

Tocilizumab added to the Alberta Biosimilar Initiative

On December 12, 2019, the Alberta government introduced the Alberta Biosimilar Initiative (refer to Benefact 826, December 2019 at <https://www.ab.bluecross.ca/pdfs/pharmacy-benefacts/pharmacy-benefact-826.pdf>). This communication is to inform you that as of July 1, 2025, a new tocilizumab biosimilar drug, Tyenne, will be listed on the *Alberta Drug Benefit List (ADBL)* and will be subject to the Alberta Biosimilars Initiative.

Switching to a biosimilar

Effective July 1, 2025, adult patients currently taking the originator drug product, Actemra, are required to switch to a biosimilar version by January 1, 2026, to maintain coverage through their Alberta government-sponsored drug plan. Actemra will not be eligible for coverage for new tocilizumab starts. All new patient starts for tocilizumab will be covered for the biosimilar.

Exceptions

If one of these exceptions apply to your patients, they will continue to be eligible for Actemra:

- **Pregnant patients:** A Biosimilar Initiative Exception Request form must be submitted. Requests for Actemra may be submitted by pharmacists with additional prescribing authorization. Alberta Blue Cross® will only consider approval based on pregnancy and approval will be granted until six months past the delivery due date. Those trying to conceive will not be approved.
- **Pediatric patients:** Existing Actemra pediatric patients (under the age of 18 years) are exempt from switching. No application is required.
- Those who have been approved for a biologic exception due to a medical reason: If there is a medical reason why a patient cannot switch to the biosimilar, the prescriber can submit a request for exceptional coverage to Alberta Blue Cross. Requests will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

For the most current special authorization criteria, please visit the Interactive Drug Benefit List at <https://idbl.ab.bluecross.ca/idbl/load.do> and search the drug name.

For a current list of biologics, their biosimilar equivalents and specific indications affected by this policy, please visit Primary and Preventative Health Services online at <https://www.alberta.ca/biosimilar-drugs>.

As a reminder, supporting materials for patients and health care providers regarding the Alberta Biosimilar Initiative are available on the Alberta Blue Cross website at <https://www.ab.bluecross.ca/pdfs/Biosimilars-Resources-for-Patients.pdf>.

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

