

# Pharmacy Benefact

A BULLETIN FOR PHARMACY SERVICE PROVIDERS FROM ALBERTA BLUE CROSS

Number 923 • December 2020

## Alberta's COVID-19 Immunization Program newsletter

Alberta Health has prepared a newsletter, on the next 2 pages, regarding Alberta's COVID-19 Immunization Program.

*continued on next page ...*

### When you have questions:

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](http://ab.bluecross.ca/providers/pharmacy-home.php)



## Immunization Newsletter: Alberta's COVID-19 Immunization Program

Dear Health Practitioners,

The Alberta Health Immunization Team would like to take this opportunity to update you on the COVID-19 immunization program.

### Vaccine Supply

Alberta Health has begun to receive a very limited amount of vaccine in the province. These initial doses must be stored, handled and transported frozen, some at  $-60^{\circ}\text{C}$  to  $-80^{\circ}\text{C}$  and some at  $-20^{\circ}\text{C}$ . These vaccines will be used in Phases 1, and 2 as described below. As we progress through 2021, Alberta anticipates receiving vaccine that can be stored, handled and transported between  $+2^{\circ}\text{C}$  to  $+8^{\circ}\text{C}$ , which will be used in later Phases.

### Alberta's COVID-19 Immunization Program Phases

Vaccine will be in limited supply, therefore, Alberta Health is taking a phased approach and will target key populations in earlier Phases. Due to the global demand and supply chain challenges, and thus fluctuating vaccine quantities, it is challenging to determine the timeframes for each of Alberta's Phases and the program may need to start and stop based on available supply.

To inform the recommendations around which key populations to include in each Phase of the program, Alberta Health Services conducted an ethics review, which considered both ethical principles and evidence of burden of disease. Phase 1 key populations for COVID-19 immunization were chosen in an effort to reduce severe illness and death while at the same time protecting individuals who are critical to providing care to Albertans experiencing the highest burden of COVID-19 disease.

#### Phase 1 Key Populations for COVID-19 Immunization and Estimated Timeframes

##### Early Phase 1: December

- Immunization will be offered to key populations, with a focus on acute care sites with the highest COVID-19 capacity concerns in Edmonton and Calgary:
  - Health Care Workers (HCWs) in Intensive Care Units (ICU)
  - Respiratory therapists
  - Staff at long-term care (LTC) and designated supportive living (DSL) facilities

##### Phase 1A: January (timeline subject to change depending on vaccine supply)

- Immunization will be offered key populations across the province:
  - Respiratory therapists
  - HCWs in ICU
  - Staff in LTC and DSL facilities
  - Home care workers
  - HCWs in emergency departments
  - All residents of LTC and DSL regardless of age

##### Phase 1B: February (timeline subject to change depending on vaccine supply)

- Immunization will be offered key populations:
  - Seniors 75 years of age and over, no matter where they live
  - First Nations, Métis and persons 65 years of age and over living in a First Nations community or Metis Settlement
  - Health-care workers in medical, surgical and COVID-19 units or operating room

**Note:** Dates are subject to vaccine supply.

Phase 2 will continue to target populations at risk. Work to identify sequencing for Phase 2 groups is underway and decisions will be made in 2021. In Phase 3, it is expected that Albertans will be able to access the vaccine through a universal COVID-19 Immunization Program.

### Immunization Providers in Each Phase

Due to the limited amounts of COVID-19 vaccine, the need for 2 doses per individual, and the cold chain infrastructure required for distributing the COVID-19 vaccines expected for Phases 1, and 2, Alberta Health Services (Public Health and Workplace Health and Safety) will lead the implementation of the COVID-19 Immunization Program in partnership with Indigenous Services Canada: First Nations Inuit Health Branch.

At this time, it is not recommended that community immunization providers purchase ultra-low temperature freezers.

In Phase 3, Alberta expects to have enough refrigerator stable (+2°C to +8°C) COVID-19 vaccine for broader distribution to immunization partners outside of Alberta Health Services.

### Key Messages

As health practitioners, many of you will be asked questions. The following key messages may assist in communicating with your patients or clients, other HCWs, and community partners. Additional public and HCW messaging is forthcoming.

1. The COVID-19 immunization program could be a start and stop program due to fluctuating vaccine quantities from global manufacturers. The timeframes above are our targets, but could change due to supply disruptions outside provincial control. Changes in timeframes will be communicated as they become known.
2. Eligibility criteria for COVID-19 vaccine will expand as the quantity of vaccine increases.
3. The quantity of COVID-19 vaccine will be limited in Phases 1, and 2. Alberta is using a sequenced approach, immunizing health care workers and the most vulnerable populations first.
  - Phase 1 key populations were chosen to reduce severe illness and death, while at the same time protecting individuals who are critical to providing care to Albertans experiencing the highest burden of COVID-19 disease.
4. AHS Public Health, Workplace Health and Safety, Indigenous Services Canada: First Nations Inuit Health Branch will be the providers of the COVID-19 vaccine in Phases 1, and 2 due to vaccine storage requirements.
5. Residents of congregate care (e.g. long term care and designated supportive living) facilities will be offered COVID-19 immunizations at their residence through the immunization outreach program by Alberta Health Services.
6. Other Albertans will be immunized at designated immunization sites, which they will need to travel to. They will have the opportunity to book an appointment to be immunized.
7. It is expected that all Albertans will be able to access the COVID-19 vaccine through their usual community providers in Phase 3 as part of the universal COVID-19 immunization program. It is anticipated that Phase 3 will begin in summer or fall 2021 or sooner, depending on vaccine inventory levels.
8. Vaccines in Phases 1, and 2 will only be licensed either 16 years and older or 18 years of age and older depending on the vaccine, and will require 2 doses per person for optimal immunity to COVID-19.

Please see <https://www.alberta.ca/covid19-vaccine.aspx> for updates.