

FAQs for Healthcare Providers

Nirmatrelvir/ritonavir (Paxlovid™) Outpatient Treatment

What is Paxlovid™?

Paxlovid™ is a combination of two antiviral drugs, nirmatrelvir and ritonavir (brand name PAXLOVID™), taken orally to treat adults with mild to moderate COVID-19 who are at high risk of progressing to serious disease, including hospitalization or death. Nirmatrelvir works by stopping the virus from replicating, while ritonavir slows nirmatrelvir metabolism, thus prolonging its action.

Has Paxlovid™ been approved for use?

On Jan. 17, 2022, Health Canada authorized the use of Paxlovid™, which is the first oral treatment for COVID-19. For more information, visit the [Health Canada Consumer Information Summary](#).

Paxlovid™ is NOT a replacement for COVID-19 vaccination. **Albertans are strongly encouraged to get fully vaccinated against COVID-19.**

What are the eligibility criteria for Alberta patients?

Paxlovid™ is approved for outpatient use in Alberta for individuals with mild to moderate COVID-19 symptoms who have a positive test for COVID-19, are at risk for severe outcomes and are able to receive treatment **within five days** from the start of symptoms.

Treatment will be offered to patients who are most likely to develop severe COVID-19 illness and are at a greater risk of being hospitalized. The evidence around who is most at risk for severe outcomes is evolving. These criteria will continue to be reviewed.

Treatment eligibility:

Age	0 to 1 dose	2 doses	3 doses	Regardless of Vaccine Status
18+ with one or more pre-existing health conditions or pregnancy	✓	✗	✗	✗
55+ or Indigenous 45+	✓	✗	✗	✗
60+ or Indigenous 50+ with one or more pre-existing health conditions	✓	✓	✗	✗
70+ or Indigenous 60+ with 2 or more pre-existing health conditions	✓	✓	✓	✗

Immunocompromised*	✓	✓	✓	✓
Living in long-term care or designated supportive living	✓	✓	✓	✓

*Immunocompromised patients under 18 years of age should consult with their specialist for consideration of treatment. Transplant patients should **NOT** be offered Paxlovid™ due to the potential for life-threatening drug interactions.

1. Unvaccinated or have received one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine and are either:

- Age 55 or older
- Indigenous, and age 45 or older
- Age 18 and older with a pre-existing health condition⁺
- Pregnant

2. Two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine and are either:

- Age 60 or older AND have ONE or more pre-existing health condition(s) ⁺
- Indigenous and 50 years of age or older AND have ONE or more pre-existing health condition(s) ⁺

3. Three doses of a COVID-19 vaccine and are either:

- Age 70 or older AND have TWO or more pre-existing health conditions
- Indigenous and 60 or older AND have TWO or more pre-existing health conditions ⁺

4. Immunocompromised (regardless of vaccination status), due to reasons including, but not limited to:

- have received a transplant – solid organ or stem cell (Transplant patients should **NOT** receive Paxlovid™ due to the potential for life-threatening drug interactions but are eligible for other therapies, such as Remdesivir.) Transplant patients should be assessed and treated through the centralized Outpatient Treatment Program by calling 1-844-343-0971 or through their transplant specialist. All prescribers in the community including Primary Care physicians, Nurse Practitioners and Pharmacists should refer transplant patients to the centralized team or the patient's specialist/team.
- is an oncology (cancer) patient who has received a dose of any IV or oral chemotherapy or other immunosuppressive treatment since December 2020
- has an inflammatory condition (e.g., rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, inflammatory bowel disease) and has received a dose of any systemic immunosuppressive treatment since December 2020.

5. Living in long-term care or some designated supportive living sites (DSL4 and 4D), regardless of vaccination status.

⁺ Pre-existing Health Conditions include:

- diabetes (taking medication for treatment)
- obesity (BMI >30)
- chronic kidney disease (estimated glomerular filtration rate, <60 ml per minute per 1.73 m² of body-surface area)
- congestive heart failure (New York Heart Association class II, III, or IV)
- chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and moderate-to-severe asthma

Please note that Paxlovid™ is also approved for patients in hospital who have incidental or hospital-acquired COVID-19, if they meet the eligibility criteria above. Please consult the AHS Provincial Drug Formulary for further information on inpatient use.

Why is this medication limited to people who can receive treatment within five days of onset of symptoms?

Paxlovid™ has been shown to be most effective when administered in the early phases of infection and viral replication, while symptoms remain mild to moderate (i.e., no shortness of breath at rest and no requirement for supplemental oxygen). If people have COVID-19 symptoms, they are encouraged to get tested as early as possible to allow sufficient time to determine potential eligibility for either Paxlovid™ or an alternate outpatient treatment like Remdesivir.

Can Paxlovid™ be used in patients under 18 years of age?

Paxlovid™ is not licensed for patients under 18 years of age at this time. Pediatric patients can be considered for Remdesivir treatment. More information is available in the [Remdesivir FAQs](#).

How were the eligibility criteria determined?

Eligibility criteria were partly based on evidence from the EPIC-HR study of Paxlovid™, and partly on expert consensus, including a thorough analysis of provincial data showing risk factors for severe disease among Albertans testing positive for COVID-19.

Why is pregnancy included if pregnant patients were not included in the study?

Even though pregnant patients were not included in the clinical trials leading to the approval of Paxlovid™ or Remdesivir, Health Canada has not listed pregnancy as a contraindication. Pregnant individuals are offered therapy for COVID-19 based on the increased risk of progression to severe disease including admission to hospital and ICU. After consultation with specialists in Alberta, therapy with either Paxlovid™ or Remdesivir can be offered to pregnant individuals. This approach is supported by international societies such as the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists which consider treatment with Paxlovid™ to be safe ([COVID-19 FAQs for Obstetrician-Gynecologists, Obstetrics](#)). Because treatment needs to begin within five days of symptom onset, please consult with a specialist if there are questions about the suitability of either Remdesivir or Paxlovid™ for individual patients.

My patient is a resident of a Long-Term Care or DSL4/4D facility. How do they access treatment?

A primary care physician or nurse practitioner may prescribe Paxlovid™ directly for eligible residents. If the resident cannot take Paxlovid™, the primary care physician or nurse practitioner can call the dedicated number at 1-844-343-0971, to access treatment with Remdesivir.

In the case of a facility outbreak, can Paxlovid™ be ordered for patients prior to confirmation of COVID-19 infection or onset of symptoms?

No. Patients are only eligible for Paxlovid™, regardless of their location, if they meet all eligibility criteria, which include a positive COVID-19 test and presence of symptoms.

My patient is on other medications. Can they take Paxlovid™?

Paxlovid™ does interact with other medications. Patients will be required to produce a list of medications, including all over-the-counter and herbal medications, at the time of their assessment. For a complete list of drug interactions, visit the [Health Canada Consumer Information Summary](#).

How is Paxlovid™ administered?

Paxlovid™ is taken orally in pill form. One dose is a combination of two nirmatrelvir (pink) tablets and one ritonavir (white) tablet, taken twice a day for five days. Patients with reduced kidney function (eGFR of 30 to 59 mL/min) should have the dose reduced to one nirmatrelvir (pink) tablet and one ritonavir (white) tablet, taken twice a day for five days.

Where is Paxlovid™ available?

While all pharmacies are able to order Paxlovid™, not all pharmacies may have supply on hand. Clinicians can use the [online tool](#) to see which pharmacies are currently stocking Paxlovid™. There is no charge to the patient to fill their Paxlovid™ prescription.

My patient tested positive with a Rapid Antigen Test at home. Is this sufficient for treatment?

Most patients with confirmed COVID-19 do not require specific treatment as they will not benefit from treatment. Patients with an increased risk for poor outcomes may benefit from Paxlovid™ or other outpatient medications. Eligible patients who are symptomatic, with symptom onset within the last 5-7 days, and have tested positive with a laboratory test for COVID-19 or a home Rapid Antigen Test, should consult with a healthcare provider to determine the best course of treatment. To do this, they have two options:

1. They can contact the dedicated line at 1-844-343-0971 for screening and referral to a healthcare professional for assessment.

OR

2. They can contact their family physician.

AHS is in the process of transitioning the prescribing of Paxlovid™ to Primary Care, and some family physicians and pharmacists have started prescribing Paxlovid™ to their patients.

How will patients be monitored after treatment?

Within the first two to three days of starting treatment, a healthcare provider will follow up with the patient to check on their wellbeing. After this, patients should continue to monitor their health and report any perceived adverse effects or worsening COVID-19 symptoms to their healthcare professional or Health Link by calling 811. For urgent assistance, they should call 911. All patients should follow up with their family physician or healthcare provider 10 days after onset of their COVID-19 symptoms.

What are the potential adverse effects of Paxlovid™?

According to [Health Canada](#), reported side effects include:

- altered sense of taste
- diarrhea
- muscle pain
- vomiting
- high blood pressure
- headache

Paxlovid™ is a new medication, so patients may experience unexpected side effects. For more details on avoiding potential side effects and what to watch for, see the [Health Canada Consumer Information Summary](#).

What should be done if COVID-19 symptoms continue to worsen?

Even with Paxlovid™ treatment, symptoms of COVID-19 may continue or get worse. Patients are advised to:

- Monitor their health and report any symptoms or concerns to the healthcare provider who follows up with them in the few days following their treatment. They can also call [Health Link at 811](#) or their healthcare provider if they have questions or concerns.
- **Call 911 immediately** if they experience severe symptoms of COVID-19 such as:
 - difficulty breathing
 - severe chest pain
 - feelings of confusion/ loss of consciousness

More information on how to manage COVID-19 symptoms can be found at [Symptoms and testing | Alberta.ca](#).

Can patients receive COVID-19 vaccinations after taking Paxlovid™?

While no interaction between Paxlovid™ and COVID-19 vaccine is anticipated (as occurs with monoclonal antibodies), patients should wait until they are fully recovered from the infection before getting vaccinated to ensure they receive the maximum benefit from the vaccine.

What do we know about rebound symptoms after treatment with Paxlovid™?

A small percentage of patients may develop a relapse of COVID-19 symptoms within a few days of completing a course of treatment (eg. recurrence of sore throat, runny nose, etc.). This may be accompanied by a new positive test for COVID-19 (PCR or Rapid Antigen Test), after testing negative. (Of note, this has also occurred in a small number of patients who have not received treatment.)

At this time, it is NOT recommended that treatment be extended or repeated.

Does treatment of acute COVID-19 prevent Long COVID?

Some individuals experience prolonged symptoms after acute infection with SARS-CoV-2. There is no evidence at this time whether treatment will influence the total number of people who will experience these symptoms, or their severity. This is an important area for research. Treatment does prevent progression of COVID-19 and prevents severe outcomes, but should not be offered as a means of preventing Long COVID.

Should symptoms of Long COVID be treated with Paxlovid™?

Current therapies for COVID-19 (including Paxlovid™, Remdesivir and monoclonal antibodies) target actively replicating virus during acute infection. There is no reason to believe that there would be any benefit to offering such therapies weeks or months later for symptoms of Long COVID. At this time, Paxlovid™ should not be considered a treatment for individuals experiencing symptoms of Long COVID.

What if the patient has tested positive for COVID-19 again? Can Paxlovid™ be prescribed more than once?

Paxlovid™ can be prescribed again for a confirmed new COVID-19 infection, but patients are strongly encouraged to get vaccinated against COVID-19 after fully recovering from the infection.

Occasionally, COVID-19 symptoms can recur within a few days of treatment with Paxlovid™. At this time, retreatment with Paxlovid™ is not recommended in this situation.

Why is Alberta providing access to this drug? How many patients could benefit?

Paxlovid™ may help prevent mild to moderate COVID-19 from progressing. By providing access to Paxlovid™, it is anticipated that the outcomes of patients most at risk will be improved and that we may avoid the need for hospitalization, ICU stays or deaths.

Is Paxlovid™ being used elsewhere?

Yes. Other provinces are also launching programs to provide Paxlovid™ to individuals at greatest risk for severe COVID-19 infection. AHS is working with other health authorities in Canada.

I care for a patient in Saskatchewan or British Columbia; do these patients have access to Paxlovid™?

For information on Saskatchewan's program, visit www.saskatchewan.ca/monoclonal.

For Information on the British Columbia program, visit the [Health Care Provider Info-Paxlovid-remdesivir-sotrovimab.pdf \(bccdc.ca\)](https://www.bccdc.ca/health-care-provider-info-paxlovid-remdesivir-sotrovimab)

Residents from other provinces who are visiting or working in Alberta will be eligible to receive Paxlovid™, utilizing the same criteria and processes as Albertans.

I have a patient I believe is eligible for Paxlovid™. How do I refer that patient on for further assessment?

Any physician or nurse practitioner, and some pharmacists, in Alberta may prescribe Paxlovid™ to patients. Patients should be assessed for treatment eligibility (see current eligibility criteria above).

If the physician, nurse practitioner, or prescribing pharmacist is not comfortable assessing patients, they can refer to another clinician or direct patients or their family members to call the dedicated line at **1-844-343-0971**.

I have additional questions about outpatient treatments like Paxlovid™ and Remdesivir. Who can I speak to?

The team of physicians who are working in the program are available to answer questions about the program. They are available between **8 a.m. and 8 p.m.** daily and can be reached through RAAPID.

- North: 1-800-282-9911 or 780-735-0811
- South: 1-800-661-1700 or 403-944-4486

For more information on the AHS implementation of outpatient treatments, visit ahs.ca/covidopt.