

Independent Medical Exams (IME): Frequently asked questions

Independent Medical Exams (IMEs) address a variety of medical issues, such as diagnosis, fitness for work, treatment recommendations or prognosis.

Questions an IME may help answer for you and WCB:

- Is there anything else that should be done to confirm your diagnosis or to determine treatment?
- Is there a medical condition that would be affected by your return to work?
- Is your injury or illness permanent or temporary? (The examiner indicates whether they think your injury or illness will change or improve over a reasonable period of time.)

Physicians who perform IMEs are part of a select roster of community specialists who have training to perform these types of exams. This roster is managed by WCB.

Injured workers have the opportunity to select their examiner from the roster of specialists if there is choice available (e.g., more than one specialist with the expertise in their type of injury/illness is available).

About IMEs

When does an IME occur?

This helpful specialist's exam may occur any time during your recovery. It may take place soon after your injury or illness, a few weeks or months into the recovery or after you have returned to work. Not all cases need specialist input, but when they do, WCB can coordinate an IME that meets your individual injury needs.

How long will it take for an IME to be booked?

The time it takes to book an IME depends on the availability of the type of specialist required for the examination. An orthopedic examination, for example, will usually occur within four weeks of referral. For injuries requiring other specializations (e.g., neurosurgery), the wait time can be longer.

If IMEs are independent, why are they done at WCB?

IME examiners are independent physicians and not WCB employees. Exams are performed in examination rooms located at the WCB offices in Edmonton and Calgary so that on-site WCB staff can provide support for the IME physicians. This support includes medical transcription, access to specialized equipment, and assistance for workers with special needs.

How do I know the physician identified for my IME is an expert in my type of injury?

IME physicians are selected based upon their expertise in the specialty required to meet your needs.

Due to the extensive training and experience of the community physicians on the roster, their knowledge base is significant.

When there are overlapping effects of an injury on various body systems, there may be times when specialties in addition to the specialty of your treating doctor may be appropriate to increase our understanding of your condition.

How is the specialty of the IME physician determined?

Claim owners determine the question(s) under consideration (e.g., diagnosis, causation, work fitness, further treatment), and will then partner with a WCB clinical consultant to review the file. Clinical consultants are trained medical professionals who determine the appropriate specialty for the IME, and who help facilitate the consultation requests.

Can an independent medical examiner be compelled by WCB to perform an IME?

No. There is no mandate in the *Worker's Compensation Act* to compel any physician to examine an injured worker. Physicians are covered by the Health Professions Act and are regulated by the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta. Participation on the IME roster is voluntary.

**Independent Medical Exams (IME):
Frequently asked questions (continued)****What happens if I refuse an IME, or withdraw my consent?**

An IME can only be done with your consent. However, it is important to be aware that refusing an IME may have negative impacts on your claim—including a suspension or delay in benefits and/or medical and rehabilitation services. The *Workers' Compensation Act* requires workers to participate in medical assessments to ensure the right services and benefits are offered.

What claim history is included in the medical summaries prepared by WCB for the examining physician?

Typically, an IME is a one-time assessment and the physician will be provided with any relevant reports from your treating physicians, including your family doctor.

It is important for the IME physician to know the medical issues on your case, which includes information about any issues that have been previously ruled on by the Appeals Commission in order to understand the accepted facts on the claim file. For example, if the Appeals Commission has directed that a certain injury or condition be accepted, an IME opinion may not be needed for that injury or condition. However, if the worker's situation has changed since the Appeals Commission determination, medical opinion on the condition may be required. Therefore, the appeal history forms an important part of the medical package for IME physicians.

IME roster**Is the roster posted on the WCB website up-to-date?**

Yes. All participating community specialist are listed on the IME roster.

Why are there not more choices on the IME roster? Why was I only given one choice?

WCB works to recruit qualified independent community medical examiners to increase choice; however, with certain specialties, recruitment is difficult due to the limited availability of physicians in that specialty. Therefore, in some cases, there may only be one or two suitable physicians available to select from.

How can I learn about the credentials of the physicians on the IME roster?

The WCB website provides a biography on each independent medical examiner. Additional information can also be found on the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta website: <https://search.cpsa.ca/>.

Does WCB investigate concerns about the bias of IME physicians?

IMEs help provide important information for your care and entitlement. Concerns about bias are investigated carefully when factual evidence is provided; a suspicion of bias “just because” is not enough to conclude that there is bias, and the grounds need to be serious and substantial. According to the American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine (ACOEM), “To be most effective, IMEs must be complete, focused, rigorously and clearly reasoned, and objective”.

Any concerns should be reported to your claim owner.

During the exam**Can I bring someone with me?**

One person may accompany you to the exam location (i.e., WCB building), but no one is permitted inside the exam room unless a medical need has been communicated to the scheduling team in advance of arriving. Interpreters provided by WCB-Alberta are permitted into the exam room if required.

Can I record my IME?

Recording IMEs is not permitted. This practice aligns with the Independent Medical Evaluation Best Practices established by the American Medical Association.

What can I expect during the exam?

The examiner will:

- Review the medical records and reports that have been submitted to WCB (this usually takes place prior to your appointment).
- Take a medical history from you.
- Conduct a physical examination.

- Order additional tests, if necessary.
- Write a report to WCB (a copy will be sent to your treating physician).

Will my examiner treat me?

No, but a copy of the report (including any treatment suggestions) will be sent to your family doctor, who may review them with you.

I'm not allowed on WCB property. How do I attend?

WCB's security and Medical Services teams will partner with you to facilitate an appropriate and safe environment to attend the IME.

Can I obtain a copy of the IME report?

Yes. Injured workers have access to their entire claim file, including any IME reports. The IME consult report will be available two weeks following your appointment (this allows for dictation, transcription and signing time) and can be requested from your claim owner or our contact center by calling 1-866-922-9221.

How long after the examination will it be before someone from WCB-Alberta gets back to me?

WCB will be in contact to discuss the results of your examination within three to four weeks after the examination. If you have any questions about this process, please contact your claim owner directly.

Do IME physicians determine the outcome of the claim?

Physicians do not make any claim decisions.

Physicians provide a medical opinion to assist the claim owner in arriving at a decision. The claim owner weighs all the available evidence on the claim, including the IME opinion, to arrive at entitlement decisions.

Can I file a complaint about an IME physician's actions during an exam?

Yes. Any issues can be outlined in writing and submitted to the claim owner. The matter will be investigated by WCB, and a written response will be provided to you. If required, the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta may be asked to assist in the review. Depending on the outcome of the review, the physician's status on the roster may be affected.

