

COVID-19 Immunization Program

Stakeholder Information

March/April 2021

Purpose

To provide an overview of the COVID-19 Immunization Program so that stakeholders have the most up-to-date information, including current status and next steps.

Approved COVID-19 Vaccines

All vaccines used in Canada must obtain regulatory approval through Health Canada and must meet strict standards for safety, quality and effectiveness. The following vaccines have been approved:

- Pfizer-BioNTech (16 years of age or older)
- Moderna (18 years of age or older)
- AstraZeneca (55 years of age or older)
- Janssen (18 years of age or older)

Alberta receives vaccines, including the COVID-19 vaccines, through a bulk purchasing program coordinated by the Government of Canada. Under this program, the federal government determines on a per-capita basis how many COVID-19 vaccines Alberta receives, and works with Alberta on the timing of receiving vaccines.

COVID-19 Immunization Program Goal, Objectives and Approach

Alberta's COVID-19 Immunization Program supports the overall provincial and federal program goal: *To minimize serious illness and overall deaths while minimizing societal disruption due to the COVID-19 pandemic.*

The COVID-19 Immunization Program objectives are to:

- Provide a safe and effective COVID-19 vaccine for all Albertans for whom the vaccine is licensed and recommended;

- Allocate, distribute and administer COVID-19 vaccine as efficiently, equitably and effectively as possible; and,
- Monitor the safety and effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccines.

As COVID-19 vaccines are still in limited supply, Alberta Health continues to implement a phased approach by offering vaccine to key populations in the earliest phases of the COVID-19 Immunization Program. The ability to move forward depends on there being an adequate supply of vaccines, which means the precise timeframes for each phase are currently unknown.

Phases

Phase 1 is nearing completion and Phase 2 started on March 15. Vaccine continues to be offered first to those at the highest risk of severe illness and death, as well as individuals who are critical to providing care to these Albertans.

- Over two million Albertans have been determined to be part of Phase 2. Four priority groups have been identified to facilitate the rollout of the immunization program to Albertans.
- Our anticipated vaccine supply is enough to provide first doses to all those in Phase 2 in April and May (Q2), but is currently less than what is required to offer two doses for all groups within Q2. Our plan depends on the amount of vaccines that are procured and distributed by our federal partners.

In Phase 3, it is expected that all Albertans will be able to get the vaccine through multiple access points by June 30, 2021, depending on vaccine supply.

Progress to Date

Alberta's [COVID-19 Vaccine Program information](#) is updated daily with the number of doses administered, Albertans who are fully immunized and reported adverse events following immunization.

Preferential use of Vaccines

Alberta Health is prioritizing the use of the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines for individuals in Phase 1 and Phase 2A, B and C. Upon receipt of the AstraZeneca vaccine in March, it was offered to the oldest birth years in Phase 2D (age 60-64). If more AstraZeneca vaccine becomes available, those between the ages of 55-64 will be offered this vaccine.

Those between the ages of 55-64 can choose to access AstraZeneca vaccine earlier due to age-eligibility or wait for the Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna vaccine. This is also true for those in this age group who may be in Phase 2B or C due to health conditions or occupation. Current evidence shows that the AstraZeneca vaccine is highly effective in preventing serious illness, hospitalization and death due to COVID-19.

Access to Immunization

For most Albertans living in the community, appointments can be booked through participating pharmacies, online with Alberta Health Services (AHS) or by calling Health Link. Starting in April, some community physicians will also begin administering vaccines in their clinics. Anyone who receives a first dose of vaccine will be able to receive a second dose within four months. At the time of booking, appointments will only be made for the first dose. Reminders to book a second dose will be sent via autodial/phone/text.

In some cases, appointments for immunization may need to be delayed because of unforeseen issues with supply. In same way, eligibility may start earlier than expected because of unexpected shipments of vaccine doses, or to use up doses that otherwise may have gone to waste.

First Nations individuals living on-reserve will be able to book appointments through their local health centres. COVID-19 immunization outreach services will be available in Métis Settlements through AHS public health. First Nations, Inuit and Métis people can also access COVID-19 immunization services through AHS public health, community pharmacies, participating physicians and other outreach immunization clinics (e.g. friendship centres).

For rural areas without pharmacies, AHS is evaluating how and where they can provide additional immunization access points. Mobile options are also being explored for smaller communities and homebound Albertans.

Individuals living in [licensed supportive living](#) congregate settings will be offered COVID-19 vaccine through AHS outreach immunization services, which means that vaccine is being offered on-site at these facilities.

Post-Immunization

All individuals, including those immunized with COVID-19 vaccine, should continue to follow public health measures for prevention and control of COVID-19 infection and transmission. With doses being administered 16 weeks apart, it will take time to get most Albertans fully immunized. Ongoing research continues to determine whether immunized people can transmit the virus to those who are not immunized, how effective the vaccines are against variants and how long immunity lasts.

COVID-19 immunization will not be mandatory in Alberta, but it is highly encouraged and recommended. Alberta's approach is collaborative rather than mandatory to encourage conversations on the benefits of immunization, while still respecting Albertans' right to make informed decisions about their own health. There is no intent to restrict the activities of those who choose not to immunize.

More information is available on the [COVID-19 Vaccine Questions and Answers resource](#).