

COVID-19 Vaccine Sequencing for Healthcare Workers

Overview

Since the COVID-19 vaccine roll-out began in December 2020, we have been receiving questions from staff, physicians, partners and the public on COVID-19 immunization sequencing - who will be immunized when, in what order, and why some groups are chosen to go before others.

We truly wish everyone could be immunized right away. Within these early phases, there simply isn't enough vaccine for all healthcare workers. In the earliest phases of vaccine roll out, there is only enough vaccine for residents of long term care (LTC) and designated supportive living (DSL) facilities, age-groups of seniors who have been hardest hit and some healthcare workers. The reality is that it's going to take several months for all healthcare workers to be offered COVID-19 immunization.

Fundamentally, the major issue we face right now is vaccine supply. There is insufficient vaccine available to immunize our entire workforce at once. Because there is not currently enough vaccine, decisions have to be made about sequencing of the vaccine rollout.

We hope the information below will help provide further background on immunization sequencing, rationale behind decisions and insight into the immunization rollout process.

Principles Used by the Government of Alberta to Determine Groups Included in Phase 1

Alberta's COVID-19 Immunization Program launched in December 2020. With not enough vaccine available to offer immunizations to everyone at the same time, Alberta Health established a [phased approach](#) aligned with anticipated vaccine supply.

COVID-19 immunization roll-out takes into account groups that have been particularly hit hard by the pandemic. This includes older Albertans and in particular those living in LTC and DSL facilities.

The sequencing of healthcare workers across phases acknowledges the tremendous impact COVID-19 has had on the healthcare system's ability to deliver care and support patients and residents in moving through the system. The need to prevent outbreaks that further impair health system capacity and flow was also considered.

Healthcare workers including physicians were sequenced with consideration of the extent to which immunizing a particular group would contribute to a combination of the following:

- Reducing acute care demand;
- Protecting critical workforce;
- Enhancing the flow of patients and residents through the system; and
- Preventing COVID-19 outbreaks.

Rationale into Action

Using the criteria above, Alberta Health, with input from Alberta Health Services, identified the [populations](#) to be included in the province's [phased immunization program](#). Exact amounts and timelines are subject to change depending on vaccine supply.

Phases

Early Phase 1: December 2020

- Focus on acute care sites with the highest COVID-19 capacity concerns:
 - Healthcare workers in intensive care units
 - Respiratory therapists
 - Staff in LTC and DSL facilities

Phase 1A: January 2021

- Respiratory therapists
- Healthcare workers in intensive care units
- Staff in LTC and DSL facilities
- Home care workers
- Healthcare workers in emergency departments
- All residents of LTC and DSL facilities, regardless of age
- Healthcare workers in COVID-19 units, medical and surgical units and operating rooms
- Paramedics and emergency medical responders

Phase 1B: February 2021 (timeline subject to change depending on vaccine supply)

- 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

Phase 2: April to September 2021

Eligibility will move from Group A towards Group D. Timelines are subject to change depending on vaccine supply.

Detailed information on how eligible Albertans will receive the vaccine will be released prior to each group.

Group A

- Albertans aged 65 to 74, no matter where they live
- First Nations and Métis people aged 50 to 64, on and off reserve or Métis Settlements
- Staff of licensed supportive living not included in Phase 1

Group B

- Albertans aged 18 to 64 with high-risk underlying health conditions
- Specific conditions will be provided prior to Phase 2 roll-out

Group C

- Residents and staff of eligible congregate living settings: correctional facilities, homeless shelters, group homes including disability, mental health and other types of licensed supportive living
- Healthcare workers providing direct and acute patient care who have a high potential for spread to high risk individuals
- Caregivers of Albertans who are most at risk of severe outcomes

Group D

- Albertans aged 50 to 64, no matter where they live
- First Nations and Métis people aged 35 to 49 on and off reserve or Métis Settlements

Work to identify sequencing for all other groups is underway. If additional vaccines are approved and become available, people between the ages of 18 and 64 who work in specific workplaces or industries may be included in Phase 2.

Phase 3: Fall 2021

- Anticipated start of roll-out to the general public

Early Phase 1 and Phase 1A included Albertans at greatest risk for the most severe outcomes from COVID-19, and the healthcare providers who care for them. There is no question that residents of LTC and DSL facilities across the country have borne the brunt of this pandemic with more than 60 per cent of Alberta's COVID-19 cases reported from within these facilities.

We made this group a priority for immunization and as of Jan. 19, all eligible seniors in LTC and DSL facilities province-wide who consented to receive the COVID-19 vaccine (more than 29,000) have now been given their second doses, with co-mingled sites set to be complete in early March. This is a huge win in our fight against COVID-19.

How AHS has Sequenced within Phase 1

While AHS does not have the ability to add new groups to Phase 1, questions have arisen about who is included in the groups listed above. The COVID-19 Vaccine Sequencing for Healthcare Workers Committee was established by AHS' Executive Leadership Team to help make these decision.

The sequencing committee has been considering the following questions to support decision making within priority groups including:

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- Does the person belong to a group/role prioritized for COVID-19 immunization?
- Do they routinely work in that role or environment?
- Does the immunization of the individual support the rationale for group level prioritization?
- Would not including the person in immunization eligibility be contrary to the team-based approach?

We are working quickly to respond to changing circumstances. It is not perfect, but we're working with good faith and doing our best to make effective decisions with the evidence and information we have.

Where We Are Now

We are vaccinating Albertans as fast as supply allows. Doses administered to date can be found on the Government of Alberta's [website](#).

Alberta has experienced reduced vaccine supply over the past month. As such, our priority has been ensuring those who received their first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, receive their second dose, within the recommended window. This includes re-booking more than 90 per cent of second dose appointments for healthcare workers and residents of LTC and DSL facilities.

Starting Feb. 16, approximately 9,000 healthcare workers from Phase 1A are being contacted through email invitation to re-book their first and second dose appointments. These appointments had been postponed in January due to the national vaccine shortage. We encourage everyone who has received an email invitation, but has not yet scheduled an appointment, to please book your COVID-19 immunizations as soon as possible.

In addition, all eligible healthcare workers in Phase 1 who received an email invitation may book their vaccine appointments. This includes anyone who previously received an invitation but did not book an appointment.

Eligible healthcare workers will be contacted by AHS directly via email (from **AHS Booking**) and will be sent a text message and/or an automated call encouraging them to check their email and book their appointments.

Health Canada is currently reviewing other COVID-19 vaccine products, including Johnson and Johnson and AstraZeneca. If and when they become approved for use in Canada they will provide additional options for vaccine supply and improve access in the future.

Where We Are Heading

On [Feb. 19](#), the Government of Alberta announced that Phase 2 vaccinations will be offered in a staged approach starting this spring. Once completed, Phase 2 will mean that anyone aged 50 to 74 years, anyone with high-risk underlying health conditions, First Nations and Métis people aged 35 and older, residents and staff in congregate living settings, healthcare workers

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providing direct and acute patient care who have high potential for spread to high-risk individuals and eligible caregivers will have had the opportunity to be vaccinated.

Detailed information on how eligible Albertans will receive the vaccine will be released prior to each step in Phase 2. The timeline for starting each phase is dependent on vaccine supply and availability.

We have more than 103,000 direct AHS employees, and 11,800 staff working in AHS' wholly-owned subsidiaries, Alberta Precision Laboratories, Carewest and CapitalCare Group. AHS is also supported by nearly 15,100 volunteers and more than 10,800 physicians practicing in Alberta, approximately 8,200 of whom are members of the AHS medical staff as well as Covenant Health, which has nearly direct 11,000 employees and 900 employees.

We want to immunize everyone, and we will immunize everyone, but we need the supply to do it. Until then, we will continue to work with what we have.

As details related to vaccine availability and sequencing become available, they will be posted [here](#). We are committed to communicating directly with staff and physicians as soon as we know more. We know this is difficult. We appreciate all you do to provide care for Albertans, and we promise you that we are doing everything we can to ensure all AHS staff and physicians who provide direct patient care will receive vaccine just as soon as we are able.

Questions

If you have a question, please reach out below. Be advised that email volumes are extremely high and responses may be delayed.

- Staff: ahsvaccinetaskforce@ahs.ca
- Physicians: cmo@ahs.ca