



Message from Mauro Chies and Dr. Laura McDougall

Important COVID-19 Updates

Dear staff, physicians and volunteers,

As Alberta continues to shift from an emergency response to a more sustainable approach to managing COVID-19, several changes will soon take place.

Provincial guidelines on testing and isolation

As of April 1, rapid antigen tests (RAT tests) will be the recommended COVID-19 test for all individuals with respiratory virus symptoms, including healthcare workers and workers in other high-risk settings. This change reflects Alberta's transition to an endemic approach to managing COVID-19 and is the next step toward aligning public health recommendations across all acute respiratory viral illnesses.

In addition, the previously recommended minimal isolation period of five days for people with COVID-19 symptoms or a positive COVID-19 test will no longer be required by Alberta Health for the public. Those with respiratory virus symptoms or who test positive for any respiratory illness will be advised to stay home until all symptoms have improved, they feel well enough to resume normal activities, and they have been fever-free for 24 hours without using fever-reducing medications.

Anyone who has respiratory virus symptoms should wear a mask for a total of 10 days from the onset of symptoms (even if the symptoms have resolved or improved) when in indoor settings with other individuals.

Alberta Health will also be recommending that in addition, as was the case before the pandemic, anyone who is feeling unwell, regardless of whether they have tested positive for a respiratory virus or not, should avoid visiting acute care or continuing care settings unless receiving care, and if possible, avoid contact with anyone who may be at high risk of severe outcomes (e.g. elderly or immunocompromised individuals).

Testing and isolation for staff and healthcare workers

While our teams have been eligible to book molecular COVID-19 tests throughout the pandemic, self-referral will no longer be available after March 31. Anyone experiencing symptoms of respiratory illness is encouraged to conduct a RAT test. You are considered confirmed with COVID-19 if you test positive by molecular or RAT test. You are considered negative for COVID-19 if you test negative by molecular test or if you obtain negative results from two RAT tests, taken at least 24 hours apart.

While Alberta's isolation recommendations to the public have been eased, the majority of individuals seeking care at AHS sites are more vulnerable to severe outcomes from COVID-19. Ensuring you are not at work and providing care while at highest risk for transmitting the virus will help protect someone at high risk of becoming severely ill if they were to develop COVID-19. As such, we continue to require all AHS employees, members of the medical and midwifery staffs, students, volunteers, and other persons acting on behalf of AHS (including contracted service providers) to be restricted from work for a minimum of five days from the onset of their COVID-19 symptoms, or until

their symptoms have improved and they are fever-free for 24 hours (without the use of fever-reducing medications), whichever period is longer.

We appreciate your patience as we work to update all relevant resources and guidance documents, including the Attending Work Directive in the days ahead, to reflect these changes.

Closure of assessment centres

With the RAT test being the recommended COVID-19 test for most Albertans, AHS Assessment Centres will be closing on March 31, and swabbing for COVID-19 will no longer be available at these sites. This decision was made in consideration of the limited demand for molecular testing and is the next step in aligning public health recommendations across all acute respiratory viral illnesses.

The closure of assessment centres will also conclude text notifications of a positive result for a molecular test. Instead, Albertans who require a molecular test can obtain their results on the [MyHealth.Alberta.ca website](https://myhealth.alberta.ca).

Molecular testing for COVID-19 will continue to be available if required to support the clinical care of individuals and for outbreak management purposes. Molecular testing will be available through existing structures such as acute care sites, emergency medical services, and primary care offices.

Availability of next COVID-19 booster vaccine

Starting this week, Albertans living in seniors' congregate care will begin to be offered an additional bivalent booster. Starting the week of April 3, Albertans 65 years of age and older, as well as those 18 years of age and older with [certain immunocompromising conditions](#), including individuals with moderate to severe primary immunodeficiency, transplant recipients, or individuals taking certain medications for autoimmune diseases, can [book appointments](#) for the additional bivalent COVID-19 booster vaccine. A full list of eligible immunocompromising conditions can be found on the [Alberta Health website](#).

In order to receive the additional booster dose, it must be at least six months since the individual's last dose of COVID-19 vaccine or infection. However, a shortened interval of at least three calendar months will be permitted for residents of seniors' congregate care sites in order to optimize the ability to administer the additional dose to the most people in a timely way.

Eligible Albertans can receive the additional bivalent COVID-19 booster dose at participating community pharmacies, AHS Public Health clinics, or participating community medical clinics. Additional booster doses may be recommended for the broader population groups in the fall of 2023, depending on the COVID-19 pandemic context.

Sincerely,

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