

mRNA COVID-19 Vaccine Primary Series UPDATE and Fall Immunization Program Update

- As of August 2, 2023, **bivalent vaccines** will be the **only** mRNA COVID-19 vaccine product available in the province **for both primary series and booster doses**.
- The original monovalent mRNA COVID-19 vaccines are no longer being produced by the manufacturers, and all remaining inventory will soon expire.
- The Pfizer-BioNTech BA.4/5 bivalent vaccine for ages 12 and up will primarily be available through community pharmacies.
- As quantities of the Pfizer-BioNTech BA.4/5 bivalent vaccines for 5-11 year olds and the Moderna BA.4/5 bivalent vaccines are limited, they will only be available through Alberta Health Services (AHS). Appointments can only be booked by calling Health Link at 811 or booking online via AVBS.
 - o The Moderna bivalent vaccine will be available to all children aged 6 months to 4 years and to individuals aged 5 years and older who are immunocompromised.
- Currently, there is no non-mRNA vaccine available to Albertans who cannot receive or who refuse an mRNA vaccine.
- For more information, visit <https://www.alberta.ca/covid19-vaccine.aspx>

Vaccine-specific recommendations or considerations for certain age groups or individuals with underlying health conditions.

- The Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines are safe, effective and interchangeable.
- The Moderna bivalent vaccine is available to children 6 months to 4 years of age, as it is the only authorized product available to this age group.
- Based on guidance from the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI), the Moderna bivalent vaccine will be available to immunocompromised individuals 5 years of age and older as they may get more benefit from a primary series with Moderna compared to Pfizer-BioNTech.
- Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine is still preferentially recommended to individuals 12–29 years of age, as the rare risk of myocarditis is lower when compared to the Moderna original (monovalent) vaccine.
- As previously recommended, individuals with specific underlying conditions may need an additional dose in their primary series for better protection against severe outcomes. This additional dose is not considered a booster dose but rather a completion of the primary series for this population.

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If an individual started the primary series with an original monovalent mRNA vaccine, can they continue with the bivalent mRNA vaccine? Should they restart the primary series?

- If an original monovalent mRNA vaccine was used to start the primary series, a bivalent mRNA vaccine can be used to complete it.
- Regardless of which vaccine is offered to start the primary series, that first dose is counted, and the series should be **continued** and **not restarted**.
- For information about doses, schedules and completing a primary series started with a non-bivalent vaccine, please consult the biological pages. These will be available on August 2 on <https://www.alberta.ca/alberta-immunization-policy.aspx>

Alberta Vaccine Booking System (AVBS)

- Pharmacies will be required to update the available vaccines field and scheduler within the AVBS to only include the Pfizer-BioNTech BA.4/5 bivalent vaccine for the 12+ population.

Important

The Pfizer-BioNTech original monovalent vaccine, which is currently available for individuals aged 12 years and older as part of the primary series, will expire on July 31. Therefore, please avoid scheduling primary series appointments for this age group on August 1. However, starting from August 2, appointments can be made for these individuals to receive a bivalent vaccine as part of the primary series.

TWO IMPORTANT REMINDERS about The Alberta Influenza Immunization Program 2023/2024

1. Fluzone high-dose vaccine

If you have NOT received an allocation from Health AVI by June 30, please complete the following steps:

1. Check with all your AVI registered users to ensure no one received the email.
2. Confirm the email was not moved to a spam or junk mail folder.
3. Submit an allocation request to Alberta Health using [this Google Form](#) by July 30, 2023.

Please refer to Benefact #1116 for information regarding the July 30, 2023, deadline:

<https://www.ab.bluecross.ca/pdfs/pharmacy-benefacts/pharmacy-benefact-1116.pdf>

Alberta Health cannot accommodate allocation requests after July 30, 2023.

2. Outreach program

Pharmacies that have been contacted by continuing care facilities to provide fall immunization services for their residents and staff are asked to **please respond to all the questions in the survey/worksheet**. Specifically, please provide the facilities with the name of your primary pharmacy wholesale distributor along with your distributor account number. These two pieces of information are critical for Alberta Health's work to calculate vaccine allocations for you. Without this information, Alberta Health will not be able to match pharmacies with their wholesale distributor and therefore NO VACCINE allocations or distribution can occur for you for the outreach program. Please provide this information to the facility by July 26.

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CORRECTION: Alberta Vaccine Inventory (AVI) Compliance Requirements— Follow-up to Benefact #1119

Correction notice:

- The Alberta Vaccine Inventory (AVI) Compliance Requirements (Benefact #1119) contained an error in the **AVI Compliance Reports and Process** section.
- Previously, this incorrect messaging indicated that frozen (1-month) suspensions may start in October.
- This messaging should have read: "Please note that with the grace period being lifted in July, pharmacies that have low compliance rates could receive a **frozen (1-month) suspension in September**, which could impact influenza vaccine distribution. If low compliance leads to a **frozen (6-month) suspension**, it will impact the pharmacy's participation in the 2023–2024 Influenza Immunization Program."

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

