FAQs for Patients/Public
Nirmatrelvir/ritonavir (Paxlovid™) Outpatient Treatment

Alberta Health Services (AHS) is offering a new medication, nirmatrelvir/ritonavir (Paxlovid™) to Albertans with mild to moderate COVID-19 symptoms who are at greatest risk of developing severe COVID-19 infection. Eligible patients will receive a prescription for the oral medication and have it filled for free at select pharmacies throughout Alberta.

Paxlovid™ is not a replacement for immunization against COVID-19. Albertans are strongly encouraged to get the COVID-19 vaccine.

What is Paxlovid™?
Paxlovid™ is a new anti-viral medication that is made up of two medications, nirmatrelvir and ritonavir, that are taken in pill form together by mouth twice a day for five days.

Has Paxlovid™ been approved for use?
Health Canada has authorized the use of Paxlovid™ to treat mild to moderate COVID-19 infection that has been confirmed by lab testing. Learn more on the Health Canada Consumer Information Summary for Paxlovid™.

What is Paxlovid™ used for?
Health Canada has authorized the use of Paxlovid™ to treat mild to moderate COVID-19 infection that has been confirmed by lab testing. Paxlovid™ is used to prevent these symptoms from getting worse in people who have a high risk of needing to go to the hospital for COVID-19.

Who can get Paxlovid™?
In Alberta, Paxlovid™ is approved for adults who:
- have a positive AHS-confirmed test for COVID-19 (confirmed by text message from AHS)
- have mild to moderate COVID-19 symptoms
- can receive the medication within five days from when symptoms started

The medication will be given to patients who are most likely to develop severe COVID-19 illness and are at a greater risk of being hospitalized. This includes:
- Anyone who is **unvaccinated or has only received one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine** and are:
  - 55 years of age and older, regardless of other health conditions
  - pregnant (when the benefits of treatment are felt to outweigh any risk to the fetus)
  - 18 years of age and older with a with one of the following health conditions:
    - diabetes requiring medication
    - 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

- Vaccinated or unvaccinated patients who are immunocompromised due to one of the following reasons:
  o have received a transplant (solid organ or stem cell)
  o an oncology patient who has received a dose of any IV or oral chemotherapy or other immunosuppressive treatment since December 2020
  o patients with inflammatory conditions (e.g. rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, inflammatory bowel disease) receiving a dose of any systemic immunosuppressive treatment since December 2020.

Paxlovid™ is not a replacement for immunization against COVID-19. **Albertans are strongly encouraged to get fully immunized against COVID-19.** If you receive Paxlovid™, you should wait until you are fully recovered from the infection before getting a COVID-19 vaccine to ensure you get maximum benefit from the vaccine.

Patients will be required to provide a list of all current over-the-counter and herbal medications during their assessment. For a complete list of medications that may interact with Paxlovid™, visit the [Health Canada Consumer Information Summary](#).

**What if I’ve only received a positive test result from a rapid/at-home test?**
If you’ve received a positive test result from a rapid/at-home test, you will still need to take a test that can be confirmed by a lab before you receive a prescription for Paxlovid™. You must [book a test](#) and then call [Health Link at 1-844-343-0971](#) if your test results are positive.

**Why is this medication limited to people with COVID symptoms for less than five days?**
Paxlovid™ has been shown to work best when it is used early, before the virus has moved beyond a mild to moderate infection. If you have symptoms of COVID-19, it’s important to get tested as soon as possible. This gives AHS time to determine if you are eligible for Paxlovid™.

**Can Paxlovid™ be used in patients under 18 years of age?**
For patients aged 12 to 17, there has been no research on Paxlovid™ use. Paxlovid™ is not approved for use in those under 18 years of age at this time. Alternative treatment can be considered for patients 12 to 17 years of age.

**Why are immunocompromised patients who have been vaccinated eligible for Paxlovid™ treatment?**
Paxlovid™ is intended for individuals who are at high risk of progressing to severe disease (hospitalization, need for intensive care or death). Vaccinated individuals are expected to develop an immune response that places them at a low risk for severe COVID-19. However, immunocompromised individuals may not respond fully to vaccines, so providing access to Paxlovid™, or a monoclonal antibody treatment like Sotrovimab, can better protect them.

**How were the health conditions for unvaccinated individuals selected?**
Aside from pregnancy, the health conditions are based on the study used to approve use of Paxlovid™ by Health Canada. These health conditions were identified to have more chance of serious outcomes from COVID-19 disease.

**Why is pregnancy included if pregnant patients were not included in the study?**
Pregnancy was included because Health Canada has licensed use of Paxlovid™ in pregnant women where the potential benefits of treatment outweigh potential risks to the fetus.

**How will eligible patients be identified and informed?**
If you are 18 years of age or older and test positive for COVID-19, you will be told about outpatient treatments in the same text message from AHS that notifies you of your positive COVID-19 test result. You may also hear about treatments from your family doctor or another healthcare provider.

If you are undervaccinated (are unvaccinated or have only received one dose of vaccine) or immunocompromised and are interested in getting the treatment or learning more about Paxlovid™, follow the instructions in the text message you receive confirming that you have COVID-19. You will be asked to visit ahs.ca/covidopt to determine if you are eligible for either Sotrovimab or Paxlovid™. If you meet the criteria, you should then leave a message at 1-844-343-0971. Health Link staff will call you back and ask you some questions before referring you to a healthcare professional who will determine if you are eligible to receive either treatment.

If you are a transplant patient, tell your medical specialist or specialized healthcare team if you test positive for COVID-19. A member of your healthcare team will answer your questions, and help determine if you are eligible for either treatment. They will advise you to call and leave a message at 1-844-343-0971 and a Health Link provider will return your call. The provider who calls you back will confirm your information, create a chart and send it to the physician team member who will collect important information, including a list of drugs you are taking. They will explain the options for treatment, obtain your consent, and either issue a prescription for Paxlovid™ or book an appointment for a Sotrovimab infusion.

If the patient is a resident of a Long-Term Care facility, a primary care physician, nurse practitioner, or family member can call the dedicated number at 1-844-343-0971 on the patient’s behalf, if is believed they meet the eligibility criteria to receive Paxlovid™ or Sotrovimab.

**How is Paxlovid™ administered?**
Paxlovid™ is taken in pill form. One dose consists of three pills that are taken twice a day over five days. Patients with a reduced kidney function may have their dose reduced to two pills twice a day for five days.

**How come I have been asked to provide a list of current medications?**
Paxlovid™ can interact with other medications. Providing a list of your current medications, including over the counter drugs, herbal and natural products, during your assessment will assist the clinicians in determining which treatment is best suited for you. If you do not have a current medication list, please contact your community pharmacy and they will be able to provide you with one.
For a complete list of medications that may interact with Paxlovid™, visit the Health Canada Consumer Information summary.

How can I pick up my prescription for Paxlovid™?

Paxlovid™ is available through a limited number of community pharmacies throughout the province. The physician who determines if you are eligible to receive Paxlovid™ will advise you of the closest pharmacy that is stocking Paxlovid™. A prescription for Paxlovid™ will be sent to the pharmacy closest to you.

Is there a charge for my Paxlovid™ prescription?

No. Paxlovid™ is covered and paid for by Alberta Health. If you are eligible for the treatment, you can have your prescription filled for free.

Can I pick up my prescription myself?

As an individual must be COVID-19 positive in order to qualify for treatment, it is important to limit your contacts with other people. If you cannot have another person pick up your prescription, the approved pharmacies also offer delivery service or curb-side pickup.

What if there are no community pharmacies in my area stocking Paxlovid™?

Alberta Health is working with community pharmacies in every geographic location in the province. Should the closest pharmacy to you be too far away, the assessing physician will follow up to determine what other options might be available.

How will I be monitored after receiving Paxlovid™?

If you take Paxlovid™, a healthcare provider will call you within about two days. You will also get an information sheet with your prescription.

After the follow up call, you should continue to monitor your health. Tell your family doctor or usual healthcare provider about any side effects or COVID-19 symptoms that get worse. Or call Health Link at 811 to speak to a registered nurse. For urgent help, call 911.

You should also follow up with your family doctor or healthcare provider 10 days after your COVID-19 symptoms started.

What are the possible side 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 relatively new, so you may experience unexpected side effects. Please report any side effects to your family doctor. For more details on avoiding potential side effects and what to watch for, see the Health Canada Consumer Information Summary.
What should I do if my COVID-19 symptoms get worse?
Even after taking Paxlovid™, your COVID-19 symptoms may continue or get worse.

- Monitor your health and tell the healthcare provider about your symptoms when they call you after your treatment.
- Call Health Link at 811 or your healthcare provider/family doctor if you have more questions or concerns.
- Call 911 right away if you have severe symptoms such as:
  - difficulty breathing
  - severe chest pain
  - feelings of confusion
  - loss of consciousness

Learn more about managing your COVID-19 symptoms.

Can I get vaccinated for COVID-19 after I take Paxlovid™?
Yes. But you should wait until you have fully recovered from COVID-19. This allows your body to respond to the vaccine and develop a good level of antibodies. Paxlovid™ is not a replacement for immunization against COVID-19. Albertans are strongly encouraged to get fully immunized against COVID-19.

What if I test positive for COVID-19 again? Can I take Paxlovid™ more than once?
If you test positive for a second COVID-19 infection, Paxlovid™ can be prescribed again, but you are encouraged to get vaccinated against COVID-19 90 days after you are no longer symptomatic.

Why is Alberta using this drug?
Paxlovid™ can prevent mild to moderate COVID-19 from becoming more severe and requiring people to be admitted to the hospital. Paxlovid™ can be especially helpful for patients who might otherwise have a high risk of being hospitalized or developing more serious health problems due to COVID-19.

Is Paxlovid™ being used elsewhere?
Yes. Outpatient treatments like Paxlovid™ and Sotrovimab are currently being used in many areas of Canada. AHS is working with other health authorities in Canada to learn how they are using this treatment.

Why hasn’t this drug been considered before now?
Paxlovid™ is a new treatment for COVID-19 that was only recently approved by Health Canada. For more information, see the Health Canada Consumer Information Summary.

For more information on the AHS rollout of all outpatient COVID-19 treatments, visit ahs.ca/covidopt.