

Influenza and COVID-19 updates

Starting the week of October 16, Albertans 6 months of age and older will be eligible for the COVID-19 XBB.1.5 and influenza vaccines through community pharmacies, community medical clinics and Alberta Health Services.

Starting the week of October 2, residents living in **senior congregate care settings** will be offered COVID-19 XBB.1.5 and influenza immunizations through their facilities with pharmacy support. For updated PINs and claiming information please see the Alberta Blue Cross® website for the [Reference Guide for Pharmacists Billing COVID-19 Vaccinations](#).

It is safe and convenient to receive both the COVID-19 XBB.1.5 and influenza vaccines at the same time, reducing the need for multiple immunization appointments. More information on the COVID-19 XBB.1.5 vaccine will be provided to pharmacies in the very near future.

Influenza Administration and Claims Process

For updated PINs and claiming information for the 2023/2024 season, please see the Alberta Blue Cross website for the [Reference Guide for Administering and Claiming Influenza Vaccines](#) and the [Alberta Health Influenza Antiviral Drug Policy as applied to Vulnerable Populations Living in Congregate Living Settings](#) for additional details. Pharmacy teams are encouraged to review these two documents for changes to policy for this season, including that for workplace settings.

Only immunization services provided by ACP injection-authorized pharmacists in approved locations and situations are eligible for Influenza Immunization Program (IIP) compensation. Pharmacists may not delegate the administration of provincially funded influenza vaccines to other health care professionals (paid or volunteer).

COVID-19 Pharmacy Services Changes

Pharmacists are valued partners in our health system and have been integral to our efforts to reduce COVID-19 transmission. To date, pharmacists have administered over 5.6 million COVID-19 vaccines and completed over 3.7 million Assessments to Screen and/or Treat for Infectious Disease. Thank you to all pharmacists who provided COVID-19 pharmacy services to Albertans.

As COVID-19 is no longer considered to be a pandemic and is now being handled in the same way as other respiratory viruses, changes are being made to COVID-19 pharmacy services to reflect this transition to an endemic approach to managing COVID-19.

Assessment for the Administration of COVID-19 vaccine

The following changes are being made to the fee for Assessment for the Administration of COVID-19 Vaccine:

- Effective October 1, 2023, the fee will be initially reduced to \$17 for the 2023/2024 season; and
- Effective April 1, 2024, the fee will be reduced to \$13 in alignment with other publicly funded vaccines.

Assessment to Screen and/or Test for Infectious Disease

Effective October 1, 2023, the temporary pharmacy service Assessment to Screen and/or Test for Infectious Disease (assessment code 0071120, SSC - L) is being terminated. Pharmacies will no longer have the ability to bill for this COVID-19 pharmacy service as of October 1, 2023. Please refer to [Benefact 847](#) for the original communication to pharmacies regarding the implementation and intention for this temporary service during the pandemic.

COVID-19 Rapid Antigen Test Kits

All Albertans can get free COVID-19 rapid testing kits for at-home use at participating pharmacies across the province. Albertans can find a pharmacy offering rapid test kits online using the [Alberta Blue Cross Pharmacy Inventory Map](#).

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A large supply of test kits are available for pharmacies to order from pharmacy wholesale distributors. Details on submitting claims for rapid testing kits were provided in **Benefact 1018**. It is important for pharmacy teams to verify expiration dates on COVID-19 rapid testing kits as there are several different lots with expirations dates between November 2023 and March 2024.

Alberta Vaccine Booking System (AVBS)

Even though the AVBS is not mandatory for community pharmacies to use, Alberta Health continues to direct Albertans to the AVBS to review available appointments within both community pharmacies and Alberta Health Services clinics.

It is recommended that pharmacies administering **Fluzone High Dose** enter appointments into AVBS to ensure Albertans are easily able to make an appointment to access this vaccine.

Alberta Vaccine Inventory (AVI)

Please ensure you are using and updating the AVI system every week. This includes counting and reconciling your physical inventory and reporting it into AVI as well as receiving in AVI ALL transfers from your pharmacy wholesale distributor. AVI compliance is **mandatory** for all publicly funded vaccines, including influenza and COVID-19.

Alberta Blue Cross Locator Tool — Pharmacy Inventory Map

All pharmacies registered for Alberta Blue Cross's pharmacy provider website can submit inventory information related to available vaccines and COVID-19 products at any time at ab.bluecross.ca/provider/type/pharmacy/secure-online-site.php.

Enhancements will be made to display the following product types:

- Influenza vaccine
- COVID-19 vaccine
- COVID-19 rapid antigen test
- COVID-19 Paxlovid

To ensure the inventory information displayed on the Alberta Blue Cross website is accurate, please log in to the pharmacy provider website regularly to reflect the vaccine(s) and products you have on-hand.

Additional enhancements are in progress and will be released in a future update.

Quarterly update regarding the Authorized Adjustment

The Alberta government, the Alberta Pharmacists' Association and Alberta Blue Cross continue working collaboratively to monitor pharmacy compensation expenditures and trends for drug benefit fees and pharmacy services. As previously communicated in **Benefact 865**, a provision exists to enable an Authorized Adjustment mechanism through a consultative process should expenditures trend towards exceeding established budget targets. With the completion of the first fiscal quarter (April 1 to June 30, 2023), expenditures remain within budget targets, and as a result, there was no need to initiate consultations on the Authorized Adjustment.

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

