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Dear parents and guardians:

The past 15 months of living and working during the COVID-19 pandemic have been very difficult, especially for our children and youth. The COVID-19 vaccines that we have provide the chance to get the virus under control and help us to get back to the activities that are so important to our families' health and well-being. I am writing to share information with you about these vaccines. Over the past months, I have heard questions from parents about the COVID-19 vaccines, and as a parent myself, I understand that you want to make an informed choice to keep your families safe.

Vaccines make our immune systems stronger by building antibodies that help prevent and fight off diseases. The COVID-19 vaccines are a safe way you can protect yourself and your family. They work well, even against known variant strains. It is much safer to be immunized than to get the COVID-19 disease.

Who can get COVID-19 Vaccine?

Albertans born in 2009 or before (turning 12+ this year) can get their first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine now. Second doses are also being offered in stages throughout June. If you or your child (turning 12+) have not yet gotten a COVID-19 vaccine, you can book an appointment by contacting a participating pharmacy or through Alberta Health Services by using the online booking tool or by calling 811. Some family physicians are also giving vaccines.

Youth who were born in 2004 – 2009 can have the Pfizer vaccine and those born in 2003 and before can get Pfizer or Moderna. Both of these are the same kind of vaccine, are safe and effective, and need two doses per person for best protection. Most times, youth under 18 years of age will need consent from their parent to get their vaccine. If a parent/guardian is at the appointment, they can give verbal consent. If a parent/guardian is not able to be at the appointment, a consent form can be signed and given to the person who is giving the vaccine. Consent forms can be found at https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/frm-21765.pdf.

At this time, children born in 2010 or later (turning 11 this year or younger) **are not able** to get a COVID-19 vaccine. There are studies happening now for children under 12 to measure how the vaccine works, and to look for any side effects in this age group. Until we have that information, possibly by this fall, adults and older children can help protect younger children from the virus by getting their COVID-19 vaccines as soon as they can.

Vaccine safety and additional information

I know that some people may be worried about receiving the COVID-19 vaccine. A good way to manage worries is to find out more information. The vaccines we have in Alberta have been used around the world for more than six months now, and they are safe. It is not possible to get

COVID-19 from a vaccine. It is common for people to have a sore arm and feel a bit tired for a day or two after getting a vaccine, sometimes with a fever or aches. More serious side effects like allergic reactions are rare, and health care providers who administer vaccines can give treatment for these kinds of reactions.

Some people may have a fear of needles or may be concerned with discomfort after getting the COVID-19 vaccine. You can prepare yourself and/or your child for your appointment by looking at tips from Alberta Health Services at ahs.ca/VaccineComfort. If you or your child have other questions about the vaccine, it is important to get that information from reliable places. Not all information about vaccines on the internet is true.

For reliable information about the COVID-19 vaccines you can go to any of the following websites: Alberta Health, Alberta Health Services- COVID-19 Information for Albertans, and the Government of Canada. Resources in 13 other languages are also available. I encourage you to speak to your/your child's healthcare provider if you have any questions about your own health and the COVID-19 vaccines.

Vaccines can beat COVID-19

Alberta has been able to offer protection with vaccines to many people in our province. You can see our progress here. While no vaccine is perfect, only 0.2% of everyone who received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine since January 1 has gotten COVID-19 infection after the vaccine has had time to work (it takes at least 2 weeks after getting a dose for protection to build up). If as many Albertans as possible get their first and second doses of vaccine, and follow good practices like washing hands and wearing masks indoors until everyone has had their chance to get vaccine, we will be able to protect ourselves, our loved ones, and everyone around us from COVID-19. That means in the next few months, we will no longer need strict public health measures to stop spread of the virus.

As we look forward to a time when protection from vaccines will let us do more of the things, we have missed in this last year, it will still be important for all of us to support each other through the changes. We know that this last year has been tough, and many people have had a hard time with their mental health. If this is true for you or your family, there is help through Alberta Health Services' Help In Tough Times website or by calling 811.

Vaccines are bringing hope, and that is made stronger by all of us working together. Thank you for all that you have done over this last year to get your families and communities through the pandemic. We will get through this together.

Sincerely,



Dr. Deena Hinshaw, BSc, MD, MPH, CCFP, FRCP
Chief Medical Officer of Health