Information for Healthcare Professionals Only:

Strategies to Assist with Delivery of COVID-19 Vaccine to Special Needs Clients with Needle Phobias or Developmental Challenges

Immunization against COVID-19 is very important. For some clients, there is a perception that getting immunized is worse than getting the disease because of needle phobias. In addition, it may be difficult to help some clients with special needs understand the need and the procedure for the vaccine because of individual developmental challenges.

The following document provides some strategies for healthcare professionals about how they can support these clients and their needs:

1. Specific client needs should first be discussed with the individual’s primary care provider. They know the client best and likely have previous strategies related to previous procedural experiences.

2. Care providers can access AHS’ Commitment to Comfort (CTC) Resources. CTC aims to reduce pain and distress with any needle or medical procedure to improve comfort and overall client experience. Several resources for immunizers have been developed and are available on the [COVID-19 Resources Table for AHS Staff & Health Professionals](https://www.ahealthservices.ca/vaccine/comfort/resources) or through the links below:
   - Orientation – for immunizers
   - Summary – for immunizers – one one-pager version of the Orientation
   - Positive Language Guide – for immunizers
   - Poster: COVID-19 Immunization Distraction Techniques [8.5x11](https://www.ahealthservices.ca/vaccine/comfort/resources) and [11x17](https://www.ahealthservices.ca/vaccine/comfort/resources)
   - Commitment to Comfort Podcast – for immunizers
   - Narrated PowerPoint – for immunizers
   - Commitment to Care Patient Resources can be found at [ahs.ca/vaccinecomfort](https://www.ahealthservices.ca/vaccine/comfort/resources)
   - Please also see [Appendix A: Commitment to Comfort Resources for COVID Immunization memo](https://www.ahealthservices.ca/vaccine/comfort/resources).

3. If additional support is required, consider booking into a Low Stimulus clinics in Calgary or Edmonton Zones, or connecting with the local Public Health Clinic to see how their needs can be accommodated:
   
a. **Calgary Zone:** A Low Stimulus clinic is available in Calgary. Appointments at this clinic can be made by calling Health Link 811 where a Registered Nurse can perform an assessment and make a referral to the clinic. For more information, visit the [AHS website](https://www.ahealthservices.ca/vaccine/comfort/resources).

   b. **Central Zone:** Contact the Central Zone Immunization Triage Team by calling 780-312-7972 or emailing [COVID-19.CenZImmsTriage@albertahealthservices.ca](mailto:COVID-19.CenZImmsTriage@albertahealthservices.ca) to see how they can accommodate your specialized needs at your immunization appointment.

   c. **Edmonton Zone:** A Low Stimulus clinic is available in Spruce Grove. Appointments at this clinic can be made by calling Health Link at 811 where a Registered Nurse can perform an assessment and make a referral. For more information, visit the [AHS website](https://www.ahealthservices.ca/vaccine/comfort/resources).
d. **North Zones**: Contact local AHS Public Health or Community Health Services office to discuss how they can accommodate specialized needs at immunization appointment. Visit [ahs.ca](http://ahs.ca) for contact information.

e. **South Zone**: Contact local AHS Public Health or Community Health Services office to discuss how they can accommodate specialized needs at immunization appointment. Visit [ahs.ca](http://ahs.ca) for contact information.

4. **Anticipated Procedures under Sedation:**
   For clients who are currently scheduled for dental procedures or operative procedures that will require sedation or anaesthesia, the family and primary care provider could consider requesting that the immunization be done during that procedure. Informed consent will need to be included in the operative consenting process.

5. **In cases of complex client needs**, the **Primary care health care provider/Physician** who knows the client best could consider the following:
   a. **Clients >18 years of age**
      - **Calgary**: Go to [www.specialistlink.ca](http://www.specialistlink.ca) and in Calgary, and request an anaesthesia/pain management consultation
      - **Edmonton**: Contact the Virtual Hospital for advice and way-finding at 780-916-6150
      - **Central**: Central Zone Immunization Triage Team as the point of contact for section 3: 780-312-7972 or email [COVID-19.CenZImmsTriage@albertahealthservices.ca](mailto:COVID-19.CenZImmsTriage@albertahealthservices.ca)
      - **North and South Zones**: Consult Public Health Leads who would discuss with anaesthesia support
   
   b. **Clients <18 years of age**
      - **Calgary**: Consult Vaccination Clinic Medical Lead through Paediatric Infectious Disease On Call (Alberta Children’s Hospital Switchboard 403-955-7211) at as per [Appendix B](#), [Appendix C](#) and [Appendix D](#).
      - **Edmonton**: Contact Paediatric Infectious Disease through Stollery Hospital (Switchboard 780-407-8822)
      - **Central**: Central Zone Immunization Triage Team as the point of contact for section 3: 780-312-7972 or email [COVID-19.CenZImmsTriage@albertahealthservices.ca](mailto:COVID-19.CenZImmsTriage@albertahealthservices.ca)
      - **North and South Zones**: Consult Public Health Leads who would discuss with paediatric/anaesthesia support

[COVID-19 Information for Community Physicians | Alberta Health Services](#) for additional community physician information
Date: March 25, 2021

To: Zone Emergency Operations Centres (ZEOCs)
    Immunizers and Immunization Teams

From: Commitment to Comfort - AHS COVID-19 Vaccine Taskforce

RE: Commitment to Comfort Resources for COVID-19 Immunization

Please share the following information broadly within your Zones and teams.

Commitment to Comfort (CTC) is an evidence-based quality improvement initiative, which was initially developed at the Alberta Children’s Hospital in 2014 and has now been expanded to support adult populations. CTC has five simple core principles, which are derived from research, current clinical practice guidelines and are supported by internationally renowned experts in vaccine pain and fear management.

Up to 25 per cent of adults have needle fears, this represents approximately 900,000 Albertans. About 10 per cent of those adults have such significant fear that they avoid immunization. CTC reduces pain and distress with any needle or medical procedure to improve comfort and overall client experience.

The Five CTC Principles are:

1. Make a Comfort Plan
2. Use Positive language
3. Position Comfortably
4. Use Distraction
5. Use Numbing Cream

The CTC team within the AHS COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force has expanded these principles and strategies to adult populations for the COVID-19 immunization program in Alberta. These principles have also been integrated into AHS’ provincial COVID-19 immunization policy.

Several CTC resources have been updated and developed for immunizers and clients:

- Orientation – for immunizers
- Summary – for immunizers – one one-pager version of the Orientation
- Positive Language Guide – for immunizers
• Poster: COVID-19 Immunization Distraction Techniques 8.5x11 and 11x17 – this poster is available in two sizes and can be printed and displayed at immunization sites, as you see fit.
• Numbing Cream Guide – for immunizers and clients
• Client Summary – for clients

*Supplementary Resources*
• Commitment to Comfort Podcast – for immunizers
• Narrated PowerPoint – for immunizers
• Narrated PowerPoint – for clients

Please share these resources with your teams to inform your work. We ask that you embed these resources into current immunization practices.

If you are aware that a client may have needle fears, we encourage you to share the Client Summary, Distraction Techniques Poster and Numbing Cream Guide with the client in advance of their COVID-19 immunization, when possible.

We would like to thank our partners for extensive collaboration in the development of these resources, including:

• AHS COVID-19 Vaccine Taskforce
• Zone Public Health
• Communicable Disease Control
• Engagement & Patient Experience Team, Quality Health Improvement
• Provincial Patient and Family Advisory Group
• Primary Care partners
• Alberta Children’s Hospital (ACH) Commitment to Comfort team
• Child and Youth Advisory Committee (CAYAC)
• ACH Family Advisory Council
• University of Calgary Pain Researchers

Thank you for your continued support.
ACH Pediatric COVID-19 Vaccination Clinic

Dear colleagues and clinic leads,

The Alberta Children’s Hospital team has established a COVID-19 Vaccination Clinic to support those children and adolescents who are eligible for vaccine but would not be well served by the routinely available vaccination opportunities (mass venues, pharmacies etc.).

Child life support is available for these patients to make the immunization process as calm and comfortable as possible.

Criteria:
1. Are eligible as determined by the phase of vaccination set by Alberta Health (COVID-19 vaccine program | Alberta.ca)
2. Have one of the following indications leading to challenges with routine vaccination opportunities:
   a. Severe neurodevelopmental or behavioral challenges precluding vaccination in a public setting, possibly requiring Child Life support
   b. On continuous BiPap, and/or tracheostomy +/- ventilation
   c. Active Left Ventricular Assist Device or similar
   d. Severe Needle Phobia requiring Child Life support
   e. Significant mobility restrictions (wheelchair, extra equipment, etc.) making public venues additionally challenging
   f. HIV infection (many of these patients won’t disclose this to immunizers and thus will avoid public venues)

If you have any questions around the eligibility or appropriateness of your patient, please do not hesitate to contact Dr. Otto Vanderkooi (Division Chief, Pediatric Infectious Diseases) at otto.vanderkooi@ahs.ca

At this time we will be scheduling the clinic by physician/NP referral to ensure we have the right supports in place. Attached please see the referral form that can be faxed or scanned back to the Pediatric Infectious Diseases Clinic.
ACH Pediatric COVID-19 Vaccination Clinic Referral Form

The Alberta Children’s Hospital team has established a COVID-19 Vaccination Clinic to support those children and adolescents who are eligible for vaccine but would not be well served by the routinely available vaccination opportunities (mass venues, pharmacies etc.).

Criteria:
1. Are eligible as determined by the phase of vaccination set by Alberta Health (COVID-19 vaccine program | Alberta.ca)

AND
2. Have one of the following indications leading to challenges with routine vaccination opportunities:
   a. Severe neurodevelopmental or behavioral challenges precluding vaccination in a public setting, possible requiring Child Life support
   b. On continuous BiPap, and/or tracheostomy +/- ventilation
   c. Active Left Ventricular Assist Device or similar
   d. Severe Needle Phobia requiring Child Life support
   e. Significant mobility restrictions (wheel chair, extra equipment, etc.) making public venues additionally challenging
   f. HIV infection (many of these patients won’t disclose this to immunizers and thus avoid public venues)

Patient ID Label:

Criterion precluding patient to be seen at routine vaccine opportunity:

Is Child Life Support Required?: Yes/No

Referring Physician:

Date:
Identify child that requires additional support to obtain Vaccine

Physician referral to Vaccination Clinic Medical Lead through Paediatric Infectious Disease On Call

Appointment Booked. Supports include: Childlife, Music Therapy, Low Stimuli, Increased Privacy and Commitment to Comfort Principles

Unable to complete Vaccination. Referral to ACH SCP: 
SCP.Calgary.ACH@ahs.ca

Referral reviewed by panel

Forward to Public Health and Medical Officer of Health

Boooked for Vaccination under Sedation: 
ACHSedationService@ahs.ca

Unable to Vaccinate

Inappropriate referral returned to Physician

Vaccination Successful

Vaccination not indicated

Vaccination Successful