

### FAQs: Exemption Requests for Vaccination

#### **What are the current criteria for medical exemptions for vaccination?**

There are virtually no medical conditions that universally warrant a complete exemption from a first or second dose of COVID-19 vaccine. A patient's moral objection to vaccination, or likelihood of termination from school enrolment or employment, are not considered sufficient clinical reason for exemption.

#### **Who can issue an exemption from vaccination?**

Your primary care physician is qualified to determine whether your medical condition warrants an exemption from COVID-19 vaccination. However, the likelihood of obtaining an exemption from vaccination is extremely unlikely.

#### **Is my physician obligated to provide me with an exemption?**

No. Physicians are highly unlikely to provide patients with an exemption from COVID-19 vaccination. Physicians will only offer an exemption based on the latest medical evidence from authorities like Alberta Health, Alberta Health Services, the National Advisory Council on Immunization and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

#### **Can I go to any physician to request exemption from vaccination?**

No. Please see your primary care physician to request an assessment on whether you qualify for exemption. Do not request exemptions from an emergency room physician.

#### **What should I expect when I ask my physician for a vaccine exemption?**

Your physician will assess whether your health condition warrants exemption. This assessment may be conducted in-person or virtually. As the qualifying criteria for vaccination exemption is extremely limited, we expect that nearly all requests will be denied.

#### **Why wouldn't a physician provide an exemption from vaccination?**

A physician is expected to deny any exemption request from a patient without a warranted medical condition. A physician could be investigated for unprofessional conduct if they provide an exemption that is inconsistent with the latest evidence.

#### **What are the warranting medical conditions for vaccination exemptions?**

Clinical decisions on COVID-19 vaccination exemption are expected to align with [recommendations](#) set out by the Alberta Health Services COVID-19 Scientific Advisory Group. Clinical decisions may also be made based on the latest evidence from the National Advisory Council on Immunization, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Alberta Health.

### **Are exemptions available to participants of COVID-19 clinical trials?**

Physicians may provide temporary deferrals from COVID-19 vaccination if a patient is actively participating in a Health Canada authorized COVID-19-related clinical trial. To consider these requests, a physician will require:

- proof that the trial appears on Health Canada's current authorized [list](#);
- proof that the patient is registered as a participant in the authorized trial;
- a statement from a medical representative of the holder of the trial authorization describing why participation in the clinical trial requires the patient not to be partially or fully vaccinated against COVID-19; and
- a date by which the patient's involvement in the clinical trial is expected to conclude.

It is important to remember that deferral of vaccination for participation in authorized clinical trials will be temporary and expire at the conclusion of the trial.

### **Will vaccination exemptions be given to pregnant women, or those trying to become pregnant?**

No. Pregnancy, or attempting to become pregnant, does not warrant exemption from vaccination. COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective for pregnant individuals and their babies, and vaccination may occur at any time, or during any trimester of pregnancy. Since the outset of the pandemic, the only pregnant women admitted to ICU in Alberta have been unvaccinated. COVID-19 has severe impacts on the mother's health and also the child's. [Alberta Health Services](#) has very helpful information on COVID-19 vaccination and pregnancy.

### **Can I complain to CPSA if I am denied an exemption request?**

CPSA expects physicians to assess all patient requests for vaccination exemptions. CPSA would only investigate a complaint if a physician has refused to provide an assessment, or if the physician issued an exemption for an unwarranted medical condition. CPSA accepts evidence-based clinic judgements by physicians.

### **What happens if patients become verbally or physically abusive?**

Patients who do not receive the response they are hoping for must treat the physician, clinic staff and other patients with respect. Patients cannot put undue pressure on the physician and must understand the physician's obligation to evidence-based decision making. Abusive patients will be asked to leave the premises and may be subject to termination of their relationship with the physician and/or prosecution by law enforcement.

### **How quickly will my physician respond to a request for an exemption?**

Physicians have a responsibility to triage and manage the needs of all their patient's, ensuring those with an urgent, serious need for care are prioritized for evaluation. Depending on your physician's workload, a request for assessment related to vaccination exemption may require advance booking or deferral to a future appointment.

### **Do I need to carry exemption letters with me at all times?**

In the rare event that a physician provides a patient with an exemption from COVID-19 vaccination, production of the letter may be requested by your school, workplace or business you intend to visit.

### **If I am not given an exemption, does that mean I need to be vaccinated?**

COVID-19 vaccination is not mandatory in Alberta. However, an increasing number of schools, businesses and jurisdictions are now requiring students, staff and visitors to be fully vaccinated. Choosing not to be vaccinated may limit your ability to participate in certain in-person activities.

### **Can my physician be exempt from vaccination?**

It is highly recommended that all physicians providing patient care in community medical clinics be fully vaccinated against COVID-19. The likelihood of any individual, including a physician, being exempted from vaccination is extremely low.

### **How can I protect myself and others if I cannot be vaccinated?**

An exemption from COVID-19 vaccination should not be misinterpreted as a “free pass.” You remain at an elevated risk of acquiring, transmitting and experiencing severe outcomes from COVID-19, particularly given the health conditions that warranted the exemption. Unvaccinated individuals should diligently follow public health precautions like indoor masking, physical distancing, monitoring for symptoms, avoiding crowded areas and heightening hygiene practices. You should also speak to your physician about obtaining the vaccine once new evidence emerges, your warranting condition improves or as new vaccine products become available.

### **How can I find out if my physician is vaccinated?**

Physicians are under no obligation to disclose their health status to their patients. If a physician does not wish to disclose their health status, patients have the right to ask what other protection methods, such as those listed above, are in place. Clinics are obligated to follow strict Infection Prevention and Control Standards that are designed to offer protection in the absence of staff or patient vaccination. Many clinics also undertake COVID-19 prevention strategies, which may include the use of barriers, requiring mask use by staff and patients, arranging for virtual care, postponing non-urgent visits and scheduling appointments.

### **Can medical clinic staff ask me about my vaccination status?**

Yes. It is essential for medical staff to know your immediate health history. Clinic staff may ask about a patient’s vaccination status as part of their point-of-care risk assessment and are likely to strongly encourage vaccination to any patient who was eligible.

### **Can my physician refuse to see me if I am not vaccinated?**

Patients who are not fully vaccinated cannot be denied care. Clinics are obligated to follow strict Infection Prevention and Control Standards. These measures are designed to offer protection from transmission in the absence of staff or patient vaccination. Many clinics also undertake COVID-19 prevention strategies, which may include the use of barriers, requiring mask use by staff and patients, arranging for virtual care, postponing non-urgent visits and scheduling appointments.

### **What can I do if I can't qualify for an exemption, but remain concerned about COVID-19 vaccinations?**

COVID-19 vaccination is safe and effective for nearly every individual aged 12 or older and CPSA strongly recommends COVID-19 vaccination to anyone who is eligible. To inform your personal decision-making on COVID-19 vaccination, we recommend resources provided by [Immunize Canada](#), the [National Advisory Committee on Immunization](#) and [Alberta Health](#).