

Update: March 16 - Physiotherapists Included in Phase 2C Vaccination Plan

Over the past year, COVID-19 has affected every Albertan. As Alberta's vaccine supply is steadily increasing, Alberta Health and Alberta Health Services are preparing to immunize more Albertans who may be at risk from severe outcomes from COVID-19.

Physiotherapy Alberta supports vaccination as *"one of the world's greatest public health achievements."*¹ Vaccination saves lives and reduces the chances of debilitating long-term illness, including COVID-19. Vaccines are rigorously researched and tested, and are evaluated for their safety, efficacy, and quality prior to being authorized for use by [Health Canada](#). The vaccines in use in Alberta are safe, effective and save lives.

On March 15, 2021, Dr. Hinshaw provided new information regarding the planned distribution of vaccines in Alberta to individuals who fall within categories 2B and 2C. In Phase 2B and 2C, Alberta Health will continue to take a phased approach to protect those at high risk of severe illness and death from COVID-19, and those who interact with them, like health-care workers and support staff.

Phase 2B

Individuals identified for vaccination during Phase 2B include Albertans with underlying conditions, as they are most at risk of severe outcomes. The Government of Alberta has now released [details of which underlying conditions](#) will qualify Albertans for vaccination during this phase.

The conditions included in Phase 2B were recommended by the Alberta Advisory Committee on Immunization and affirmed by the Chief Medical Officer of Health. These conditions were chosen as they are the ones that were associated with a higher risk of death or hospitalization for those under the age of 64.

In this manner, Alberta Health has remained consistent with their stated intent to prioritize vaccination delivery to those most vulnerable to COVID-19. Physiotherapy Alberta endorses this approach and believes that vaccines must be provided based on available data regarding the groups most vulnerable to contracting the virus, developing severe illness, or experiencing adverse outcomes from COVID-19.

Phase 2B - Youth with Underlying Conditions

Alberta Health is also now advising that in Phase 2B, eligible Albertans with at least one of the underlying health conditions aged **16 and older** will be able to get the vaccine.

The age range has been dropped from 18 to 16 years of age as the Pfizer vaccine is licensed to immunize persons 16 years of age or older. Guardians of youth who fall into this category will need to verify that the youth will be receiving the Pfizer vaccine and will need to wait until after the youth's 16th birthday before accessing the Pfizer vaccine.

A doctor's note or other proof of an underlying condition will not be required for individuals accessing vaccination under Phase 2B.

Phase 2C

Regulated health professionals, including physiotherapists will be eligible for vaccination in Phase 2C, **provided** they deliver direct patient care. Access is also being extended to non-regulated health care workers and staff who deliver face-to-face care for patients or have frequent contact with Albertans who are high-risk or are COVID positive.

- Physiotherapists and physiotherapist assistants or aides who deliver direct, in-person care are eligible to access vaccination during Phase 2C.
- Physiotherapists who are not involved in direct patient care (e.g., individuals in managerial or administrative roles) are not eligible under this Phase of the vaccine roll-out.

Health-care workers eligible for vaccination in Phase 2C will need to provide personal identification that contains a birth date and proof of employment or professional registration (i.e., employee ID card, letter of employment or placement) when booking or attending their appointments with Alberta Health Services or at community pharmacies.

Physiotherapists are reminded that they can access this information through the [Verify a Physiotherapist](#) section of Physiotherapy Alberta's website, or by logging into the [Member Portal](#) and printing a copy of their registration.

Other groups included in Phase 2C include:

- Residents and staff linked to eligible congregate living settings: correctional facilities, homeless shelters, meatpacking plants, group homes including disability, mental health, and other types of licensed supportive living.
- Caregivers of Albertans who are most at risk of severe outcomes.
- Students undertaking placements in clinical settings are also eligible in this phase.

Vaccinating the individuals identified in Phase 2C protects groups who are at high risk of experiencing severe outcomes, and Albertans who regularly come into contact with them.

What does this mean for Alberta Physiotherapists?

Understand the phased roll out and share public health information with patients and the public

- Physiotherapists frequently interact with patients with chronic underlying health conditions and should familiarize themselves with the qualifying conditions under Phase 2B and the schedule for vaccine roll out.
- Physiotherapists can play a role in supporting public health messaging, highlighting the importance of vaccination, and sharing information about eligibility.
 - This resource from [Alberta Health](#) provides answers to common questions individuals may have regarding the COVID-19 Vaccine, and may help you to provide accurate information to your patients.

Please note: that the resource contains information regarding use of the AstraZeneca or COVISHIELD vaccine among seniors which was updated on March 16. Please see the updated [Health Canada information](#) regarding the use of this vaccine by those over age 65.

- When trusted health professionals share credible information about vaccination it increases the likelihood of uptake by patients and members of the public.

Get vaccinated when eligible

- Physiotherapists with underlying health conditions that qualify under Phase 2B can access vaccination with that phase of the vaccine roll out.
- Physiotherapists without underlying health conditions qualify for vaccination under Phase 2C, if they provide direct patient care.

Continue public health measures to limit the spread of COVID-19

- The arrival of the vaccine does not mean the pandemic is over. For now, we all must continue to follow public health guidelines, including physical distancing, practicing good hand hygiene, masking when in public, and staying home when sick.
- Even after being immunized, physiotherapists are expected to continue to employ all the currently recommended infection prevention and control measures identified by Alberta Health and Physiotherapy Alberta in the [Guidance for Resuming Physiotherapy Practice During a Pandemic](#), bearing in mind:
 - Not all individuals who are eligible for vaccination can receive a vaccine due to other health conditions.
 - Vaccination is known to be highly effective at preventing severe illness and death from COVID-19, however,
 - There is a proportion of the population for which the vaccine is not effective.

- Data is currently lacking regarding whether vaccination prevents a vaccinated individual from transmitting the virus. Vaccinated individuals may still be able to spread the virus even if they do not become ill.
- Physiotherapists are being vaccinated ahead of the general population. A proportion of those whom they treat will not be vaccinated for several months.

Phases 2B and 2C are expected to begin in April. Exact timing will depend on vaccine supply and will be announced closer to the start of each phase. Physiotherapists are encouraged to stay up-to-date on the vaccine roll out by monitoring the Government of Alberta [COVID-19 Vaccination](#) website.

It has been estimated that 437,000 individuals qualify for vaccination under Phase 2A, which is currently underway. A further 660,000 individuals will qualify for vaccination under Phase 2B and 400,000 more under Phase 2C. Vaccinating the roughly 1.4 million Albertans qualifying for vaccination during these phases will require a herculean effort by Alberta Health, Alberta Health Services, community pharmacists and family physicians. We continue to be grateful to all front-line healthcare workers for their efforts during the pandemic, and to all those involved in the vaccine roll-out.