

Second dose spacing change - immunocompromised Albertans

What is the change?

As announced by Alberta Health today, the province has decreased the period between first and second doses of COVID-19 vaccine from 16 weeks to a minimum of four weeks for certain immunocompromised individuals.

Who is eligible?

The interval between doses is being shortened for Albertans undergoing specific kinds of cancer treatments or who are on medications that result in a level of profound immune compromise.

Those included in this updated guideline include:

- Transplant recipients
- Individuals currently undergoing (or about to start) cancer treatment that includes chemotherapy.
- Clients who are on specific medications. For example, patients on strong immunosuppressant medications (e.g. rituximab) should be immunized at a time when they are most likely to mount an immune response.

Who is not included?

This updated guideline does not include individuals who are ONLY being provided hormonal therapy, radiation therapy or surgery to manage cancer.

Who else may need different spacing for second doses?

Clients who are on specific medications may also have to have their COVID-19 immunization at a certain time. For example, patients on strong immunosuppressant medications (i.e. rituximab) should be immunized at a time when they are most likely to mount an immune response.

Patients should ask their doctor if this applies to them and if so, can call Health Link 811 to book an appointment.

Why was this change made?

The latest research shows that certain immunosuppressed individuals cannot develop a sufficient long-term response to the vaccine and need their second dose sooner. Based on this evidence, a decision was made to offer these individuals their second doses earlier than the recommended spacing for other Albertans.

There are many other conditions that compromise a person's immune system, why aren't they being offered second doses earlier?

Other Albertans, including the elderly and those with other forms of immunocompromise are still recommended to have their second doses 16 weeks following the first.

The decision to shorten the second dose for these specific conditions and treatments is based on emerging evidence from the UK and elsewhere. It indicates these treatments and conditions are so severe that the body cannot develop a sufficient long-term response to the vaccine.

By immunizing as many Albertans as possible with a first dose, we are also offering indirect protection to all Albertans, including those with other conditions.

I'm undergoing different cancer treatment, can I receive my second dose sooner?

At this time, the shortened interval is only available for transplant recipients, individuals with malignant hematologic disorders and non-hematologic malignant solid tumors receiving active immune suppressing treatment, and individuals being treated with an anti-CD20 monoclonal antibody such as Rituximab.

If you have questions about whether you qualify, please contact your health care provider or call 811.

Do I need a doctor's note? How will I have to prove I have one of these conditions?

Alberta is operating on the honour system for this population. A doctor's note or other proof of eligible criteria is not required.

We encourage everyone in this cohort to speak with their healthcare provider to help them understand if their condition is on this list, or if they have any healthcare questions or concerns.

How do individuals book if they meet this criteria?

Anyone who meet this criteria can book a second dose at the newly recommended interval by calling Health Link at 811. Second dose booking cannot be made through pharmacies, or through the AHS online immunization booking tool at this time.

If it has been more than four weeks since the first dose, the second dose can be administered as soon as possible. This would still offer the same level of protection after both doses, even if the second dose is given later.