

Alberta COVID-19 Pharmacy Immunization Program

- COVID-19 vaccines will be offered at some community pharmacies beginning the week of March 1, making it easier for eligible Albertans to get their dose as quickly as possible.
- Alberta has a robust vaccine distribution plan. We continue to expand our approach as the supply increases.
- Alberta's community pharmacists are an important partner in the success of the COVID-19 vaccine response plan.
- Starting February 24, Albertans aged 75 and older (born in 1946 or earlier) will be able to book their immunization appointment at more than 100 participating community pharmacies.
 - Appointments will start the first week of March.
 - Due to limited vaccine quantities and strict storage and handling requirements for the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, only select pharmacies in Edmonton, Red Deer and Calgary will initially offer the vaccine.
 - As more vaccine arrives, participating pharmacies in many other communities will begin to offer immunization.
 - A list of participating pharmacies is available on the Alberta Blue Cross site: <https://www.ab.bluecross.ca/news/covid-19-immunization-program-information.php>
- Albertans must book an appointment for immunization with a participating pharmacy. Drop-in requests will not be accommodated as vaccine supply is limited.
- Seniors aged 75 and older can still book appointments through Alberta Health Services using the online booking tool or by telephone by calling HealthLink at 811.
- In order to ensure fair access to all Albertans needing to be immunized and to prevent unnecessary wastage of vaccine doses please book **ONLY** one appointment per person. Please, **DO NOT** book multiple appointments at multiple sites.
- Each participating pharmacy will adhere to strict protocols and has demonstrated experience with immunizations and the specialized skills needed to safely provide COVID-19 vaccines.
- Alberta Health Services will continue to book vaccines for all eligible Albertans as well, and for those eligible Albertans residing in Supportive Living or Designated Supportive Living facilities.

Q&A:

Who will be able to get an immunization at a pharmacy?

- Initially, only Albertans 75 years of age and older, born in 1946 or earlier, in the community can be vaccinated at a participating pharmacy. Future expansion will be based on supply and phases of the COVID-19 vaccine response plan.

If I am 75+ and live in a surrounding community of Edmonton, Calgary or Red Deer, can I make an appointment at a participating pharmacy?

- All eligible Albertans are able to book an appointment for immunization at participating pharmacies. Please refer to the Alberta Blue Cross listing of participating pharmacies: <https://www.ab.bluecross.ca/news/covid-19-immunization-program-information.php>
- Seniors age 75 and older who cannot access a community pharmacy can continue to book their appointments through AHS.

How many stores will be providing immunizations?

- Initially, immunizations will be available at 102 pharmacies.
- Due to logistics and current supply, participation will be limited to Edmonton, Calgary and Red Deer at this time.
- Future expansion of this program to more pharmacies in more locations will be based on supply and phases of the COVID-19 vaccine response plan.

How many immunizations can pharmacies complete in a day?

- Together, the initial pharmacies will be able to offer more than 3,000 immunizations per day.
- This total will increase as vaccine supply expands and more pharmacies are added.

How were these pharmacies chosen?

- The initial participating pharmacies were identified based on geographic and population needs, as well as their demonstrated ability to handle large volumes of immunizations in short time frames.
- This includes past performance for immunization capacity based on 2020-2021 Influenza Immunization Program data.
- Representation includes a varied group of community pharmacy partners, including independents, chain, banner and franchise stores.

Will the program be offered in more cities in the future?

- Due to the complex logistics for vaccine handling and storage, and limited quantity of vaccine at this time, pharmacy participation will be limited.
- Expansion of the pharmacy immunization program to more pharmacies in more locations in the future will be coordinated with future expansion in vaccine supply.

Where can I find information on which pharmacies are offering immunizations?

- Enrolled pharmacy names, location and contact details will be published on Alberta Blue Cross' website.
- <https://www.ab.bluecross.ca/news/covid-19-immunization-program-information.php>
- This list will be updated regularly as more pharmacies are added.

What vaccine will be available at pharmacies? How will they ensure the doses do not spoil?

- Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine will be supplied to pharmacies in a thawed or thawing state, through wholesale distribution channels with a long history of safely handling vaccines requiring cold chain management.
- Undiluted thawed Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine can be stored under refrigeration for up to 5 days. Each shipment to pharmacies will be clearly marked with the date and time by which that supply of vaccine must be used.

What if someone does not show up for their appointment? Will the pharmacy be able to give the dose to someone that happens to be in the pharmacy?

- Pharmacies have been provided guidance on developing an “on-call” list for eligible clients that can be reached on short notice to be immunized should there be any left over doses at the end of the day.

If I have COVID symptoms can I still go to a pharmacy for my scheduled vaccine appointment?

- No. Only Albertans who are well, have no symptoms and no known exposure can be immunized at a pharmacy.
- If you have COVID-19 symptoms or have been in close contact with a known case, please reschedule your appointment, self-isolate immediately, and complete the AHS self-assessment and booking for testing [online](#) or by calling HealthLink at 811.

Do I have to have an appointment to go to a pharmacy for a vaccination?

- Yes, you are required to book in advance. Drop-in or unscheduled visits will not be accommodated due to limited supply and required adherence to safety protocols.

Can I book online?

- Each pharmacy will have their own booking system, and so should be contacted directly to confirm the method by which an appointment can be made.
- Please refer to the Alberta Blue Cross listing of participating pharmacies:
<https://www.ab.bluecross.ca/news/covid-19-immunization-program-information.php>

Will pharmacies require proof that I am eligible for a vaccine?

- Pharmacies will be required to verify year of birth. Albertans should ensure they bring photo ID and/or their Alberta Health Care Insurance (Personal Health Number) with them to the appointment.

Will pharmacists be able to immunize pharmacy staff with leftover doses at the end of the day?

- Pharmacies have been provided guidance on developing an “on-call” list for eligible clients that can be reached on short notice to be immunized should there be any leftover doses at the end of the day.
- Pharmacies are advised to refer to the Vaccine Wastage Guidance Document posted on the Alberta Blue Cross website provider page for detailed information.
- Once all eligible client options have been exhausted, any leftover doses can be used to immunize pharmacy staff who have direct contact with patients.

What is the time interval between doses of the vaccines being used in Alberta?

- Public Health authorities are advising, based on the most current evidence available, that the interval between doses should be extended up to four months (i.e. 16 weeks).
- Starting March 10, pharmacies will book eligible Albertans for the first dose **only**. The pharmacy will contact the Albertan at a later date to book the second dose.
- Information for participating pharmacies on when to contact the Albertan for the second dose will be provided at a later date.

Why is the time interval between doses being increased from 42 days to 4 months?

- Emerging evidence indicated that first doses of all currently approved vaccines appear to be at least 80 per cent effective in protecting against severe outcomes after the first dose.
- The 4-month timeline for second doses brings Alberta in line with British Columbia and other jurisdictions.
- With this change, Alberta will now be on track to offer first doses of vaccine to all adults 18 years and over by the end of June, provided supplies of vaccines arrive as forecast by the federal government.

I received, or will receive my first dose before March 10, and I am scheduled for the second dose already. Will I have to rebook my appointment for the second dose?

- No, all existing appointments that were booked by the pharmacy will be honoured.

Can an electronic signature or digital version of the form be used to complete the ACPIP Client Consent and Checklist?

- In order to ensure that the requirements for provision of informed consent are fully met and acknowledged an actual “wet” signature from the client or their representative is recommended. An electronic signature or verbal consent documented by the pharmacy is acceptable as well.
- Pharmacies must ensure that all the elements of the ACPIP Client Consent and Checklist for every client seeking immunization with COVID-19 vaccine are recorded.
- Pharmacies wishing to use their own digital versions of these forms must ensure that all elements are present and in alignment with the ACPIP Client Consent and Checklist.

Can COVID-19 vaccine be administered to eligible Albertans outside of the pharmacy itself?

- At this time, all COVID-19 vaccine must be administered to Albertans on-site in the pharmacy it is delivered to and cannot be transported to a secondary location for storage or administration. Vaccine must be maintained in a controlled cold chain at all times in order to avoid any potential wastage of doses for the very limited amount of vaccine available.

Can a pharmacy book more than 30 patients per day (or less)?

- Pharmacies can book as many eligible clients per day (in multiples of 6) as they are able to safely and efficiently accommodate given the amount of vaccine they will have available.
- The total number of Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine doses allocated to each pharmacy per week cannot be changed and pharmacies are advised to book appointments accordingly.
- Participating pharmacies have committed to being able to immunize at least 30 eligible clients per day, however it is recognized this may not always be feasible (i.e. weekends, staff illness, etc.)

What if an eligible individual does not have a Personal Health Number (lost number, out of province)?

- Individuals who are eligible for vaccine but cannot provide a valid Personal Health Number must be referred to AHS to book an appointment for immunization.
- This includes all individuals who are living, working, going to school or visiting in Alberta for three months or longer who are eligible to receive the vaccine and do not have a Personal Health Number.