

## Public service announcements and news releases

- **[Fourth dose booster expansion starting April 11:](#)** Starting Monday, April 11, Saskatchewan residents most at risk for severe health outcomes due to COVID-19 will be eligible to receive their second booster dose (fourth dose) four months following their third dose, including all Saskatchewan residents 70 years and older, and all residents of First Nations communities and the Northern Service Administration District 50 years and older.
- **[Government Signs Multi-Year Virtual Care Contract:](#)** The Government of Saskatchewan is pleased to announce Lumeca, a Saskatchewan company, is the successful vendor in an RFP to replace the platform for secure video conferencing for healthcare professionals.

## SHA Robotic Surgical Program announced in Saskatchewan

April 8, 2022



*Donor Merlis Belsher taking a close look at the state-of-the-art robotic surgical system, the Da Vinci Surgical System. Photo by Matt Smith*

Advances in robotic technology have opened the door for the expansion of robotic-assisted surgery around the world, and now Saskatchewan is joining this modern advancement. On Monday, April 4, the Saskatchewan Health Authority (SHA) - in partnership with Ministry of Health, Emmanuel Health, St. Paul's Hospital, St. Paul's Hospital Foundation, the University of Saskatchewan and donors - announced the introduction of a Robotic Surgical Program with the purchase of a state-of-the-art robotic surgical system, the Da Vinci Surgical System.

Robotic-assisted surgery systems reduce complications and shorten hospital stays for patients, creating additional hospital capacity to perform more procedures. Technology and innovation like this will play a key part in reducing the surgical backlog created by the COVID-19 pandemic and ramp up surgical services offered by the SHA.

The surgical robot will be located at St. Paul's Hospital in Saskatoon and will be used in urology, head and neck cancer, thoracic surgery and gynecological oncology procedures. It is anticipated that the first robot-assisted procedure will be performed in the fall of 2022.

Surgical robots are controlled by specially-trained surgeons during all phases of surgical procedures. The surgeon's movements are translated through sensitive fibers of the machine with precision to perform minimally invasive surgery.

Monday's announcement helps to strengthen commitment to the SHA's vision, 'Healthy People, Health Saskatchewan'. The SHA is proud of the teams that are developing this new program which will provide a new service for Saskatchewan residents.

"Acquiring this surgical robotic system will enhance our ability to provide state-of-the-art surgical service to the people of Saskatchewan. We firmly believe that patients should have access to the best surgical care here at home," said Dr. Ivar Mendez, Provincial Head of Surgery.

As robotic technology continues to develop and the SHA acquires experience with robotic surgery, it is expected the program will expand to include other surgical specialties and surgical centers in Saskatchewan.

The cost of purchasing this robotic system is approximately \$2.5 million. The Ministry of Health will contribute up to \$1 million to fund the purchase and will cover annual operational expenses estimated at \$160,000 in year one and increasing to almost \$800,000 by year five when the system is fully implemented. St. Paul's Hospital Foundation has committed to raising over \$1.5 million for the robot and the Merlis Belsher Family is donating a remarkable \$1 million and providing up to an additional \$100,000 as a matched gift. The robot will be named "Daryl" after Merlis Belsher's late son.

For additional information, read the [Government of Saskatchewan's news release](#).

<https://www.saskhealthauthority.ca/news-events/news/sha-robotic-surgical-program-announced-saskatchewan>.

## **| COVID-19 | Suspension of sotrovimab monoclonal antibody treatment**

**April 8, 2022**

In October 2021, the Saskatchewan Health Authority began offering Sotrovimab, a monoclonal antibody treatment for mild COVID-19 cases. Since then, we have treated hundreds of high-risk patients who were diagnosed with COVID-19, and we are proud to have led Canada in early therapeutics, being the first province-wide monoclonal program and administering the first dose of Sotrovimab in the country.

However, recent studies have shown reduced efficacy of Sotrovimab against Omicron's BA.2 subvariant. Based on this evidence and the growing prevalence of Omicron BA.2 in Saskatchewan, Sotrovimab use will be suspended in Saskatchewan after April 7, 2022.

The Saskatchewan Health Authority (SHA) and Saskatchewan Prescription Drug Plan continues to offer Paxlovid, an oral antiviral, to eligible patients diagnosed with COVID-19.

- Paxlovid is an antiviral medication that helps prevent COVID-19 from spreading in your body.
- Treatment with Paxlovid must start within five days of symptom onset. The medication consists of tablets taken every 12 hours for five days.
- Information on Paxlovid [eligibility](#) is available at [Saskatchewan.ca/covid-19](https://www.saskatchewan.ca/covid-19).

Future recommendations regarding the use of sotrovimab and early therapeutics will continue to be guided by rapidly emerging evidence.

## **Living with COVID-19: Masking Choices**

**April 11, 2022**

Everyone needs to be aware of their own personal risks for COVID-19 and make personal decisions about what they need to do to feel safe from developing severe disease.

While there is no mandate to wear masks in public spaces in Saskatchewan, some people may choose to do so based on their personal risk assessment. And that's okay.

Masking can protect others from individuals who may have COVID-19 by preventing respiratory droplets from travelling through the air when they cough, sneeze, talk, shout, or sing. Wearing a mask means the droplets stay in the mask. Wearing a mask also protects the individual wearing one by preventing any droplets in the air from reaching their mouth or nose.

People who are or who love someone who is at risk for developing severe COVID-19 disease if exposed to the virus may still choose to wear a mask when out in public or at different events because of the protection masks provide. Some parents may ask their children to continue to wear masks at school to provide a higher level of protection for themselves and others in their families. And some individuals and families may be perfectly comfortable not masking when they are out in public because their risk of developing severe COVID-19 is low.

All of it – whatever you decide – is okay. We're all individuals and it is our individual choice whether to wear a mask or not.

However, please note that to protect the extremely vulnerable patients within SHA facilities, those entering are still required to put on a fresh medical mask. Certain businesses and venues may still have a masking requirement in place but in most other instances of everyday life, whether you wear a mask is up to you based on your own personal risk assessment. Please simply respect the choice of others, whatever they decide.

<https://www.saskhealthauthority.ca/news-events/news/living-covid-19-masking-choice>

## **/ COVID-19 / Novavax COVID-19 vaccine now available**

April 12, 2022



*The Novavax COVID-19 vaccine is now available in Saskatchewan.*

Effective April 11, 2022, the Novavax COVID-19 vaccine became available in limited quantities in Saskatchewan.

The Novavax COVID-19 vaccine:

- is available to residents 18 years and older;
- requires two doses, at least 21 days apart;
- is available for third/fourth doses;
- is only available in limited quantities at select SHA walk-in clinics, or;
- can be booked in advance by calling 1-833-SASKVAX (727-5829).

Novavax is a protein-based vaccine – a well-known and safe technology that has been in use for decades, and is used in many hepatitis and influenza vaccines.

This vaccine contains a protein that is found on the surface of the COVID-19 virus and an adjuvant, which is a substance to boost your immune response, called Matrix-M. While mRNA (Pfizer, Moderna) and Viral Vector (AstraZeneca, Johnson and Johnson) vaccines tell your body how to create proteins found on the COVID-19 virus that trigger your immune system to respond, protein-based vaccines like Novavax have purified proteins present already which trigger our immune system to create antibodies that help protect us against serious illness and death.

Clinical trials of the vaccine showed that Novavax prevented serious illness from COVID-19 90 per cent of the time.

For more information on Novavax and other available COVID-19 vaccines, and to book an appointment, visit [Saskatchewan.ca/covid19-vaccine](https://www.saskhealthauthority.ca/covid19-vaccine).

[View this story on the Saskatchewan Health Authority website, and share it with family and friends.](#)

## EMS expands Community Paramedicine

April 12, 2022



Following an additional [investment in Emergency Medical Services \(EMS\) and paramedicine](#) in the 2022-23 provincial budget, EMS is expanding Community Paramedicine (CP) services throughout the province. CP is a model of care where Paramedics working in the community apply their training and skills in “non-traditional” community-based environments, often outside the usual emergency response and transportation model. Although services will vary by location, some examples of CP care may include clinical assessments, direct patient care, immunizations, and mental health supports, just to name a few.

CP builds additional capacity within health care systems by collaborating with existing services and teams to provide patient centred care. The program utilizes the scope of practice of paramedics to provide assessments, treatments, monitoring and supports “closer to home”. By addressing patient needs at their home, it reduces patient travel and addresses capacity issues in local Emergency Departments. There is no cost to the patient for accessing community paramedicine services.

If you are interested in learning more about Community Paramedicine in your area please contact Sherri Julé Director, EMS North and CP ([Sherri.Jule@saskhealthauthority.ca](mailto:Sherri.Jule@saskhealthauthority.ca)), Erika Stebbings Manager, CP ([Erika.Stebbing@saskhealthauthority.ca](mailto:Erika.Stebbing@saskhealthauthority.ca)) or your local EMS manager.

## COVID-19 and pneumonia

April 13, 2022

*I tested positive for COVID; now the doctor says I have pneumonia – which is it?*

It may be both. **Pneumonia can be caused by COVID-19.**

Pneumonia is a lung infection that causes inflammation in the air sacs inside your lungs, and it causes severe shortness of breath. These tiny sacs fill up with fluid and pus and make it hard to breathe. It can be caused by viruses, including COVID-19, along with other organisms such as bacteria.

Classic COVID-19 symptoms include sore throat, runny nose, sneezing, new or worsening cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, a temperature of 38C or more, fatigue or weakness, chills, muscle or body aches, loss of smell or taste, headache, abdominal pain, diarrhea and vomiting. If your COVID-19 infection is causing pneumonia, you may also experience severe shortness of breath, rapid heartbeat and rapid breathing, dizziness and heavy sweating on top of those symptoms.

Often, it's the patients with severe pneumonia caused by COVID-19 who end up needing critical care.

“It's important that if you start to feel significantly worse, develop shortness of breath or have a cough that produces chest pain that you seek medical care,” noted Dr. John Froh, deputy Chief Medical Officer, pandemic and Emergency Operations Centre co-chief of Defensive Operations with the Saskatchewan Health Authority.

Pneumonia is a serious complication and requires treatment. If you experience symptoms, it is important to seek medical help.

<https://www.saskhealthauthority.ca/news-events/news/covid-19-and-pneumonia>

## Patient booking system reaches one-million milestone

April 14, 2022

In 2021, the Saskatchewan Health Authority was tasked with delivering COVID-19 vaccine to Saskatchewan people and created an online booking system for people to book their vaccine appointments where and when they most desired.

The SHA's Digital Health team delivered that patient-centred system – the Patient Booking System (PBS) – in record time. Launched March 11, it underwent continual improvement based on public feedback. On October 5, influenza vaccine bookings were added and bookings for COVID-19 tests were included from November 30, 2021 to February 7, 2022.

**The system has now surpassed one million appointments booked.** Since launch to now, 76 per cent of appointments have been made using the PBS online by the public, while the remainder have been booked by SHA staff.

“This project has been challenging, yet very rewarding to work on. It has been incredible to see how our work on the Patient Booking System has impacted our communities and the people of Saskatchewan,” noted Caitlin Hanson, analyst with SHA Digital Health.

Hanson is one of 34 people who have supported the PBS since its inception. Currently there are two teams of four supporting the PBS's day-to-day operations and improvements.

“Our team has played an outstanding role with implementing the Patient Booking System,” noted Erica Pederson, acting Executive Director of Digital Health. “The development and launch team worked so hard to get the site ready, and our support teams have really done an amazing job of keeping the Patient Booking System working well ever since. We are proud of the contributions we have made to the pandemic response and the teams we get to work alongside in every corner of the province.”

“I don't think we can overstate the impact this system has had on the rollout of COVID-19 vaccine in Saskatchewan,” said Michelle Mula, acting Vice President - Infrastructure, Information and Support for the SHA. “It has easily allowed clients around the province to book an appointment to receive a vaccine with the SHA – or later, to book a COVID-19 test – where and when they desired. That it was able to be created and launched so quickly is a testament to the knowledge and skill of the team that developed it, and the importance that was placed on it by the health-care system as a whole. I'm extremely proud of this team, and what they've been able to do with this system.”

*Appointments are now available on the Patient Booking System [for fourth dose boosters](#) for Saskatchewan residents 70 years and older. Others eligible for fourth dose boosters, including all residents of First Nations communities and the Northern Service Administration District 50 years and older, can call SASKVAX (1-833-727-5829) to book an appointment.*

[View this story on the Saskatchewan Health Authority website, and share it with family and friends.](#)



## Fourth Dose/second Booster COVID-19 Immunizations help protect our most vulnerable population

April 20, 2022

As of Monday, April 11, a second booster dose (fourth dose) of COVID-19 vaccine is available at least four months following the third dose for:

- All residents 70 years and older
- All residents of First Nations communities and the Northern Service Administration District (NSAD) 50 years and older

It is anticipated that eligibility will be expanded to those 50 years and older in early May.

As well, **all residents aged 12 and older may now receive their third dose four months after the second**. Those eligible for a fourth dose may receive it four months after the third. Previously the interval was five months.

COVID-19 is not done with us yet, so **we must continue to treat every health-care encounter as an opportunity to vaccinate**. As we endure the sixth wave of COVID, hospitalizations are once again increasing, particularly in light of the Omicron variant and its even more infectious BA.2 subvariant. Even though Omicron BA.2 is more transmissible, having three or four doses of vaccine protects against hospitalization, severe illness and death.

Help reduce the strain on our healthcare system, keep our loved ones safe, and stay on the path to “normal” life by continuing to encourage vaccination. Your support is more important now than ever.

For more information on COVID-19 vaccines, and to find or book an appointment, visit [Saskatchewan.ca/COVID19-vaccine](https://saskatchewan.ca/COVID19-vaccine).

## Ages 12 to 17: COVID-19 Immunizations now four months between doses

April 20, 2022

The time is now to get your COVID-19 booster.

Residents in Saskatchewan 12 to 17 years are eligible now to take the third dose or booster **four months after their second dose**, instead of five months. The COVID-19 virus is still in our communities and easily transmissible. Vaccination and boosters do provide protection against the variants of concern.

It is never too late to get the first, second and booster dose to protect yourself from hospitalization, serious illness and death. Even if you had COVID-19 previously, getting your immunizations is the best protection against the Omicron variant and the BA.2 subvariant.

The time for a fourth dose for severely immunocompromised 12 to 17 year old individuals is **three months following completion of a third dose** in their primary series.

Be aware and be better protected with vaccination, plus the practices that go a long way to reducing spread of COVID-19: wearing a mask, regular rapid testing, consistent handwashing and staying home when you feel sick.



More on the phases between vaccinations for all residents eligible for third and fourth doses can be found at [saskatchewan.ca/covid-19](https://saskatchewan.ca/covid-19).

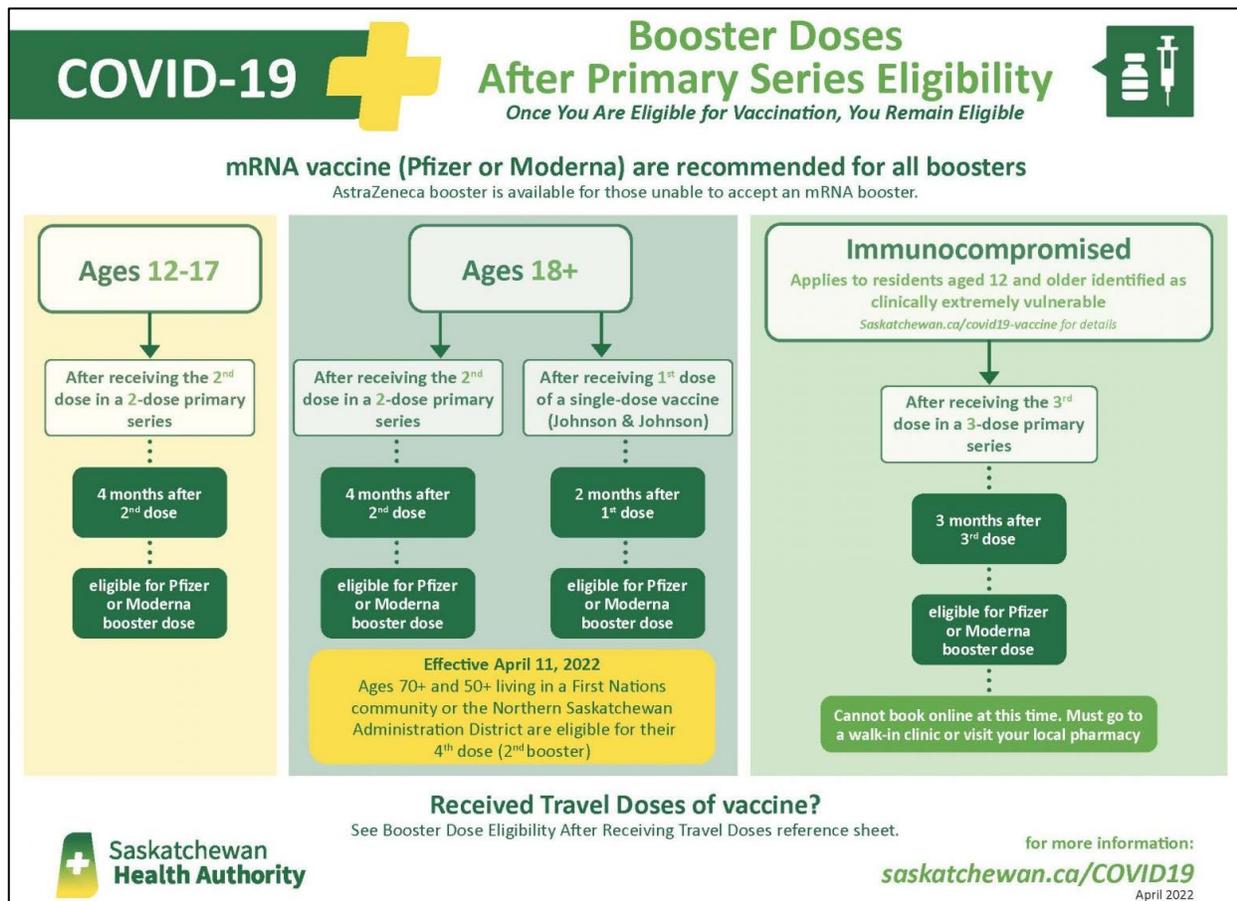
The Easter break is a perfect time for youth aged 12 to 17 and their families to get their boosters at SHA clinics and [participating pharmacies](#). Book an [appointment or visit a walk-in location](#). It is never too late.

**Are you confused about when to take your next vaccine dose?**

**New Information as of April 11, 2022:**

The eligibility between third and fourth booster doses is now **four months** after a third dose for people 70 years and older and 50 years and older in First Nation communities and the Northern Saskatchewan Administration District. Previously, the time lapse between the third and fourth doses was five months.

Please see the image below for when your next vaccine dose is due:



Vaccine Doses Eligibility Chart

[View this story on the Saskatchewan Health Authority website, and share it with family and friends](#)



## **/ COVID-19 /** Living with COVID-19: What do I do if I feel sick?

April 21, 2022

Prior to the pandemic, it was common to go about our daily routines even if we didn't feel completely well.

"I don't feel that bad," we would say. "I can still do what I usually do."

The COVID-19 pandemic has challenged that attitude, especially when it comes to symptoms like coughing or sneezing that previously would have been brushed off as "just a cold." People were forced to decide if they should still go places and see people if they were feeling slightly under the weather, in case they were experiencing symptoms of COVID-19.

"Instead of only considering whether they could do their job or go to school, people had to also consider whether they would get others sick, and that is a huge shift in thinking," noted Dr. Johnmark Opondo, deputy medical health officer for the Saskatchewan Health Authority.

Saskatchewan people pride themselves on their work ethic, but during the pandemic, they have also been asked to keep others safe, which was why public health measures were put in place. While the mandatory measures under a public health order have ended, individuals need to continue to make the best decision based on what we know about COVID and stay home when they are feeling sick.

"It's best to stay home and rest. Not only will you recover more quickly, you will prevent whatever virus you have contracted from spreading," stated Dr. Opondo.

For those who work, staying home means using a sick day. It's important – even if your workplace does not provide sick days – to inform your workplace that you are home ill and keep them informed of your recovery.

"Resting instead of pushing yourself to go to work can result in a faster recovery, and can mean fewer missed days of work," said Dr. Opondo. "So it makes sense, even if you don't have sick days as an option, to look after yourself early so you can get back to work faster."

Employers need to understand in these pandemic times why we need to support sick employees to stay home.

"Missing one employee for a few days is a bit of a bother; having that sick worker come in could end up taking out a good chunk of your workforce which is much more serious," said Dr. Opondo.

One of the best things to do is to make a plan for when you get sick while you are still healthy. Have food and medicine in the house ahead of time so you don't have to go out, and have a plan for how you will stay away from the rest of the household so whatever you have doesn't spread. The pandemic isn't over yet; COVID-19 is still here.

[View this story on the Saskatchewan Health Authority website, and share it with family and friends.](#)

## **/ COVID-19 / QUICK LINKS:**

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[Testing Information](#)

[Vaccine Update](#)  
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