

FAQs for Patients/Public

Remdesivir (antiviral medication) Outpatient Treatment

Alberta Health Services (AHS) is offering Remdesivir to some Albertans to treat mild to moderate COVID-19 symptoms. Patients who might benefit from this medication will get the treatment at an AHS site, or from the [EMS Mobile Health Unit \(MIH\)](#) in their homes if appropriate.

Remdesivir is not a replacement for immunization against COVID-19. **Albertans are strongly encouraged to get the COVID-19 vaccine.**

Paxlovid™ is generally the preferred therapy for COVID-19, because it is taken in pill form.

Remdesivir must be given by injection (intravenously) and is made available to those who may benefit from treatment who cannot take Paxlovid™.

What is Remdesivir?

Remdesivir is an antiviral medication that prevents the replication of the coronavirus that causes COVID-19. It is administered intravenously over 30 minutes.

Has Remdesivir been approved for use?

Health Canada provided authorization in October 2020 for use of Remdesivir in Canada to treat adults and adolescents (aged 12 years and older) who test positive for COVID-19.

Health Canada has authorized Remdesivir based on limited clinical testing in humans. Learn more at [Health Canada consumer information](#).

What is Remdesivir used for?

Remdesivir is used in outpatients to treat mild to moderate COVID-19 that has been confirmed by testing. Remdesivir is used to prevent these symptoms from getting worse in people who have a high risk of needing to go to the hospital for COVID-19. Remdesivir is also approved to treat individuals hospitalized due to COVID-19.

Who can get Remdesivir?

In Alberta, Remdesivir is approved for adults who:

- have a positive confirmed test for COVID-19

- have mild to moderate COVID-19 symptoms
- can receive the treatment within seven days from when symptoms started

Treatment will be offered to patients who are most likely to develop severe COVID-19 illness and are at a greater risk of being hospitalized. The evidence around who is most at risk for severe outcomes is evolving. These criteria are guidelines, and a healthcare provider can still assess patients on a case-by-case basis for appropriateness. These guidelines will continue to be reviewed as evidence evolves.

Patients considered high risk for severe outcomes

1. Immunocompromised

- have received a transplant – solid organ or stem cell (Transplant patients should **NOT** receive Paxlovid™ due to the potential for life-threatening drug interactions but are eligible for other therapies, such as Remdesivir.) Transplant patients should be assessed and treated through the centralized Outpatient Treatment Program by calling 1-844-343-0971 or through their transplant specialist. All prescribers in the community including Primary Care physicians, Nurse Practitioners and Pharmacists should refer transplant patients to the centralized team or the patient's specialist/team.
- is an oncology patient who has received a dose of any IV or oral chemotherapy or other immunosuppressive treatment since December 2020
- has an inflammatory condition (e.g., rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, inflammatory bowel disease) and has received a dose of any systemic immunosuppressive treatment since December 2020.
- has sickle cell anemia
- has had their spleen removed
- has pulmonary hypertension
- is receiving treatment for tuberculosis

2. Living in long-term care or designated supportive living

3. Age 18 or older with three or more high risk comorbidities*

4. Age 50 or older (40 or older for First Nations, Métis or Inuit) with two or more high risk comorbidities*

5. Age 60 or older (50 or older for First Nations, Métis or Inuit) with one or more high risk comorbidities*

* High risk comorbidities include:

- received fewer than three doses of COVID vaccine
- diabetes (taking medication for treatment)
- obesity (BMI >30)
- chronic kidney disease (estimated glomerular filtration rate, <60 ml per minute per 1.73 m² of body-surface area)
- congestive heart failure (New York Heart Association class II, III, or IV)
- chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and moderate-to-severe asthma
- pregnancy

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Why is this medication limited to people with COVID symptoms for less than seven days?

Remdesivir works best when it's administered in early infection. If you have [symptoms of COVID-19](#), it's important to get tested as soon as possible. This gives AHS time to determine if Remdesivir is right for you.

Can Remdesivir be used in patients under 18 years of age?

For those aged 12 to 17, Remdesivir may be considered if it is deemed appropriate by a healthcare provider. For those with COVID-19 in this age group who are immunocompromised and potentially eligible for Remdesivir, a consultation with a Pediatric Infectious Disease specialist needs to occur to determine whether Remdesivir is an appropriate treatment. Health Canada has not approved Remdesivir use for patients under the age of 12.

How was it determined which patients are most likely to benefit from Remdesivir?

Guidelines for which patients were considered most likely to benefit from treatment with Remdesivir were determined by a panel of experts based on medical research and Alberta-specific data that helped to identify groups of patients with higher chances of serious outcomes from COVID-19 disease.

Why is pregnancy included if pregnant patients were not included in the study?

While pregnancy was not included in the clinical trial leading to approval of Remdesivir, Health Canada notes use can be considered when the benefits outweigh the risks to the mother and fetus. This is based on the increased risk of progression to severe COVID-19 in pregnant individuals and the overall safety profile.

How will eligible patients be identified and informed?

You may hear about Remdesivir from your family doctor or another healthcare provider.

If you fall into one of the categories above and are interested in treatment or learning more about Remdesivir, visit ahs.ca/covidopt. If you think you might benefit from

treatment based on the risk factors above and you are interested in receiving treatment, you should **leave a message at the dedicated line at 1-844-343-0971**. Staff will call you back and ask you some questions before referring you to a healthcare professional who will determine if Remdesivir is right for you, get your consent and book your appointment.

What if I tested positive using an at-home Rapid Antigen Test?

If you have symptoms of COVID-19, have received a positive test result from a rapid/at-home test and you are high risk for severe outcomes according to the guidelines above, there are two options;

1. Contact your family physician to book an assessment,
OR
2. Call **the dedicated line at 1-844-343-0971** and leave a message. A staff member will call you back to ask some initial questions before referring you to a healthcare provider on the Outpatient Treatment Program team.

How is Remdesivir given?

Remdesivir is given intravenously (through a vein) by a qualified health professional. The medicine is given over 30 minutes. You will be watched closely for another 15 to 30 minutes after getting the treatment. You can expect the appointment to last about 1.5 hours, including setup time.

Where will the treatment be given?

Treatment will be provided to patients either at an AHS clinic, or by [EMS MIH](#) in your home, in the areas they service, depending on your location in the province. Details on appointment booking will be provided to patients who are prescribed the medication. In order to receive the infusion, you may need to travel to a designated clinic.

How will I be monitored after receiving the treatment?

If you are treated with Remdesivir, You will also get an information sheet after your infusion telling you about possible symptoms and side effects to watch for.

Monitor your health and call your family doctor or usual healthcare provider about any side effects or COVID-19 symptoms that get worse. Or call Health Link at 811 to speak to a registered nurse. **For urgent help, call 911.**

You should also follow up with your family doctor or healthcare provider 10 days after your COVID-19 symptoms started.

What are the possible side effects of Remdesivir?

Current clinical trials have found relatively mild side effects in a very small percentage of people who get Remdesivir. Side effects that have been found include:

- nausea
- headache

- cough
- shortness of breath

Since there is limited clinical data about Remdesivir, you might have unexpected side effects that have not been reported yet. The healthcare provider who does the infusion will monitor you during the treatment and one hour after you receive Remdesivir. They will provide treatment, as needed, to manage any side effects you have.

For more details on avoiding potential side effects and what to watch for, see the [Health Canada consumer information](#).

What should be done if my COVID-19 symptoms get worse?

Even with Remdesivir treatment, your COVID-19 symptoms may continue or get worse.

- Monitor your health and tell the healthcare provider about your symptoms when they call you after your treatment.
- Call Health Link at 811 or your healthcare provider/family doctor if you have more questions or concerns.
- Call 911 right away if you have severe symptoms such as:
 - difficulty breathing
 - severe chest pain
 - feelings of confusion
 - loss of consciousness

Learn more about [managing your COVID-19 symptoms](#).

Can I get vaccinated for COVID-19 after I get Remdesivir?

Yes. But you should wait until you are fully recovered from COVID symptoms.

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Why is Alberta using this drug?

Remdesivir can prevent mild to moderate COVID-19 from becoming more severe and requiring people to be admitted to the hospital. Remdesivir can be especially helpful for patients who might otherwise have a high risk of being hospitalized or developing more serious health problems due to COVID-19.

Is Remdesivir being used elsewhere?

Yes. Outpatient antiviral treatments like Remdesivir are currently being used in many areas of the United States, as well as in Saskatchewan, Ontario, British Columbia. AHS is working with other health authorities in Canada so that we can all learn how to use using this treatment most effectively.

Do I need to pay for this treatment?

No. The treatment is covered and paid for by Alberta Health. If a healthcare provider orders this treatment for you, you do not need to pay for it.

For more information on the Remdesivir or other outpatient treatments, visit ahs.ca/covidopt.