-CDCI) if unable to complete the online form.

The pharmacist must be familiar with the adverse events that are reportable including the adverse events of special interest that is particular to the COVID-19 vaccine.

The Alberta Health [Active Surveillance and Reporting of Adverse Events following COVID-19 Immunization](#) Policy outlines the reportable AEFIs.

3. Alberta Vaccine Inventory (AVI) Reporting Process

Pharmacies will be required to access the AVI Portal on a daily basis to complete required reporting. Pharmacies that have not already done so are required to complete the enrolment for access to the AVI system as soon as possible by completing the form found at: <https://forms.gle/F6rKtRgNT7Lkq5Dq8>.

You can enroll up to four on-site users per pharmacy site who will be responsible for submitting daily records. Please complete all fields on all pages and submit the information to be uploaded to AVI. All locations holding any quantity of COVID-19 vaccine must complete a daily physical count and reconciliation of their on-hand inventory by 9 pm. The on-hand quantities reported in AVI are used to manage inventory in the province and accuracy is essential to managing the COVID-19 vaccine program.

Training videos are available on the AVI home page (<https://vimsavi.alberta.ca/prod/>). For questions on the AVI process please contact the AVI Help Desk at 1-844-213-3600.

Vaccine allocations will be reconciled by Alberta Health against this data for each participant site on a daily basis and allocation amounts may be reduced if the requested amounts cannot be corroborated by the data.

Patient Based National Survey

In addition, there is a client based national survey study to conduct active safety surveillance on the COVID-19 vaccines. The study is optional, and usually takes less than one minute to complete online. The study has received ethics and privacy approvals from all the appropriate groups. The initiative would include three email surveys in total which will be sent to clients:

- one on day 8 after dose 1,
- the second on day 8 of dose 2, and
- the third six months after vaccine to help gather more information on the COVID-19 vaccine.

The surveys were developed by CANVAS, the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) and the F/P/T Vaccine Vigilance Working Group (VWVG) and will be utilized by other participating provinces and territories. This information will be collected and provided to Alberta Health surveillance.

Enrollment should occur at the time of immunization with the attached QR code from the printable poster which can be scanned or by providing the link : <https://canvas-covid.ca/>

Additional Recommended Resources

Information regarding the development of these vaccines and their safety can be found below.

- Q&A Document from Alberta Health
 - [COVID-19 Vaccine – Questions and answers for health-care practitioners](#)
- Health Canada
 - [What you need to know about the COVID-19 vaccine for Canada](#)
 - [COVID-19: How vaccines are developed](#)
 - [Vaccine safety, concerns and possible side effects](#)

For immunization providers:

- [Alberta Immunization Policy](#)
- [Guidance for the delivery of COVID-19 immunization services](#)

Manufacturer resources:

- COVID-19 vaccine product monographs and information can be found online from the manufacturer website
 - Pfizer BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine at <https://www.cvdvaccine.ca/>
 - Moderna COVID-19 Vaccine at <https://www.modernacovid19global.com/ca>
- Training on the Low Dose Syringes: Training: the National Collaborating Centre for Infectious Diseases (NCCID) hosted a webinar on Feb 10th,2021 for health care providers who are administering COVID-19 vaccines.
 - This webinar has been recorded and available on the NCCID website
 - [Presentation on Allergies and Anaphylaxis following administration of COVID-19 vaccines with live Q&A Live Q&A panel on Low Dead Volume Syringes](#)

Alberta Health Resources:

- [Alberta's COVID-19 Immunization Policy](#)
- [COVID-19 vaccine biological pages:](#)
 - [COVID-19 Vaccine \(mRNA\) – Moderna frozen vaccine](#)
- [Alberta Vaccine Storage and Handling for COVID-19 Vaccine;](#)
- [Active Surveillance and Reporting of Adverse Events following COVID-19 Immunization \(AEFI\) Policy;](#)
- [COVID-19 Vaccine – Questions and answers for health-care practitioners;](#)
- [COVID-19 immunization: Guidance during the COVID-19 pandemic;](#)
- [Product Problem form](#)

National resources:

- [The National Advisory Committee on Immunization \(NACI\) Recommendations on the use of COVID-19 vaccine](#)
- [Planning guidance for immunization clinics for COVID-19 vaccines](#)