

Immunization of Workers for COVID-19 Policy

The following information is meant to address some questions you may have about Alberta Health Services (AHS) Immunization of Workers for COVID-19 Policy. The following document will be updated as additional information is available. We encourage you to check back frequently for updates.

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Policy

1. What is the purpose of the Immunization of Workers for COVID-19 Policy?

- The purpose of the [Immunization of Workers for COVID-19 Policy](#) is to protect the health and safety of our workers, patients and the public, and to preserve workforce capacity to support the healthcare system.
- This policy sets out worker immunization requirements for COVID-19.
- Alberta Health Services (AHS), Alberta Precision Laboratories (APL), Carewest, CapitalCare and Covenant Health will require all employees, members of medical and midwifery staffs, students, volunteers and contractors to be fully immunized for COVID-19 by Nov. 30, 2021.

2. Who does this policy apply to?

- This applies to AHS, APL, Carewest, CapitalCare, and Covenant Health employees, members of the medical and midwifery staffs, students or instructors, volunteers, and other persons acting on their behalf.
- Compliance requirements for other contracted service providers, such as continuing care providers, will be communicated directly to those providers.
- Anyone providing a service at an AHS facility or on behalf of AHS must be fully immunized for COVID-19.
- At this time, this policy does not apply to visitors or designated support persons (including doulas). Visitors and designated support persons should visit [ahs.ca/visitation](https://www.ahs.ca/visitation) for the current information on visitation.
- This document does not apply to physicians with Community Appointments.

3. Why is this policy being implemented now?

- Scientific and medical evidence shows that immunization is proven to be safe and effective to protect people against COVID-19.
- The evidence overwhelmingly confirms that being fully immunized decreases the risk of potential harm to patients and workers. [Alberta Health reports](#) vaccine effectiveness of 85 per cent to 91 per cent against variants of concern identified in Alberta (including the Delta variant, the current predominant strain of SARS-CoV-2).
- This new policy further supports the efforts of AHS, along with its subsidiaries and Covenant Health throughout the pandemic to keep our hospitals and healthcare facilities safe, including mandatory use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), daily screening for all healthcare staff, visitor restrictions, Infection Prevention and Control measures, physical distancing and ongoing awareness and education.
- This new policy reflects our changing environment as we continue to protect our workers, patients and their families.

4. What does it mean to be fully immunized?

- A worker becomes fully immunized when they have received two doses of a vaccine considered valid by Alberta Health in a two-dose COVID-19 vaccine series or one dose of a vaccine considered valid by Alberta Health in a one-dose COVID-19 vaccine series. You should receive your final dose by Nov. 15, 2021 to be fully immunized by Nov. 30, 2021.
- For vaccines requiring two doses (Moderna, Pfizer-BioNTech, AZ) vaccines this means 14 days after the second dose.
- For the Johnson & Johnson (Janssen) vaccine, which requires just one dose, this means 14 days after the first and only dose.
- Please note that Alberta Health recently announced that some Albertans are eligible to receive a third dose of vaccine. At this time, a [third booster shot](#) is not required to be considered fully immunized for the purpose of the AHS' *Immunization of Workers for COVID 19 Policy*.

5. Why is this policy necessary when we have PPE and other safety measures in place?

- While PPE used diligently is highly effective in preventing virus transmission, there is always the potential for equipment failure and human error. Unfortunately, a large portion of the healthcare worker cases determined to be occupationally acquired are attributable to these causes.
- Vaccines are an important tool within a larger system of measures – the strongest line of defense against the transmission of COVID-19 is immunization in conjunction with appropriate use of PPE, hand hygiene, physical distancing and other measures.

6. What is my deadline to become fully immunized?

- Workers must receive the final dose of their vaccine no later than Nov. 15, 2021, to be considered fully immunized by Nov. 30, 2021.
- Fourteen days must pass after the second dose of a two-dose vaccine series – or one-dose of a one-dose vaccine series – for full immunization status to be achieved.
- COVID-19 immunization appointments can be booked through ahs.ca/vaccine or through the Government of Alberta's new [Alberta Vaccine Booking System](#).
- A newly hired worker or worker on an approved Leave of Absence (LOA) will be required to be fully immunized before their start or return to work date.

Proof of Immunization

7. Do I need to provide proof that I've been fully immunized?

- Yes, AHS and APL employees will need to provide proof of immunization by using the online [Got My COVID-19 Immunization Form](#).
- Those workers on approved leave must provide their proof of immunization before returning to work. You do not need to provide proof of immunization if your return to work falls after.
- Carewest and CapitalCare workers will have their own method of collecting immunizations records.
- Staff who reside out-of-province and do not have an Alberta Healthcare Number, can submit their COVID-19 immunization record by clicking on the [Workplace Health and Safety](#) link.
- Students will be required to submit their proof of immunization through their post-secondary institution and should contact their school for more information.
- Contracted service providers providing services at AHS sites will be required to disclose proof of immunization status to their employer.
- More details will be shared with volunteers as to how to provide proof of immunization. Contact volunteer_resources@ahs.ca for more information.
- A worker who submits false documents or is otherwise dishonest regarding their vaccination status may be subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment or appointment in accordance with the applicable AHS Medical Staff and Midwifery bylaws, policies, procedures, collective agreements, terms and conditions of employment and/or employment contract.
- As a reminder, a booster shot is not required to be considered fully immunized for the purpose of the policy, which is in alignment with Alberta Health's guidance at this time. You do not need to re-submit the Got my COVID-19 Immunization Form after receiving a booster.

8. How do I submit my proof of immunization?

- Submit your proof of immunization by using the online [Got My COVID-19 Immunization Form](#) after the final dose of your vaccine.
- You will need your Alberta Health Care Number (9 digits), Employee ID Number (8 digits) and date of immunization handy to submit.
- If you are fully immunized, please do not wait to submit your proof of immunization. We strongly encourage you to submit as soon as you can.
- If you submitted the form before the policy was announced on Sept. 14, you need to re-submit using the new form issued the day the policy came into effect.
- The form includes an option for workers to declare the date of their last dose and provide consent for AHS to verify your record.
- APL and Covenant Health employees will submit their information using the Got My COVID-19 Immunization Form.
- If you work for more than one employer, you will need to complete the Got My COVID-19 Form for each organization.
- There is also the option to submit a copy of your immunization records by following instructions found [here](#).
- You will need to use instructions to submit your proof of immunization:
 - Obtain a copy of your immunization from [MyHealth Records](#)
 - Use the [email template](#) and fill out the fields before you submit
 - Use your AHS/APL email when submitting to ensure the secure transmission of your records

- To avoid any delays with your record submission, please use the following tips:
 - Enter all eight digits, including leading zeros in your employee ID number
 - Use month, day, year (mm/dd/yyyy) as the order for your date of birth and all date fields
- If you have questions regarding your immunization status, email COVID19Immunization@ahs.ca.

9. Is my immunization information confidential?

- Your immunization information is being 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 the legislation.
- Your information will be securely stored in [MySafetyNet](#) and will only be used for the purposes stated on the *Got My COVID-19 Immunization Form* used to collect your information.
- Authorized members of WHS may access this information solely for the purposes stated on the form. This includes Occupational Health Nurses and administrative staff assigned to administer the program. These are the same teams who confidentially manage other health records for our people, including immunization and health surveillance.

10. How will my leader know that I successfully submitted my proof of immunization?

- Leaders have access to the manager look up tool that shows their list of employees and confirmed record status.
- If your manager has informed you that your record hasn't been confirmed yet, but you have submitted a record, please be patient. We are working hard to process and confirm records as quickly as possible.
- To avoid any delays with your record submission, please use the following tips.
 - Include all eight digits, including leading zeros in your employee ID number
 - Use month, day, year (mm/dd/yyyy) as the order for your date of birth and all date fields
 - Fix any errors as displayed on your screen as appropriate

Vaccine Safety Concerns

11. I have questions about the safety of the vaccine. Where do I find more information?

- All approved vaccines are safe, tested, effective and help prevent serious illness. Here are some helpful resources about vaccine safety on the AHS [webpage](#).
- Additional facts can be found here: [Health Canada](#) and [National Advisory Committee on Immunization \(NACI\): Statements and publications](#).
- If you continue to have questions about vaccine safety, please email us at AHSVaccineTaskForce@ahs.ca. We will connect with you with an AHS expert who can provide you with accurate and up-to-date information.

12. I'm pregnant. Do I still need to receive the COVID-19 immunization?

- [AHS' Position Statement on Pregnant Healthcare Workers and COVID-19](#), aligns with the latest recommendations from the [National Advisory Committee on Immunization \(NACI\)](#) and the [Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada \(SOGC\)](#). NACI and SOGC recommend that pregnant people get two doses of COVID-19 vaccine.
- Please consult with your physician or health care provider or get the facts about the COVID-19 vaccines [here](#).

- There may be situations where a worker may be medically supported for an accommodation, please refer to the accommodation section for more information.

13. What work-related compensation is available to employees who have reactions to COVID-19 vaccines?

- According to the Workers Compensation Board (WCB) policy: “When immunization is required for the prevention of a work-related disease or infection and as a result of a reaction to this compulsory immunization a worker experiences a loss of earnings, WCB will consider the reaction and its consequences to be compensable.”
- WCB will accept a COVID-19 vaccination reaction when vaccination is a mandatory condition of employment.
- WCB will adjudicate work-related claims and benefit entitlement based on a case-by-case basis.
- For more information, see the [WCB Worker Fact Sheet on COVID-19 Vaccine Reactions](#).

Accommodation

Any AHS employee who is unable to be immunized due to a medical or religious reason under the Alberta Human Rights Act, will be reasonably accommodated, up to the point of undue hardship, in accordance with the AHS Workplace Accommodation Policy. Please note, even with an approved accommodation, you will not be able to work at an AHS site.

14. If I am unable to be immunized due to a medical reason, or for another protected ground under the Human Rights Act, such as religious beliefs, what should I do?

- Any AHS and APL employee who is unable to be immunized due to a medical reason, or for another protected ground under the *Alberta Human Rights Act*, will be reasonably accommodated, up to the point of undue hardship, in accordance with the [Workplace Accommodation Policy](#). Please note, even with an approved accommodation, you will not be able to work at an AHS site.
- Each accommodation request will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.
- Employees of CapitalCare, Carewest and Covenant Health who are unable to be immunized due to a medical reason, or for another protected ground under the *Alberta Human Rights Act*, will be reasonably accommodated, up to the point of undue hardship, in accordance with their applicable workplace accommodation policies.
- Any AHS or APL employee can request an accommodation. Requests should be made as soon as reasonably possible and no later than Oct. 16, 2021. New requests will not be accepted after this date. If there were exceptional circumstances which impacted the employee’s ability to submit their request by the deadline, they will be considered on a case by case basis.
- The employee will need to use the request for accommodation forms found on [Insite](#) and send their request for accommodation to covidvaccine.accommodations@ahs.ca. The employee’s manager will be notified of the accommodation request for the purposes of workforce planning. The manager will also receive another notification if the accommodation request is accepted or denied.
- Medical accommodation requests will require validation through their physician using a standardized form that will be made available to workers who submit a request for accommodation on medical grounds.
- Any AHS member of the medical or midwifery staff who is unable to be immunized due to a medical reason may request an exception to this policy and should do so no later than

Oct. 16, 2021. Medical or Midwifery Staff exception requests are made using [this form](#) and submitted to md.midwife.covidvacc@ahs.ca.

- The lack of immunization may affect the safe exercise of their Clinical Privileges as described in the Medical Staff Bylaws and Rules (Rule 3.4.4.2), or may directly impact their ability to practice and patient safety in the Midwifery Staff Bylaws and Rules (Rule 3.3.4), as applicable.
- If you work for more than one employer that is identified in this policy, you will need to apply for accommodation from each organization.
- Students and instructors who request an accommodation are to contact their post-secondary institution. AHS will not assess accommodation requests from students and instructors. It is important to note that as of Nov. 30, 2021, students and instructors must be fully immunized to have a placement in AHS. Accommodation of students and instructors will be adjudicated by the post-secondary institution.

15. What circumstances may be considered as an accepted accommodation for religious belief?

- Only religious beliefs that are sincerely held and connected to a faith must be accommodated under the *Alberta Human Rights Act*.

16. How do I apply for accommodation for a medical reason or for another protected ground under the Human Rights Act?

- AHS employee requests for accommodation will be reviewed by an Accommodations Adjudication Panel, the panel is comprised of members from Human Resources, Employee Relations, Workplace Health and Safety, Ability Management, Organizational Ethics, Labour Relations and Spiritual Care.
- If you have questions or would like to request an accommodation, please email covidvaccine.accommodations@ahs.ca.

17. Is my physician obligated to provide me with a medical exemption?

- Physicians are highly unlikely to provide patients with an exemption from COVID-19 vaccination.
- Physicians will only offer an exemption based on the latest medical evidence from authorities like Alberta Health, Alberta Health Services, the National Advisory Council on Immunization and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
- See the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta (CPSA) [Guidance on COVID-19 Vaccination Exemption Requests](#) and CPSA [Patient FAQ](#).

18. What if my accommodation request is not processed before Nov. 30, 2021?

- If a request for accommodation is submitted prior to Oct. 16, 2021, and is not reviewed before Nov. 30, 2021, due to no fault of the employee, the employee will be placed on a paid LOA.
- For existing employees, any requests submitted after Oct. 16, 2021, have no guarantee they will be reviewed prior to the compliance date, and if still outstanding effective Dec. 1, 2021, the worker will be placed on unpaid LOA.

19. My request for accommodation was denied. Will I be placed on a paid LOA while I become fully immunized?

- No. If the accommodation request is denied and the employee is not fully immunized by Nov 30, 2021, they will be placed on an unpaid LOA. Once the employee becomes fully immunized and submits their proof of immunization, they will be able to return to work.

Compliance

20. What if I am not fully immunized or I choose not to get immunized by Nov 30, 2021, what will happen?

- Except where a workplace accommodation has been approved, failure to disclose accurate proof of immunization status, shall result in a meeting scheduled with the worker to discuss their concerns with the COVID-19 immunization. The worker will also be provided with educational resources regarding COVID-19 vaccines.
- If the worker is still not fully immunized, they will be placed on an unpaid LOA.
- Workers who become fully immunized after Nov. 30, 2021, will be able to return to work once they have provided proof that they are fully immunized in accordance with the policy.
- For medical and midwifery staff, immediate action will be taken, as set out in Part 6 of the Medical Staff Bylaws or Midwifery Staff Bylaws and Rules, should the staff remain non-compliant with the policy.
- For the latest e-People information regarding the policy, visit the [e-People Employee Resources](#) page on Insite. See the [COVID-19 Immunization Policy – Employee e-People FAQ](#).

21. Will employees who are placed on an unpaid LOA receive a Record of Employment?

- Yes employees will receive a Record of Employment when they are placed on an unpaid leave of absence that will extend greater than 30 days per Service Canada requirements. When there is a separation of employment, box 16 on the Record of Employment (ROE) will indicate the reason for the employee's leave or separation from employment. Direction from Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) is to use code N on an ROE when an employee does not report to work because they refuse to comply with the organization's mandatory COVID-19 vaccination policy. The ROE will be sent to Service Canada by HR Shared Services by Dec. 11, 2021.

22. Will employees be able to apply for Employment Insurance (EI) benefits if they are placed on an unpaid LOA?

- As eligibility for employment insurance benefits is determined by Service Canada, we are unable to provide any information in this regard to employees at this time. Employees can contact Service Canada for additional details and eligibility criteria.

23. If I'm placed on an unpaid Leave of Absence, how will this impact my benefits and pension?

- If the employer is placing the employee on an unpaid Leave of Absence, the general unpaid LOA terms in the applicable collective agreement or other terms and conditions would apply, which would permit:
 - Employees may, subject to the insurer's requirements, make prior arrangements for the prepayment of full premiums for the applicable benefit plans. There will also be no accrual of vacation and sick time after 30 days of leave.
 - As per the LAPP Standards, contributions are not required during this unpaid LOA. Eligible employees will have the opportunity to buy back their service through the annual pension buy-back campaign or through the prior service process.

Additional Information

24. Will I be able to leave work during my scheduled shift to get immunized?

- AHS employees are entitled up to [three hours of paid leave](#) (or longer if the employer deems it reasonable) to get each dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, if the appointment occurs during the employee's shift.
- Employees and managers should work together when scheduling COVID-19 immunization leaves. Employees are required to give their leader as much notice as possible before requesting this leave.

25. I recently had COVID-19, but I'm better now, so why do I need to be fully immunized?

- All workers must be immunized regardless of whether they have already had COVID-19. If you have already recovered from COVID-19, there is still a chance you could contract COVID-19 again or spread it to others. You are not considered fully immunized if you have not completed a vaccine series in accordance with Question 4.
- According to Alberta Health: "Available evidence suggests that most individuals would have a certain degree of immunity for at least 90 days after initial diagnosis of COVID-19. However, the risk for reinfection is likely to increase due to waning immunity after initial infection and exposure to variants that cause immune escape."
- You can also find more information and the latest studies on the [National Advisory Committee on Immunization](#).

26. I already work remotely. Why do I need to be fully immunized?

- We all have a duty to protect the health and safety of each other, the patients and the public, prevent the spread of COVID-19 and outbreaks in AHS facilities, and to preserve workforce capacity to protect our healthcare system.
- It is important that all AHS workers, including those working remotely are fully immunized as you may need to access an AHS site, facility or have contact with another AHS worker at any time.
- This decision ensures consistency and fairness across the organization.

27. Why isn't rapid testing an alternative to immunization?

- There are significant safety and efficacy concerns with rapid testing. Current rapid testing technology is designed for those experiencing symptoms, which creates a large risk of false positives (up to 30 per cent), and this could lead to workers being unnecessarily restricted from work.
- The occurrence of false negatives is even more significant (reported as high as up to 50 per cent) where workers may be entering care environments infected with COVID-19.

28. I am feeling stressed. 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.
- Use EFAP [counselling services](#), which are offered over the phone, through video, or online.
- Download the [EFAP Resilience App](#), which offers custom lessons and content to build skills on resilience. Read more about how to use the app [here](#).
- Use [i-Volve](#), a web-based solution to help employees struggling with mild depression or anxiety.

- Join a [wellness seminar](#) on a variety of health and wellness topics. Register on MyLearningLink by searching 'WHS Wellness Seminar Series' or 'wellness.' [Schedule available here.](#)
- See the [Resilience, Wellness and Mental Health Resource Guide](#) for a comprehensive list of health and wellness supports, and the [COVID-19 EFAP Support Menu](#) for a quick reference on resources for stress and burnout, immediate support and self-care. For questions and more information, contact wellness@ahs.ca.

Contact Information

29. 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.
- You can also send emails to AHSVaccineTaskForce@ahs.ca.