

Over the past several weeks, Albertans have watched as COVID daily case numbers, hospitalizations and ICU admissions have steadily increased. With fall fast approaching, children and youth returning to in-person learning in the coming days (if they have not already returned to the classroom), and the upward trend in case counts, there have been some recent changes to the management of the pandemic that physiotherapists should be aware of.

Return of mask bylaws

On Monday, Edmonton City Council became the first municipality to reinstate a [bylaw](#) requiring individuals to wear masks when in indoor public spaces. The bylaw will take effect on Friday, September 3, 2021. The City of Calgary is also currently requiring masks or face coverings in City-operated facilities. This is in addition to the current [province-wide requirement](#) that masks be worn on public transit and in taxis, ride shares, motor coaches and shuttles.

Expectations for physiotherapists

The [Standards of Practice](#) include the expectation that physiotherapists are aware of and comply with the legislation relevant to their practice. This includes municipal bylaws in effect in the communities where physiotherapists work.

Physiotherapists are advised to closely monitor developments in their local communities in the coming days and weeks, and to be aware of the specifics of any mask bylaws instituted and any exemptions included in those bylaws.

Physiotherapists are directed to address questions regarding local mask bylaws to their municipality.

Employer-led immunization requirements

In recent days, employers in various sectors have implemented immunization requirements as a condition of employment, and in some cases as a condition of access. The details of these requirements vary by employer, as do any exemptions or accommodations that may be afforded to affected employees.

The most notable example is the announcement from Alberta Health Services (AHS), on August 31 that they are implementing a mandatory COVID-19 immunization policy for workers. AHS will require workers and staff of AHS, AHS subsidiaries, applicable contracted service providers and Covenant Health to be fully immunized for COVID-19 by October 31, 2021.

Additional information regarding this announcement can be found on [AHS' website](#). AHS has indicated that they will directly contact all contracted service providers to whom this requirement applies, providing them with additional details of compliance requirements.

Expectations for physiotherapists

Physiotherapy Alberta is a proponent of immunization against communicable diseases for which vaccines exist. We encourage all physiotherapists who have questions regarding the COVID-19 vaccine to seek the advice of a trusted health professional who knows the physiotherapist's health history. We continue to strongly encourage physiotherapists to be immunized against COVID-19.

We remind physiotherapists that employers may set expectations and employment requirements over and above the requirements and Standards established by Physiotherapy Alberta. Physiotherapists with questions regarding employer-led immunization requirements must direct their questions to their employer.

Physiotherapists in community settings who have questions regarding whether the AHS policy applies to them are advised to direct their questions to AHS.

Employer considerations

Employers, including physiotherapists who are also employers, are subject to Occupational Health and Safety Legislation and should familiarize themselves with the provisions of that legislation.

Employers who are considering instituting (or re-instituting) requirements as a condition of service (such as patient mask or immunization requirements), are reminded that declining to provide care is a serious matter. There are conflicting needs, values, and rights involved in such a decision. Physiotherapists and physiotherapy business owners should understand the many implications of refusing to provide care to a patient who declines to adhere to such requirements.

Other precautions

Changes to [isolation](#) and [testing](#) requirements announced by the Government of Alberta on July 28, 2021 have been postponed and are scheduled to come into effect on September 27, 2021.

Regardless of when changes to testing and isolation requirements come into effect, Physiotherapy Alberta's prior guidance to regulated members, issued on [June 30, 2021](#), and [July 29, 2021](#), regarding the need to continue with screening, point of care risk assessment and use of PPE, and other infection prevention and control measures remains in effect.

Physiotherapy Alberta continues to advise our regulated members to employ the measures discussed in these documents to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the physiotherapy practice environment and protect their patients and themselves.