



COVID-19 School Immunization Program:

Questions and answers for school administrators

Preamble

The most important thing that adults and older children can do to protect themselves and others from COVID-19 is to be fully immunized. Vaccines are safe and effective and protect against severe illness and outcomes. Together we are building a protective shield around those for whom the vaccine is not yet available.

On August 13, 2021, the Government of Alberta announced a COVID-19 school immunization program to further increase accessibility to COVID-19 vaccines. Immunizations will be available in schools in September and October for eligible students in Grades 7-12. Staff in those schools will also be able to access their COVID-19 immunizations, if desired.

All Albertans are encouraged to continue using public health practices such as staying home when sick, good hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette, to reduce the risk of COVID-19 and other respiratory illnesses. They should also assess their personal risk for COVID-19 and other respiratory illnesses, and may choose to take additional precautions such as continuing to use a face mask. Schools should support students, staff and visitors in their choice to wear a mask.

Questions and Answers

What are the objectives of the COVID-19 school immunization program?

- Increase COVID-19 immunization coverage rates in youth in order to protect them, their families, communities and schools.
- Provide an additional location in the community for school staff and parents/guardians of eligible students to be immunized.

Who is eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine in school?

- Eligible students in Grades 7 to 12, who are born in 2009 or earlier, if appropriate parent/guardian consent is provided.
- If a student is in a grade level lower than Grade 7 but meets the age requirement of having been born in 2009 or earlier, they may be immunized if appropriate parent/guardian consent is provided.
- School staff.
- Parents/guardians of eligible students, if sufficient vaccine is available.
- COVID-19 immunization services in schools will not be open to the general public.

Can mature minor students be vaccinated without parent/guardian consent?

- Consent forms will be provided electronically to all parents/students by schools (schools can choose to offer printed forms as needed) and will also be available electronically on the AHS website.
- Only those students with written consent from a parent/guardian will be able to be immunized in the school setting as part of the COVID-19 immunization program.
- The Alberta Health Services mature minor processes will not apply for the COVID-19 school immunization program.

Which school authorities will have access to the COVID-19 school immunization program?

- The COVID-19 school immunization program is being offered to public, separate, francophone and charter school authorities as well as private (independent) schools offering Grades 7 to 12 programming.
- This program is also available to First Nation schools that wish to participate.

Will all schools offering Grades 7 to 12 programming have access to the COVID-19 school immunization program?

- The intent is to extend this program as widely as possible.
- If there are less than 20 student consents per school are received for immunization, AHS will work with the school to determine the best mechanism for providing immunization.

Who is eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine and what is the benefit of getting immunized?

- Currently, Albertans born in 2009 or before are eligible for a COVID-19 vaccine (turning 12+).
- Vaccines have shown a significant level of protection against severe outcomes from COVID-19. Two doses of the COVID-19 vaccine have been shown to be highly protective against infection.

How many doses of the COVID-19 vaccine are available as part of the COVID-19 school immunization program?

- One dose per eligible student, staff member and parent/guardian.
- Includes first dose for persons not previously vaccinated and second dose for students that already received their first dose.
- For those whom this is their first dose, information regarding how to book a follow-up appointment for a second dose will be provided, these may occur at local pharmacies, AHS sites, or physicians' offices. AHS will not be returning to complete immunizations for those who did not provide consent on time or for second doses.

Why are children under 12 years not eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine?

- Children born in 2010 or later (11 and under) are currently not eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine as the vaccine is not currently licensed for that age group. It is expected that a COVID-19 vaccine for younger children will be available sometime in early 2022.
- Children under 12 years of age have much lower rates of hospitalization, severe disease and death from COVID-19. Based on Alberta's experience in the 2020-2021 school year, schools were not the primary drivers of COVID-19 transmission during that time period.
- We may not be able to entirely eliminate COVID-19, but we can develop a sustainable approach that does not have disproportionate impacts on learning and development opportunities for students while also preventing serious outcomes, hospitalizations and death due to the disease.

How can we protect children who are not yet eligible for immunization?

- It is encouraged that all eligible individuals be immunized to reduce the risk to those who are unable to receive the vaccine.
- Promoting and maintaining good public health practices such as staying home when sick, good hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette will reduce the risk of COVID-19 and other respiratory illnesses.
- Students, parents/guardians, staff and visitors are encouraged to assess their personal risk factors and/or the risk factors for their families and take precautions that make sense in their situations. This may include wearing a face mask in certain settings, keeping your social circle small, or leaving space between yourself and others in group settings. Schools should support these personal choices, whenever possible.

When will the COVID-19 school immunization program be available?

- The program will start the week of September 7 and run until about October 15.
- Alberta Health Services public health teams will provide immunization opportunities within and after school hours at schools across the province. Specific dates and hours will be determined by schools in collaboration with Alberta Health Services.

Which COVID-19 vaccine will be provided?

- This program offers the Pfizer-BioNTech mRNA COVID-19 vaccine.

Who is the provincial lead for the COVID-19 school immunization program?

- Alberta Health, Alberta Health Services and Alberta Education are collaborating with school authorities to make the COVID-19 school immunization program available to school authorities across the province.

What is Alberta Education's role in the COVID-19 school immunization program?

- Alberta Education is working with school authorities to provide information and raise awareness about the program.
- Alberta Education is also ensuring that Alberta Health Services has the necessary contact information to connect with school and school authority leaders to schedule immunizations in schools, ensure parent/guardians complete consent forms, and make space available in schools for immunization to take place.

What is Alberta Health's role in the COVID-19 school immunization program?

- Provide vaccine to Alberta Health Services.
- Monitor immunization program and results.

What is Alberta Health Services' role in the COVID-19 school immunization program?

- Alberta Health Services will contact each school to coordinate timing and logistics of providing immunization on sites.
- They will collect signed consent forms from schools either in advance of or at the time of the immunization clinic.
- Administer COVID-19 vaccine to all those who are eligible (based on current Alberta Health policy) where consent is received.

What is the school/school authorities' role in the COVID-19 school immunization program?

- Provide Alberta Education with school authority key contact information for immunization program and a key contact (likely principal) for all schools offering grades 7 to 12 programming.
- Collaborate with AHS in establishing and operationalizing the immunization program, including:
 - Communicate with parents, including sharing parent/guardian consent form as soon as possible.
 - Collect parent/guardian consent forms for sharing with AHS while ensuring forms are securely stored and student privacy is maintained.
 - Dedicating space in school facility for immunizations.

What is the parents' role in the COVID-19 school immunization program?

- Complete parent/guardian consent form and deliver to child's school by the first week of school.
- Ensure child(ren) are at school on time for immunization.

Can schools ask their students and staff about their COVID-19 immunization status?

- It is important to note that the decision to be vaccinated is a personal choice, and the decision made by parents/guardians for their children is private.
- In accordance with Alberta's privacy legislation, the *Personal Information Protection Act* and the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, staff must respect the health privacy of students, including their vaccination status.

Can school authorities require that their staff be immunized for COVID-19?

- School authorities should consult with their legal counsel to determine employment policies.

Who can parents/guardians contact if they have questions about this program?

- Persons with questions or seeking more information can call their [local public health office](#) or 811.

Can a school or school authority opt out of the COVID-19 school immunization program?

- School authorities know the communities they serve best. School authorities have the flexibility and accountability to make decisions about this program.
- Increased immunization rates protect the community, including school communities. It is hoped that school authorities will offer this opportunity to their communities.

Is Alberta Education providing additional funding to school authorities to operationalize this program?

- This program is provided to school authorities within existing budgets.