

SPRING 2023—ADDITIONAL BIVALENT COVID-19 VACCINE BOOSTER PROGRAM

On March 3, 2023, the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) released a discretionary spring booster recommendation. Alberta Health, with guidance from the Alberta Advisory Committee on Immunization, is recommending an additional bivalent booster dose for Albertans at higher risk of severe outcomes from COVID-19 infection as described below.

Starting the week of March 20, 2023, Albertans living in seniors congregate care facilities are eligible for an additional bivalent COVID-19 booster dose.

COVID-19 bivalent booster vaccine administration in seniors congregate care facilities may be provided by onsite staff, pharmacists or Alberta Health Services. It will likely take several weeks to complete. Each facility is responsible for finding an immunization provider and to arrange the onsite immunization for their residents with the identified provider. However, if your pharmacy has provided immunization services to a facility in the past, we encourage you to reach out to them if you wish to engage with them to be their vaccination provider.

The eligibility criteria for receiving a second bivalent booster dose are as follows:

All Residents of long-term care facilities and other congregate care living settings who

- have received a Moderna or Pfizer-BioNTech bivalent booster dose on or after September 21, 2022; and
- where a period of at least three calendar months from the previous bivalent booster dose (or infection) has occurred. (This shortened interval will be permitted to optimize the ability to administer the additional dose to the most people, in the timeliest way.)

Please note: there are a number of residents in senior congregate care facilities that have not yet received a first bivalent vaccine. All efforts should be made to provide first bivalent doses to those residents at the same time as providing additional doses to those who are eligible.

Other specific groups of Albertans at higher risk of severe outcomes from COVID-19 infection are also eligible to receive an additional bivalent booster dose. As of April 3, 2023, the Alberta Vaccine Booking system will be ready for online appointments. However, eligible individuals can receive an additional booster dose from a community pharmacist without an appointment starting March 20, 2023.

Other eligibility includes:

Albertans 65 years of age and older who

- have received a Moderna or Pfizer-BioNTech bivalent booster dose on or after September 21, 2022; and
- it has been **at least six months** since that dose or infection.

No shortened (three-month) interval between the previous bivalent booster dose (or infection) and the additional bivalent booster dose will be permitted.

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Adults (18 years of age and older) with certain Immunocompromising conditions who

- have received a Moderna or Pfizer-BioNTech bivalent booster dose on or after September 21, 2022; and
- it has been **at least six months** since that dose or infection.

No shortened (three-month) interval between the previous bivalent booster dose (or infection) and the additional bivalent booster dose will be permitted.

Documentation of underlying medical conditions is not required. **Eligible Albertans who identify as meeting at least one of the criteria below are eligible to receive an additional bivalent booster.** For clarity, these criteria have not changed from previous and are the same as those [described here](#).

- Recipients of chimeric antigen receptor (CAR) T-cell therapy.
- Individuals with moderate to severe primary immunodeficiency (for example, DiGeorge syndrome, Wiskott-Aldrich syndrome).
- Individuals with advanced untreated HIV infection or acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS).
- Recipients of immunosuppressive therapies (for example, anti-B cell therapies, high-dose systemic corticosteroids, alkylating agents, antimetabolites, or tumor-necrosis factor [TNF] inhibitors and other biologic agents).
- Transplant recipients, including solid organ and hematopoietic stem cell transplants.
- Individuals with chronic kidney disease receiving regular dialysis.
- Recipients of active cancer treatment (chemotherapy, immunotherapy or targeted therapies), excluding those receiving only hormonal therapy, radiation therapy or surgery.
- Individuals taking certain medications for autoimmune diseases, including rituximab, ocrelizumab, ofatumumab and methotrexate.

The estimated population eligible for a spring booster is approximately 150,000 individuals, including residents of senior congregate care. Please order the vaccine judiciously based on demand.

Booking appointments

Eligible Albertans can receive the additional bivalent mRNA COVID-19 booster dose at local pharmacies or community medical clinics, as well as some AHS Public Health clinics. Starting April 3, if it has been at least six months since last dose or infection, an appointment can be booked on the Alberta Vaccine Booking System [online](#), by [calling your local pharmacy](#) or community medical clinic directly, or by calling Health Link at 811.

Why is the additional bivalent booster in the spring of 2023 not available to all Albertans?

All other Albertans who received a bivalent COVID-19 booster dose on or after September 21, 2022, and are not listed above as being eligible for a second bivalent booster, are considered up to date and are not currently eligible for another booster dose.

- Alberta has seen relatively stable COVID-19 disease activity in recent months, and generally high levels of protection against COVID-19 severe outcomes from vaccines and/or infection, and is therefore not recommending an additional bivalent booster for the general population this spring.
- Previous infection with COVID-19 and immunization provides better protection, called hybrid immunity, compared with immunization only or previous infection without immunization.
- In Canada, a greater proportion of older adults are protected by immunization only and have not been infected (meaning many of them do not have hybrid immunity), as compared to younger age groups. Adolescents and young adults have the highest proportion of hybrid immunity.

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- Additional bivalent boosters are being made available in the spring of 2023 to support those who are at highest risk of severe outcomes of COVID-19, and those for whom many months have passed since their last dose, especially those who might not have developed hybrid immunity.
- Plans for booster doses may change as new data and recommendations become available. It is important to follow the latest guidance from public health authorities regarding immunization and booster doses.

For assistance with benefit or claim inquiries, please contact an Alberta Blue Cross Pharmacy Services Provider Relations contact centre representative at

780-498-8370 (Edmonton and area)

403-294-4041 (Calgary and area)

1-800-361-9632 (toll free)

FAX 780-498-8406 (Edmonton and area)

FAX 1-877-305-9911 (toll free)

Alberta Blue Cross offers online access to current Pharmacy Benefacts and supplemental claiming information to assist with the submission of your direct bill drug claims.

Visit ab.bluecross.ca/providers/pharmacy-home.php

