

UPDATE: COVID-19 Immunization Policy

The following information is meant to address questions you may have about Alberta Health Services (AHS) Immunization Policy.

NOTE: AHS rescinded its COVID-19 Immunization Policy effective July 18, 2022. We will continue to update this document as we implement this change.

Contents

Policy.....	1
1. Why is the policy being rescinded?	1
2. When did the change come into effect?.....	2
3. Who does this rescindment apply to?.....	2
4. What does this mean for new hires and students?	2
5. Why was the policy not updated to include booster doses?.....	2
6. Why did you introduce the policy in the first place?	2
7. I disclosed my immunization information, will it remain confidential?	3
8. What measures are in place to protect worker and patient safety relating to COVID-19?	3
9. Do I need to disclose my immunization status to patients or my co-workers if asked?.....	3
10. How can I have respectful and safe conversations regarding immunization?	3
11. I am feeling stressed by this change. What supports are available to help me?	4
12. I have more questions. Who can I contact?	4

Policy**1. Why is the policy being rescinded?**

- The decision to rescind the policy is the result of emerging evidence that a single-dose or two-dose immunization series (as defined as “fully immunized” by the policy) has become less protective against symptomatic infection and transmission.
- The COVID-19 vaccines currently available target the original strain of the virus and the virus has evolved since then.
- The virus has undergone significant, rapid change. AHS did not feel there was sufficient scientific evidence to demonstrate reduced transmission of the current dominant variants as a result of immunization required by the policy.

2. When did the change come into effect?

- The policy was rescinded effective July 18, 2022.
- It will take some time to implement the change, including updating all impacted policies, procedures, and processes. We appreciate your patience as we make these changes.

3. Who does this rescindment apply to?

- The policy rescindment applies to all workers which, according to the policy includes AHS, Covenant Health, Carewest, CapitalCare, and Alberta Precision Laboratories and their employees, members of the medical and midwifery staff (or a corporation who employs or contracts any member of either the medical or midwifery staff), students and instructors, volunteers, and applicable contracted service providers (including anyone providing services for AHS on behalf of an applicable contracted service provider).

4. What does this mean for new hires and students?

- New hires and students will no longer be required under an AHS policy to be fully immunized against COVID-19 prior to hire or placement.
- Any applications currently in process within AHS will be exempt from the need to provide their COVID-19 immunization record as part of their application.

5. Why was the policy not updated to include booster doses?

- AHS considered this option but, at this time, didn't feel there was sufficient scientific evidence to demonstrate reduced transmission with a single booster dose.
- However, we continue to strongly encourage all healthcare workers to be immunized with every dose they are eligible to receive because there is evidence to suggest reduced severity of illness with a booster.
- AHS also requires that workers stay home when ill as part of our efforts to contain the spread of COVID-19.
- The virus has undergone significant, rapid change and the scientific evidence we have about the effectiveness of booster doses is related to earlier Omicron sub-variants. With new dominant Omicron sub-variants, stronger evidence about effectiveness of additional booster doses is needed.
- As the virus continues to evolve, we will see the evolution of the vaccine as well. We will continue to follow the scientific evidence as it emerges.

6. Why did you introduce the policy in the first place?

- The AHS policy came into effect at a time when the immunization required by the policy was highly effective in protecting the health and safety of workers, patients, residents and the communities that AHS serves by limiting the spread of COVID-19.
- Current evidence indicates that immunization without any boosters has limited effectiveness in reducing transmission of the Omicron variants currently circulating.
- AHS stands by the implementation of its policy as it was based on the best available evidence to protect our staff and patients.
- We are grateful to the vast majority of our workers who became immunized.

7. I disclosed my immunization information, will it remain confidential?

- Yes, any immunization information was collected under the authority of section 33(c) of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (Alberta) and will only be used and disclosed in accordance with that legislation.
- More specifically, within AHS, your information is securely stored in MySafetyNet and will only be used for the purposes stated on the *Got My COVID-19 Immunization Form*.

8. What measures are in place to protect worker and patient safety relating to COVID-19?

- All healthcare workers, regardless of immunization status, must still follow all current PPE and screening requirements, as well as work restrictions outlined in the [Attending Work Directive](#). All staff and physicians are still required to wear a mask, complete daily fit for work screening and stay home when sick.
- As COVID-19 evolves, we will continue to focus on protecting the health and safety of patients, families, and healthcare workers who are essential to keeping our healthcare system available for all Albertans.
- AHS will also be reviewing its existing Communicable Disease Assessment Policy and updating where appropriate to effectively manage work-related communicable disease exposures and outbreaks and protect our staff and patients.

9. Do I need to disclose my immunization status to patients or my co-workers if asked?

- No, you do not have an obligation to disclose your immunization status. It's your choice whether you disclose that information to patients or your co-workers.
- If workers do not wish to disclose their health status, patients have the right to ask what other safety measures are in place, such as those listed in Question 8.
- Patients may be emotionally vulnerable. Please be considerate and compassionate in your response to questions about immunization status or other health information. The pandemic has been stressful for everyone and people may respond in different ways based on their circumstances and experiences.
- There are many ways we can help each other get the information needed to stay safe and supported. See [Moral Distress: Considerations for COVID-19](#).

10. How can I have respectful and safe conversations regarding immunization?

- We have a shared responsibility to create [safe and respectful](#) work environments. We must work together in a way that supports respectful workplaces and safe patient care.
- Our values guide us to act with compassion and respect, even when we don't understand or agree with the reasoning or motivation behind someone's decisions.
- It is important that we do not engage in inflammatory and confrontational discussions in the work environment and respect the decisions of others.
- If you have specific concerns about your ability to work with another worker in a safe manner, please discuss them with your leader.
- See these supports:
 - [How to stay safe and be respectful](#)
 - [How to talk about COVID-19 Immunization at work](#)
 - [Being Respectful while physical distancing](#)
 - [Respectful Workplaces](#)
- We'll continue to educate and remind workers about the resources in place to support their conversations about COVID-19 immunization.

11. I am feeling stressed by this change. What supports are available to help me?

- There are many supports and resources to help you during this challenging time. If you need immediate support, call [Employee Family and Assistance Program](#) (EFAP) at 1-877-273-3134. If you are in crisis, dial 1 and be connected to a senior clinician for immediate intervention and crisis management.
- Please also consider using AHS' EFAP [counselling services](#), which are offered over the phone, through video, or online.
- See the [Resilience, Wellness and Mental Health Resource Guide](#) for a comprehensive list of supports, and the [COVID-19 EFAP Support Menu](#) for a quick reference on resources for stress and burnout and self-care.
- For workers not within AHS, ask your employer about assistance that may be available to you.

12. I have more questions. Who can I contact?

Employees should contact their manager or supervisor.

Physicians should contact their medical leader.

Midwives should email midwives@ahs.ca.

Students should contact their post-secondary institutions.

Volunteers should email volunteer_resources@ahs.ca.

Contractors should email contcare.vaccine@ahs.ca.