

Virtual Home Hospital

Frequently Asked Questions for Patients and Caregivers

You may be able to receive hospital-level care in your home through an Alberta Health Services (AHS) Virtual Home Hospital. This program allows eligible patients the option to leave the hospital early and might even help you avoid having to stay in a physical hospital.

These questions and answers are for people who have been, or might be, referred to a Virtual Home Hospital. They'll help you understand what this program is and how you'll get care.

About Virtual Home Hospital

What healthcare providers are on the team?

- Your care team will include doctors and nurses, and might include nurse practitioners, pharmacists, community paramedics and other medical specialists or healthcare workers you might need. If you have a family doctor, they'll be updated about your care.
- If you have family or caregiver supporting you, we'll show them how they can help. You are also an important part of the team.

How will I receive care?

- You'll be cared for through virtual care technology, like phone or video calls. You might need to come to our location if we need to see you in person.
- You'll get a kit that allows your care team to monitor your health remotely. This includes a blood pressure cuff, pulse oximeter and heart rate monitor (measures your oxygen level and heart rate), weigh scale and thermometer. You'll be shown how to use these devices.
- If you need hands-on care in your home, it will be provided with your consent by our community paramedics, in combination with community partners like [Home & Community Care](#).
- Some patients need more hands-on care in their home, while others can have most of their care managed through virtual visits.
- Even though you're at home, you'll still be registered as a hospital patient and be under the care of a hospital doctor.

What kind of care can I expect to receive from a Virtual Home Hospital?

- Your healthcare team will work with you to set up a plan based on your specific needs. You'll have:

- Regular check-in visits, either by phone or video calls. Sometimes you'll need an in-person check-in at the Virtual Home Hospital site. In-home care is provided by our community paramedics or other community partners when you need it.
- Medicine management, including intravenous (I.V.) fluid, if needed.
- Information to help you understand and manage your medical condition and treatment plan.
- Any other care necessary, based on your needs and treatment plan.
- You may also need lab work, medical tests and procedures as part of your care. You'll be connected to other healthcare providers and specialists as necessary.

Who is eligible for Virtual Home Hospital care?

- You'll be assessed to make sure you meet specific medical criteria before you're admitted to a Virtual Home Hospital. This helps to make sure you can safely get care at home.
- To be a patient in a Virtual Home Hospital, you'll need to:
 - be at least 18 years old and able to consent to receiving care at home,
 - be able to, and be comfortable with, communicating by phone or computer (interpretation services for other languages is available),
 - be willing to participate in your care,
 - have your home or other safe location set-up so you can receive care, and
 - have enough support in place at home if necessary, such as having a caregiver.

Is Virtual Home Hospital safe?

- Yes. Virtual Home Hospitals have been safely providing care in Alberta since 2018, and around the world for much longer.
- Safety protocols are in place to make sure you and your caregivers can contact your care team or get help when you need it.

Will I still get high-quality care?

- Yes. AHS works hard to give high-quality, safe care to all patients, no matter where they get care.
- Many past patients (86 percent) said in a survey that they believed the quality of care in a Virtual Home Hospital was "better" or "the same" as that of an in-person hospital.

Will my Virtual Home Hospital care team stay the same throughout my care?

- Once you become a Virtual Home Hospital patient, every effort is made to keep your care team the same. The goal is to keep your care consistent.

- The doctors do change weekly, but each doctor gives a detailed report to the next doctor, so nothing is missed.

What are the benefits to Virtual Home Hospital?

- You can be more independent and move around in familiar surroundings better. Many patients reported that they were highly satisfied with their care.
- You can sleep in your own bed, eat your own food and have your own things around you.
- You have a lower risk of complications that might be more likely to happen in a hospital facility. For example, you won't be exposed to someone else's viruses due to cough or sharing a room.

Can I say no to Virtual Home Hospital care?

- Yes. Virtual Home Hospital is just one option. If you aren't comfortable with being cared for at home, you can ask to continue your hospital care at an AHS facility.
- If you're already a Virtual Home Hospital patient and decide you don't want to keep getting your care this way, let your care team know. They'll go over the options for you to continue getting the care that you need. This may include returning to hospital to finish your treatment.

Is there a cost to use Virtual Home Hospital?

- There is no cost to receive care from Virtual Home Hospital for patients who live in Alberta. If you don't live in Alberta, we'll review your eligibility on a case-by-case basis.
- AHS provides you with the equipment that you need. You'll be asked to return the equipment at the end of your time with Virtual Home Hospital.
- AHS also covers the cost of medicines that are given to you by a member of the Virtual Home Hospital care team based on your treatment plan. This includes those given by community paramedics (for example, I.V. medicines).
 - Any medicines that you take as a regular part of your ongoing health are your responsibility (for example, vitamins, supplements, heart medicines that aren't related to your current treatment and so on).

How do I get referred to a Virtual Home Hospital?

- You must be referred by a doctor or nurse practitioner currently involved in your care. This can happen from a hospital unit or emergency department, or any outpatient clinic, including your family doctor or nurse practitioner as well as your Home and Community Care team.

Information for current Virtual Home Hospital patients

How do I contact my care team?

- You and your family or caregivers will have a direct line to your Virtual Home Hospital care team during their regular office hours, so you can connect with them. You will be given this information when you're admitted.
- If you need support after hours, you can contact Health Link by dialing 811. They can help you with medical advice and take the next steps to address your concern.

What happens if my health changes while I'm a Virtual Home Hospital patient?

- Let your care team know if your health changes between visits. If it's not an emergency, your care team will work with you to help manage your condition and do their best to keep you out of the hospital.
- If you need more care than you can get at home, you might need to go back to the hospital. In that case, your Virtual Home Hospital care team will connect with the hospital care team to let them know about your needs.

What do I do if I have a medical emergency?

- Call 911 or go to your nearest emergency department or urgent care centre right away. Be sure to tell them you're a Virtual Home Hospital patient.

Where do I go if I need to get diagnostic imaging (e.g., x-ray) or blood tests?

- If you need diagnostic imaging, such as an X-ray or MRI, or lab tests, such as blood work, your care team will coordinate this appointment for you.
- Depending on your condition, blood work will either be done in your home, in a community clinic or lab or at an AHS facility.

What happens when I am discharged from Virtual Home Hospital?

- Your care will be transitioned to your family doctor just like when you're discharged from a regular hospital. If you don't have a family doctor, you can use one of the [online tools](#) to help find one that is accepting new patients.
- Be sure to go to any follow-up appointments that your Virtual Home Hospital team may make for you. Continue to take your medicines as instructed. Your care team will go over them with you before you're discharged.
- Monitor yourself to watch for symptoms getting worse. If you notice any changes to your health, let your family doctor know. Your family doctor can refer you back to the Virtual Home Hospital if they think you need more short-term care.

- If you're unable to find a family doctor or nurse practitioner in your area, let your care team know as soon as possible so they can make a plan by the time you leave the program.

For more information

If you have more questions about Virtual Home Hospital, go to ahs.ca/vhh or talk to your doctor.