

Update: May 5

On May 4, 2021, Premier Jason Kenney announced that the Government of Alberta is implementing new restrictions to limit the spread of COVID-19 in the face of rising active case numbers and case rates in Alberta. As was the case with the measures announced on April 29th, some of the expanded restrictions will be in effect for **high case regions** only, while other restrictions will remain in place province wide.

The threshold for identification as a high case region and implementation of new measures has been reduced from 350 cases per 100,000 people and 250 active cases (announced on April 29th) down to at least **50 cases per 100,000 people, and at least 30 active cases**. As we advised in the April 30th update, it is imperative that physiotherapists know the case rate and number of active cases in their region and the restrictions that apply based on those metrics. You can find this information on the Government of Alberta [website](#).

The variation in the restrictions by region can make it difficult to understand which rules apply in different locations across the province. Physiotherapy Alberta's focus is on advising registrants of restrictions that may affect their practice. However, regulated members are advised to review [all restrictions in force](#), both in high case regions and province wide as the additional restrictions announced on May 4th go beyond those highlighted here.

What do the restrictions mean for physiotherapists?

Community-based practice (private practice, mobile practice, home-based businesses):

- Provincewide, physiotherapists can continue to provide one-on-one services, by appointment only.
- Provincewide, group fitness activities have been restricted since early April. As such, physiotherapy group exercise classes remain prohibited.
- In high case regions, effective 11:59pm on May 9th, indoor fitness and recreation facilities are required to close and both indoor and outdoor one-on-one training are prohibited.
 - Physiotherapists operating in fitness or recreation facility settings in these regions will need to discuss their business operations with facility owners and are advised to anticipate questions, concerns or complaints from community members who observe the physiotherapist's operations in these settings.
 - Physiotherapists who work in settings where they collaborate with kinesiologists or fitness industry professionals must be aware of this restriction and its implications for their business model. As we have stated previously, physiotherapists must not engage in activities that reflect supervision in name only, for the purpose of enabling an individual access to personal trainers or fitness and recreation facilities.

School settings:

- Provincewide, kindergarten to grade 12 students will transition to online learning effective May 7th, if not already online. Online learning is expected to continue for two weeks, with in-person learning projected to resume on May 25th.

All physiotherapists:

- Physiotherapists can continue to provide in-person physiotherapy services, provided they adhere to the public health restrictions in force in their area, measures outlined in the [Guidance for Resuming Physiotherapy Practice During a Pandemic](#), and related guidance from [Physiotherapy Alberta](#).
- When possible, physiotherapists are encouraged to employ telerehabilitation to address ongoing physiotherapy needs, if appropriate for their patient's condition, either in a hybrid model or as the sole method of physiotherapy service provision.
- Physiotherapists in community settings have been eligible to receive a vaccination against COVID-19 since April 12th. More information about Alberta's vaccination plan can be found on the Government of Alberta [website](#). Physiotherapists are encouraged to access vaccination as soon as they are able.

Easing restrictions in long-term care:

- The announcements of May 4th and April 29th follow an announcement on [April 26th](#) in which the Premier and Minister Shandro announced an easing of restrictions in long-term care and continuing care facilities, scheduled to take effect May 10th.
- Details of what will be permitted and whether this plan will go ahead given the current situation remain to be seen but appear to focus primarily on indoor and outdoor social visits and may vary by site.
- The May 10th changes are not anticipated to alter physiotherapy service provision in this sector. Group activities in these settings have been permitted for some time for groups of 5 or fewer residents, provided social distancing and appropriate cleaning and disinfecting of equipment occurs.

Conclusion

While the ongoing roll out of vaccinations and their uptake by Albertans provides hope for what's to come in the weeks and months ahead, the restrictions announced on May 4th reflect ongoing high case rates, active case numbers, hospital, and ICU admissions due to the third wave of COVID-19 in Alberta. Hospitalizations and ICU admissions are projected to increase in the coming weeks.

During his address on May 4th, Premier Kenney identified that Alberta is in a "critical stage of the COVID-19 pandemic" and stated that the new measures are required to "prevent disaster from unfolding in our hospitals."

Over the past several months, Physiotherapy Alberta has repeatedly called on physiotherapists to review the infection prevention and control measures they have in use to protect patients and themselves, and to redouble their efforts to maintain safe practice environments. We have every confidence that physiotherapists have done this.

We recognize the challenges that physiotherapists in all settings have faced throughout the pandemic and acknowledge that we are all simultaneously tired of this pandemic and concerned by the latest case numbers. These new measures are in place to prevent health system collapse and as health professionals, physiotherapists recognize the importance of that objective. In the face of this current situation, we ask you to consider if there is one thing you can do, one more step you can take, personally or professionally, to help to drive these numbers down.