

## FAQs for Patients/Public

### Remdesivir (antiviral medication) Outpatient Treatment

Alberta Health Services (AHS) is offering Remdesivir to some Albertans to treat mild to moderate COVID-19 symptoms. Eligible patients will get the treatment at an AHS site, from the [EMS Mobile Health Unit \(MIH\)](#) in their homes, or through a third-party provider in Calgary and Edmonton.

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

Paxlovid™ is generally the preferred therapy for COVID-19, because it is taken in pill form. Remdesivir must be given by injection (intravenously) and is made available to those eligible for treatment who cannot take Paxlovid™.

#### What is Remdesivir?

Remdesivir is an antiviral medication that prevents the replication of the coronavirus that causes COVID-19. It is administered intravenously over 30 minutes.

#### Has Remdesivir been approved for use?

Health Canada provided authorization in October 2020 for use of Remdesivir in Canada to treat adults and adolescents (aged 12 years and older) who test positive for COVID-19.

Health Canada has authorized Remdesivir based on limited clinical testing in humans. Learn more at [Health Canada consumer information](#).

#### What is Remdesivir used for?

Remdesivir is used in outpatients to treat mild to moderate COVID-19 that has been confirmed by testing. Remdesivir 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. Remdesivir is also approved to treat individuals hospitalized due to COVID-19.

#### Who can get Remdesivir?

In Alberta, Remdesivir is approved for adults who:

- have a positive confirmed test for COVID-19
- have mild to moderate COVID-19 symptoms
- can receive the treatment within seven days from when symptoms started

Treatment will be offered to those most likely to develop severe COVID-19 illness and are at a greater risk of being hospitalized. The evidence around who are 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<sup>+</sup>
- 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) <sup>+</sup>
- Indigenous and 50 years of age or older AND have ONE or more pre-existing health condition(s) <sup>+</sup>

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

- Age 70 or older AND have TWO or more pre-existing health condition(s)
- Indigenous and 60 years or older AND have TWO or more pre-existing health condition(s) <sup>+</sup>

### 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 m<sup>2</sup> 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

Remdesivir is not a replacement for immunization against COVID-19. **Albertans are strongly encouraged to get fully immunized against COVID-19.** If you receive Remdesivir, you should wait 90 days after your treatment before getting a COVID-19 vaccine to ensure you get maximum benefit from the vaccine.

### **Why is this medication limited to people with COVID symptoms for less than seven days?**

Remdesivir work best when it's administered in early 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 Remdesivir.

### **Can Remdesivir be used in patients under 18 years of age?**

For those aged 12 to 17, Remdesivir may be considered if the individual meets the eligibility criteria. For those with COVID-19 in this age group who are immunocompromised and potentially eligible for Remdesivir, a consultation with a Pediatric Infectious Disease specialist needs to occur to determine whether Remdesivir is an appropriate treatment. Health Canada has not approved Remdesivir use for patients under the age of 12.

### **How were the eligibility criteria determined?**

Eligibility criteria were based on the evidence from the PINETREE study, as well as guidance from Health Canada and our own experience in Alberta. The criteria 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?**

While pregnancy was not included in the clinical trial leading to approval of Remdesivir, Health Canada notes use can be considered when the benefits outweigh the risks to the mother and fetus. This is based on the increased risk of progression to severe COVID-19 in pregnant individuals and the overall safety profile.

## 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 hear about treatments in the same text message from AHS that notifies you of your positive COVID-19 test result if you had a lab-confirmed test. You may also hear about Remdesivir from your family doctor or another healthcare provider.

If you fall into one of the categories above and are interested in treatment or learning more about Remdesivir, visit [ahs.ca/covidopt](https://ahs.ca/covidopt). If you meet the criteria, you should **leave a message at the dedicated line at 1-844-343-0971**. Staff will call you back and ask you some questions before referring you to a healthcare professional who will determine if you are eligible, get your consent and book your appointment.

## How is Remdesivir given?

Remdesivir is given intravenously (through a vein) by a qualified health professional. The medicine is given over 30 minutes. You will be watched closely for another 15 to 30 minutes after getting the treatment. You can expect the appointment to last about 1.5 hours, including setup time.

## Where will the treatment be given?

Treatment will be provided to eligible patients either at an AHS clinic, a third-party clinic or by [EMS MIH](#) in your home, in the areas they service, depending on your location in the province. Details on appointment booking will be provided to eligible patients. In order to receive the infusion, you may need to travel to a designated clinic.

## How will I be monitored after receiving the treatment?

If you are treated with Remdesivir, a healthcare provider will call you within about two days of completing your treatment. You will also get an information sheet after your infusion. 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 Remdesivir?

Current clinical trials have found relatively mild side effects in a very small percentage of people who get Remdesivir. Side effects that have been found include:

- nausea
- headache
- cough
- shortness of breath

Since there is limited clinical data about Remdesivir, you might have unexpected side effects that have not been reported yet. The healthcare provider who does the infusion will monitor you during the treatment and one hour after you receive Remdesivir. They will provide treatment, as needed, to manage any side effects you have.

For more details on avoiding potential side effects and what to watch for, see the [Health Canada consumer information](#).

### What should be done if my COVID-19 symptoms get worse?

Even with Remdesivir treatment, 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 get Remdesivir?

Yes. But you should wait 90 days after getting Remdesivir before getting a COVID-19 vaccine. It is important to wait 90 days to allow your body to respond to the vaccine and develop a good level of antibodies without interference from the medication. Remdesivir is not a replacement for immunization against COVID-19. **Albertans are strongly encouraged to get fully immunized against COVID-19.**

### Why is Alberta using this drug?

Remdesivir can prevent mild to moderate COVID-19 from becoming more severe and requiring people to be admitted to the hospital. Remdesivir 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 Remdesivir being used elsewhere?

Yes. Outpatient antiviral treatments like Remdesivir are currently being used in many areas of the United States, as well as in Saskatchewan, Ontario, British Columbia. AHS is working with other health authorities in Canada so that we can all learn how to use using this treatment most effectively.

### Do I need to pay for this treatment?

No. The treatment is covered and paid for by Alberta Health. If you are eligible for the treatment, you do not need to pay for it.

For more information on the Remdesivir or other outpatient treatments, visit [ahs.ca/covidopt](https://ahs.ca/covidopt).