

Virtual Home Hospital

Frequently Asked Questions for Patients and Caregivers

You might be able to receive hospital-level care from your own home through an Alberta Health Services (AHS) Virtual Home Hospital. These programs allow eligible patients the opportunity to leave the hospital early and might even help you avoid having to stay in a physical hospital.

These frequently asked questions were created for patients who have been, or might be, referred to a Virtual Home Hospital. They're meant to help you understand what this program is and how care is provided.

About Virtual Home Hospital

What healthcare providers are on the team?

- Your care team will include doctors and nurses, and might include nurse practitioners, pharmacists, community paramedics and other medical specialists or healthcare workers you might need. If you have a family doctor, they'll be updated about your care.
- If you have family or caregiver supporting you, they'll be supported as they help us care for you.

How will I receive care?

- Your care will be provided through virtual care technology (e.g., phone or video calls and remote patient monitoring). You might need to come to our location if we need to see you in person.
- We'll give you a kit that allows us to monitor your health remotely. This includes a blood pressure cuff, pulse oximeter and heart rate monitor, weigh scale and thermometer. We'll show you how to use these devices.
- If you need hands-on care in your home, our community paramedics and Home Care partners will provide it with your consent.
- Some of our patients require more hands-on care in their home, while others can have most of their care managed virtually.
- Despite being at home, you'll still be registered as a hospital patient and remain under the care of a hospital doctor.

What kind of care can I expect to receive from a Virtual Home Hospital?

- Once you're in our care, your team will set up a plan based on your specific needs. You'll receive:
 - Regular check-in visits, either by phone, video calls or in person at the Virtual Home Hospital site, if needed. In-home care is provided by community partners if you need it.
 - Medication management, including intravenous (IV) fluid, if needed.
 - Education to help you understand and manage your medical condition and treatment plan.
 - Any other care necessary, based on your treatment plan.
- You may also need lab work, medical tests and procedures as part of your care, and you will be connected with other healthcare providers and specialists as necessary.

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Who is eligible for Virtual Home Hospital care?

- You'll be assessed to make sure you meet specific medical criteria before you're admitted to a Virtual Home Hospital. We need to make sure you can safely receive care at home.
- Patients also need to:
 - be at least 18 years old and able to consent to being treated at home,
 - be able to communicate by phone or computer (language interpretation/translation are available) and are open to using technology,
 - be engaged and willing to participate in your care,
 - be functionally able to be in your home or other safe location where you choose to receive care (e.g., home is set-up to accommodate you), and
 - if necessary, have adequate support in place at home, such as having a caregiver.

Is Virtual Home Hospital safe?

- Yes. Virtual Home Hospitals have been safely providing care in Alberta since 2018, and around the world for much longer.
- We have safety protocols in place to ensure you and your caregivers can contact your care team or access support when you need it.

Will I still receive high quality care?

- Yes. AHS strives to provide high-quality, safe care to all patients, no matter where you're receiving care.
- Many past patients (86 percent) said in a survey that they believed the quality of care in a Virtual Home Hospital was "better" or "the same" as that of an in-person hospital.

Will members of my Virtual Home Hospital care team stay the same throughout my care?

- Every effort will be made to keep your care team the same once you become our patient. The goal is to keep your care consistent.
- Our doctors do rotate weekly, but each doctor will do a detailed report to the next doctor, so nothing is missed.

Are there benefits to Virtual Home Hospital?

- Many of our patients have reported high levels of satisfaction with the care they've received. They've also experienced more mobility and independence.
- You'll safely continue to receive the care you need while sleeping in your own bed, eating your own food and being surrounded by your own things. You'll also be with your family or caregivers.
- Receiving care at home can also lower your risk of some complications that might be more likely to happen in a hospital facility.

Can I say no to Virtual Home Hospital care?

- Yes. Virtual Home Hospital is optional. If you aren't comfortable with being care for at home, you can ask to continue your hospital care at an AHS facility.
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- If you're already a Virtual Home Hospital patient and decide you don't want to continue to receive care this way, let your care team know. They'll go over the options for you to continue receiving the care that you need. This may include returning to hospital to finish your treatment.

Is there a cost to use Virtual Home Hospital?

- There is no cost to receive care from Virtual Home Hospital for patients who live in Alberta. If you don't live in Alberta, we'll review your eligibility on a case-by-case basis.
- AHS provides you with the equipment that you need. You'll be asked to return the equipment at the end of your time with Virtual Home Hospital.
- AHS also covers the cost of medications that are given to you by a member of the Virtual Home Hospital care team, including community paramedics (e.g., IV medications). Medications that are required as part of your ongoing care are your responsibility.

How do I get referred to a Virtual Home Hospital?

- You must be referred by a doctor or nurse practitioner currently involved in your care. This can happen from a hospital unit or emergency department, or any outpatient clinic, including your family doctor or nurse practitioner as well as your Home Care team.

Information for current Virtual Home Hospital patients

How do I contact my care team?

- You and your family or caregivers will have a direct line to your Virtual Home Hospital care team during their operational hours, so you can connect with them. You will be given this information when you're admitted.
- If you need support after hours, you can contact Health Link (811). They can provide you with medical advice and take the next steps to address your concern.

What happens if my health changes while I'm a Virtual Home Hospital patient?

- Let your care team know if your health changes between visits. If it's not an emergency, we'll work with you to help manage your condition and do our best to keep you out of the hospital.
- If you need more care than we can provide you at home, you might need to return to the hospital. In that case, we'll connect with the hospital care team.

What do I do if I have a medical emergency?

- Call 911 or go to your nearest emergency department or urgent care centre immediately. Please tell them you're a Virtual Home Hospital patient.

Where do I go if I need to get diagnostic imaging (e.g., x-ray) or blood tests?

- If we refer you for diagnostic imaging (e.g., x-ray, MRI) or lab testing (e.g., blood work), we'll coordinate this appointment for you.
- Depending on your condition, blood work will either be done in your home, in the community or at an AHS facility.

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What happens when I am discharged from Virtual Home Hospital?

- Once discharged, your care will be transitioned to your family doctor, and they'll continue to follow-up with you. If you don't have a family doctor, you can use one of the [online tools](#) to help find one that is accepting new patients.
- If you have follow-up appointments scheduled, please make sure you go to them. Continue to take your medications as we've instructed you to do.
- Monitor yourself for worsening symptoms. If you notice any changes to your health, let your doctor know. Your family doctor can refer you back to us if they think you need additional short-term support.
- Please let us know if you're unable to find a family doctor or nurse practitioner in your area as soon as possible so we can make a plan by the time you leave the program.

For more information

If you have more questions about Virtual Home Hospital, visit ahs.ca/vhh or talk to your doctor.