

CMO SMOH Weekly Notice for AHS Medical Staff

January 8, 2021

This week:

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Our condolences: We grieve together

We are deeply saddened about the recent loss of three healthcare workers who had tested positive for COVID-19.

We've experienced grief over the deaths of Albertans throughout the pandemic, and we recognize that the fear of a loss of our colleagues has been a concern for all of us. Losing a colleague, a member of our family, impacts us all greatly.

Our hearts go out to their families, loved ones and colleagues. We grieve with them.

There will be many emotions that arise over the coming days. We encourage you to access support if you need it during this time.

To access help, there are confidential support services available for physicians:

- [Physician and Family Support Program](#) (PFSP) by the Alberta Medical Association. The support line at 1-877-SOS-4MDS (767-4637) is available 24-7.
- AHS Physician Wellness, Diversity and Leadership page, www.ahs.ca/mdwellness, physicians can find wellness zoom rooms, and tips and guides to cope with stress.

Healthcare workers across the province have been working tirelessly to take care of Albertans, and we are so grateful for their commitment and their dedication. We will continue to do all that we can to protect healthcare workers by keeping their work environments safe and ensuring that all precautions, such as personal protective equipment education and training, are taken.

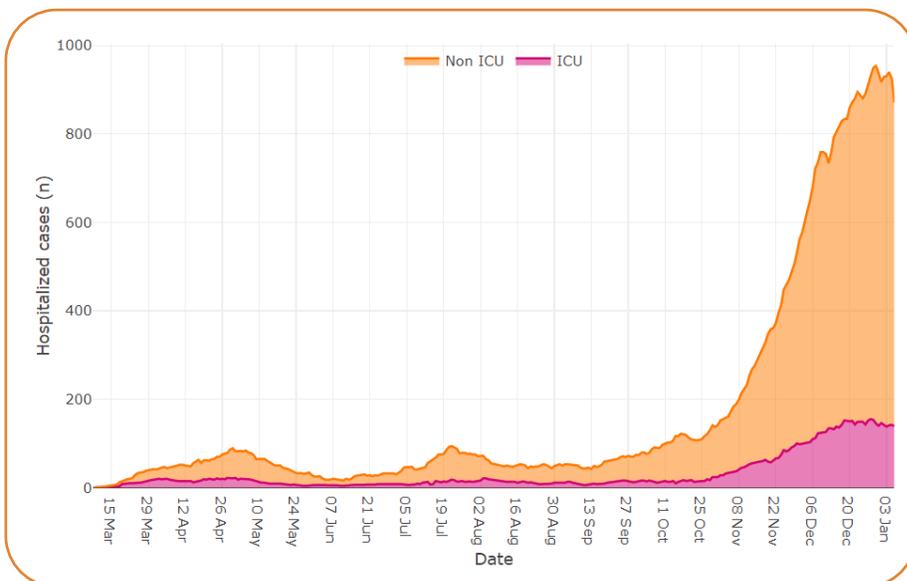
Please reach out if you need support over the coming days, and always.

Additional AHS resources on resilience, wellness and mental health

- [Resilience, Wellness and Mental Health Resource Guide](#)
- [Self-care Tactics](#)
- [Going Home Checklist](#)
- [How do I support someone who may be struggling?](#)
- [Health and wellness resources for leaders](#)

COVID-19 Case Status in Alberta

This week we lead with our hospitalization numbers. Alberta reported a week-to-week decline in the number of individuals being treated in hospital for COVID-19. On Jan. 6, there were 871 individuals with COVID-19 in hospital compared to 951 hospitalizations on Dec. 30, an eight per cent decrease. Also on Jan. 6, there were 139 individuals in intensive care compared to 145 on Dec. 30, a four per cent decrease. Despite these slight drops, the number of patients in hospital with COVID-19 continues to put significant strain on our healthcare system. Albertans need to continue to follow public health measures to limit the spread of the virus in the province and continue to reduce pressures on the health system.



The breakdown of hospitalizations by zone as of Jan. 6 is as follows:

	Hospitalizations	ICUs
Edmonton	455	64
Calgary	241	48
Central	92	17
North	64	7
South	19	3

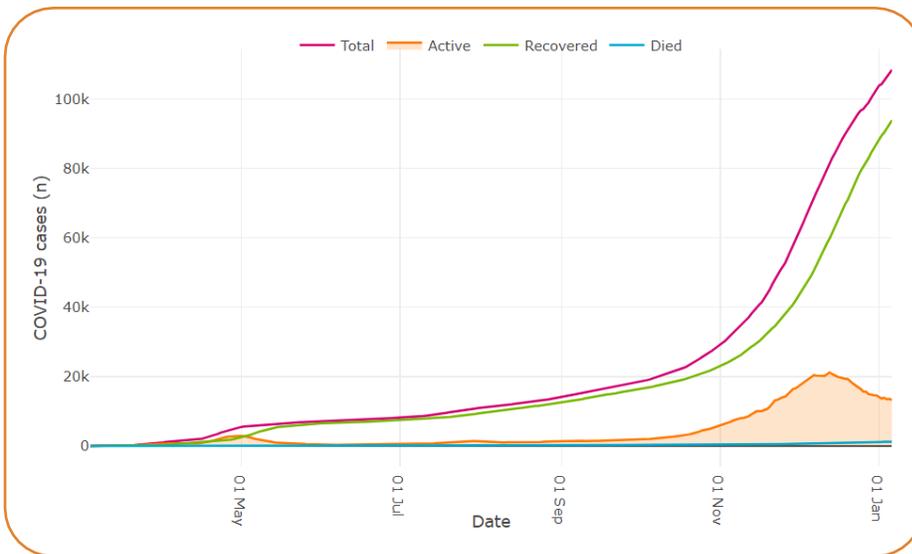
New and Active Cases

Alberta's average number of daily new cases remained relatively stable this week. The average was 978 for the seven-day period ending Jan. 6, compared to 995 the previous week, a two per cent decrease.

For the week ending Jan. 6, the Edmonton Zone had the largest number of new cases at 2,513 (37 per cent of all new cases in the province), an average of 359 new cases per day. The Calgary Zone had almost as many with 2,498 new cases (36 per cent of all new cases in the province), an average of 357 cases per day. On Jan. 6, the Calgary Zone recorded 402 new cases, which was nearly 100 more than the Edmonton Zone recorded at 306 new cases.

From Dec. 31 to Jan. 6, there were 3,431 cases among individuals aged 20 to 49 years, which is half of all new cases during that time period. Over the same period, there were 1,078 new cases were reported among school-aged children (5 to 19 years) and 1,173 new cases among older adults (aged 60 years and older).

As of Jan. 6, there are 13,298 active cases in the province whereas, on Dec. 29, there were 14,555 active cases, a decrease of 1,257 active cases — or 8.6 per cent. The Edmonton Zone continues to have the most active cases with 5,465, although this is a 17.5 per cent decrease from Dec. 29. The Calgary, Central and South zones also reported decreases in the numbers of active cases, whereas the North Zone had a 34 per cent increase in the number of active cases since Dec. 29.



The table below shows the number of active cases in each zone for the last two weeks.

	Active Cases (week ending Jan. 6)	Active Cases (week ending Dec. 29*)	Per cent Change
Edmonton	5,465	6,624	-17.5%
Calgary	4,739	5,129	-7.6%
Central	1,381	1,430	-3.4%
North	1,384	1,031	34.2%
South	252	296	-14.9%
Unknown	77	45	71.1%

**Active cases as of Dec. 29 are provided as the reference since active cases as of Dec. 30 (one week prior to Jan. 6) were not available due to the holiday break.*

Other notable COVID-19-related information:

- As of Jan. 6, a total of 108,469 cases of COVID-19 have occurred in Alberta and a total of 4,443 individuals have been hospitalized, which amounts to 4.1 individuals for every 100 cases. In all, 93,954 Albertans have recovered from COVID-19.
- As of Jan. 6, 1,217 individuals have passed away from COVID-19, including 154 over the past seven days (Dec. 31 to Jan. 6). We extend our condolences to the families of these individuals, and to all who have lost loved ones from any cause during this time.
- From Dec. 31 to Jan. 6, 90,442 COVID-19 tests were completed, an average of 12,920 per day. During this period, the daily positivity ranged from 5.38 per cent to 9.30 per cent. As of Jan. 6, a total of 2,888,432 tests have been conducted and 1,679,738 individuals have been tested.

COVID-19 testing for healthcare workers — the latest numbers

We continue to update the testing data for healthcare workers in the [AHS Healthcare Worker COVID-19 Testing dashboard](#). These statistics provide the total number of AHS, Covenant Health and Alberta Precision Laboratories (APL) employees and physicians tested, including a breakdown of the number of positive tests and those who have been confirmed to have been exposed in the workplace.

As of January 6:

- 73,828 employees (AHS, APL, and Covenant combined) have been tested for COVID-19 and, of those tested, 3,926 (or 5.31 per cent) have tested positive.
- Of the 1,047 employees who have tested positive and whose source of infection has been determined, 333 (or 31.8% per cent) acquired their infection through a workplace exposure. An additional 2,879 employees who have tested positive are still under investigation as to the source of infection.
- 4,761 physicians (AHS, APL, and Covenant combined) have been tested for COVID-19 and, of those tested, 173 (or 3.63 per cent) have tested positive.
- Of the 48 physicians who have tested positive and whose source of infection has been determined, 7 (or 14.6 per cent) acquired their infection through a workplace exposure. An additional 125 physicians who have tested positive are still under investigation as to the source of infection.

For more information, see the AHS Healthcare Worker COVID-19 Testing [infographic](#) and [dashboard](#).

COVID-19 Vaccination Updates

Healthcare Workers in COVID-19, Medical and Surgical Units Added to Vaccine Priority List

Starting immediately, vaccine appointments will be offered to healthcare workers in medical, surgical and COVID-19 units. This means about 3,300 COVID-19 unit staff and 15,400 medical and surgical unit staff are now eligible for the vaccine as well as roughly 3,300 related physicians.

Emails with links to the AHS online booking tool will be sent out to these groups starting today and over the weekend. Not everyone will receive their email today; please watch your AHS email as the unique links are specific to each individual.

If you are a physician in these groups, please watch for an email in the next 72 hours. If you have not received an email within 72 hours, please contact us at cmo@ahs.ca.

The online booking tool provides identified healthcare workers with options to choose a preferred time, date and location to receive their immunization. The tool also ensures the healthcare worker books a second dose within the allowable date range. After booking your appointment, you may change the appointment time or date within the allowable date range for the second dose.

To further boost the vaccine roll-out effort, Alberta's Chief Medical Officer of Health issued a directive to expand the types of healthcare practitioners that can be used in the COVID-19 immunization program. The directive will support Alberta Health Services to recruit additional health professionals in more settings like LTC/DSL and increase the number of available immunizers.

The full list of current phases is available on the [Alberta Health website](#).

If you have any questions about the vaccine rollout, contact your supervisor or medical leader or see the [Staff FAQ](#). Additional information can found on our [external COVID-19 vaccine site](#).

Vaccination Statistics

As of 12:20 p.m. today (Jan. 8), more than 38,500 Albertans received their first dose of COVID-19 vaccine, including:

- 16,600+ healthcare workers
- 12,500+ long-term care (LTC) and designated supportive living (DSL) staff
- 9,400+ LTC/DSL residents

Vaccine Supply

As we announced earlier this week, more than 13,600 additional doses of Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine have arrived in Alberta as of Jan. 6. We expect additional doses of both Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine and Moderna vaccine to arrive next week and those will be distributed across the province as quickly as possible.

Quarantine Requirements Still Apply Even if You've Been Immunized

Healthcare workers who meet current COVID-19 exposure criteria (e.g., unprotected close contact with a COVID-19 case, or a recent returned to Alberta from international travel) are still required to quarantine. Immunization does not change quarantine requirements.

Adhere to Public Health, PPE Guidance Even if You're Immunized

Currently, there is insufficient evidence on the duration of protection and effectiveness of the vaccine in reducing transmission of COVID-19. While the vaccines being delivered have shown very high effectiveness in clinical trials, no vaccines are 100 per cent protective. Immunized healthcare workers are still required to adhere to existing PPE guidance, including continuous masking, continuous eye protection, and IPC recommendations for COVID-19. Healthcare workers who are close contacts of cases of COVID-19 will still need to isolate for 14 days. Learn more [here](#).

Please be Patient

We recognize that many physicians and healthcare workers who work with patients vulnerable to COVID-19 are waiting for information on when they will be eligible for immunization. More information on which healthcare workers will be included in each phase will be shared as plans are finalized.

Over the last week, many teams across AHS have made extraordinary efforts to provide immunization clinics to eligible staff and physicians.

North, Central and South Zone Public Health as well as Health Link staff have been working hard to call eligible staff and physicians directly.

We understand the frustration of those who want to be vaccinated and are not yet eligible. We urge your patience and understanding. We will communicate any updates about additional vaccine sequencing as soon as we can.

We would love to be able to vaccinate everyone who interacts with patients and families immediately. The reality is that it's going to take some time, primarily due to vaccine availability. Risk of transmission within our sites remains very low when staff and physicians use appropriate PPE.

We are doing all we can to keep our teams safe, and will continue to push hard to roll out vaccine as it is available.

We are extremely grateful for the patience of all physicians, AHS staff, and Albertans who are waiting to receive the vaccination.

For more information about vaccine sequencing, please visit alberta.ca. For more information about vaccines and other COVID-19 related topics, please see these [FAQs](#), and visit ahs.ca/covidPHC.

Have a question?

Visit ahs.ca/covidvaccine or alberta.ca/covid as more information becomes available. If you have a COVID-19 vaccine specific question that is not addressed here, please submit your question using this [online form](#), or connect with your respective zone medical leader.

COVID-19 Vaccine Safety

All vaccines are thoroughly tested and must be shown to be safe and effective before they are approved for use. Find out more about how vaccines are developed by watching this [short video](#).

Vaccines are a critical way to limit the spread of the virus. They are effective and safe. After a thorough review conducted by Health Canada of the evidence around the safety and effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccines, Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 and Moderna COVID-19, have received approval for use in Canada.

Vaccine safety is monitored on an ongoing basis. Millions of doses of vaccine have now been administered and there haven't been any serious adverse events that are more serious or more frequent than expected based on the experience in clinical trials.

The following are contraindications to receiving the currently available vaccine:

- Persons under 16 years of age.
- Known hypersensitivity to any component of the vaccine.
- Anaphylactic or other allergic reactions to a previous dose of COVID-19 mRNA vaccine

Pregnant, breastfeeding and immunosuppressed individuals were not included in the vaccine clinical trials to date. As such, the National Advisory Committee on Immunization ([NACI](#)) [has recommended](#) that individuals in these groups should work with their healthcare team to assess the benefits along with potential risks.

Many professional societies (e.g., [Society of Obstetrics and Gynecology](#), and [Canadian Rheumatology Association](#)) are recommending, based on their review of the evidence and review of usual practice for other vaccines, that most individuals in these groups should receive the vaccine. More information will be coming shortly to help inform discussions between providers and patients.

For more information about COVID-19 vaccines, common side effects and recommendations on use, please visit [NACI's website](#). Please see the [AHS vaccine website](#) for ongoing updates as they become available.

Satellite Immunization Clinics

This week, AHS and Covenant Health began piloting a program to bring temporary satellite COVID-19 immunization clinics to some Emergency Departments throughout the province to help support already booked immunization clinics on the ground. These satellite clinics will increase opportunities for eligible Emergency Department staff and physicians to be immunized during this phase of the sequenced COVID-19 immunization rollout.

Given existing pressures in acute care settings, this pilot will evaluate the effectiveness of administering immunizations within acute care settings rather than requiring frontline staff to travel to immunization sites. AHS will continually assess the logistics of vaccine transport, site set-up, and the staffing and delivery model for the vaccine and will explore options for further expansion. As more vaccine becomes available, all staff and physicians will have the opportunity to be immunized.

COVID-19 Vaccine Administration Volunteer offers

We'd like to thank everyone for their interest in volunteering to administer immunizations.

Based on the current supply of vaccine in our province, AHS currently has the staff needed to immunize Albertans against COVID-19. We know more vaccine will become available soon, that is why AHS has planned ahead and recruited additional staff to join our team of immunizers. We are proactively increasing our staffing levels to meet the increase of vaccine supply.

We have received hundreds of expressions of interest from a variety of healthcare professionals, including physicians and nurses. AHS now has enough interest from staff to be able to fill the positions we anticipate we will need to immunize Albertans against COVID-19 as vaccine becomes available.

Our vaccination logistics coordinators are working through each expression of interest right now and will follow up with applicants in the coming days. Again, we sincerely thank everyone who has offered to assist with Alberta's COVID-19 immunization planning.

If you have additional questions, please send these to cmo@ahs.ca.

COVID-19 Vaccine Wastage

Misinformation is circulating about wastage of the COVID-19 vaccine. Vaccines are a critical way to limit the spread of the COVID-19 virus. There has been no wastage significant enough to impact immunization numbers. As of Jan. 6, 86 doses of the more than 26,000 doses administered have been considered wasted - only 0.3 per cent of the supply.

All immunization programs have some degree of inadvertent vaccine wastage due to issues such as refrigeration errors, vial breakage, expirations and appointment no-shows. That is expected, but usually minimal. AHS is optimizing the number of appointments to minimize any wastage due to client factors, including overbooking appointments to account for no shows.

Any additional vaccine available at site at the end of the shift are provided to immunizers on site as our second line of defense against wastage.

Alberta Health Services issued a Twitter thread on this topic. It can be found [here](#). Alberta Health issued a media statement on this issue which can be found [here](#).

Enhanced Public Health Measures Extended Until At Least Jan. 21

The Government of Alberta announced yesterday that the [enhanced public health measures](#), implemented a month ago, will remain in place provincewide until at least Jan. 21.

Health officials continue to actively evaluate the situation and will adjust measures if required.

Businesses, organizations and service providers will be given at least one week's notice prior to changes to the current health measures that may affect them.

The government also announced all students will return to in-person learning, as planned, on Monday. [Public health measures](#) remain in place to support the health and safety of students, teachers and staff.

Doc of the Week – Dr. Adam Vyse

Throughout the pandemic, Dr. Adam Vyse has shown great leadership in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic in High River. In particular, when High River first started seeing cases in the community in the spring, Dr. Vyse was instrumental in liaising with local leadership and setting up a test centre within a few days of the first identified COVID-19 positive cases.

More recently, Dr. Vyse has tirelessly continued to provide support to other physicians in our community both in relation to creating resources for local physicians for COVID-19 management, and also being a great support to his colleagues who are feeling the mental health strain of this pandemic.

Thank you, Dr. Vyse, for your unwavering dedication and support.

Doc of the Week Call for Nominations

Do you know a physician who has gone above and beyond during the pandemic to shape and drive improvements for patients?

Perhaps a physician colleague has gone above and beyond to help support others during a difficult day?

Each week, we would like to take a moment to celebrate and thank the amazing physicians working across the province to provide high-quality care to patients, staff and colleagues across the province.

If you know someone who deserves to be celebrated, please email CMO@ahs.ca with your suggestion, and a brief description of why.

Annual Information Verification and Attestation (AIVA) Process Change

The Annual Information Verification and Attestation (AIVA) submission process is moving from a paper-based approach to online.

On January 18, you will be sent an email asking you to complete your 2021 AIVA electronically by clicking on a link to a secure website.

Once logged in to the secure website, you will be able to review and update your personal information, answer attestation questions, review your medical staff appointment and privileges and request a change form if you wish. You will also see if AHS already has a copy of your practice permit and/or liability coverage on file and if not, you will be able to upload copies.

The move to a secure online AIVA process will improve AHS' Medical Affairs ability to manage submissions and changes and respond to physician inquiries in a more timely manner.

For more information, please contact your Medical Staff Office.

If you experience technical issues, please contact local Medical Affairs office or email AIVA@ahs.ca.

Physician Diversity, Wellness and Leadership Development

Physician Wellness Zoom Room – New format: Group discussions will be included

Date: Tuesday, January 12, 5-6 p.m. MST

Topic: Hope

Co-Moderators: Dr. Debrah Wirtzfeld, Associate Chief Medical Officer, Physician Health, Wellness, AHS, and Diversity, Dr. Jennine Wismark, Associate Chief Medical Officer, Physician Wellness & Development, Covenant Health

Join: [Here](#).

U of C COVID Corner – The Shadow Pandemic

COVID Corner, hosted by the University of Calgary, offers updates on various topics and aspects related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The next session in the series, held on January 13, will cover the following objectives:

- Recognize the direct and indirect impacts of the COVID-19 on excess mortality & morbidity in Alberta during 2020

- Describe how the pandemic has adversely affected the presentation and management of other acute and chronic medical conditions
- Strategize how in 2021 we can minimize impact of the pandemic on our care for patients with and without COVID-19

Date: Wednesday, January 13, 7-9 p.m. MST

Register: [here](#).

Rapid Testing for COVID-19 Continues to Expand

Kudos and thanks to the staff at Alberta Precision Laboratories who continued working diligently over the holidays processing thousands of COVID-19 tests every day and moving ahead with the expansion of rapid point-of-care testing across the province.

The launch of clinical pilots of rapid point-of-care testing at assessment centres, hospitals, continuing care facilities and homeless shelters before Christmas set the stage for the broader implementation of rapid testing that is now underway in all AHS zones. The rapid point-of-care testing systems provided by the federal government will form an important new pillar of the provincial COVID-19 testing program.

By the end of this month, rapid point-of-care testing is expected to be in place at 48 assessment centres, 27 hospital labs and four homeless shelters in Calgary and Edmonton. The addition of mobile testing teams for long-term care and designated supportive living facilities are also a great example of the innovative approach Alberta is taking to protect populations that are most vulnerable to outbreaks. These mobile teams are currently operating in Edmonton and Central Zone, and will be expanded to other communities in the coming weeks.

We have received more than one million rapid point-of-care tests so far, and APL's independent validation work has provided valuable information about the sensitivity and effectiveness of these systems compared to our lab-based polymerase chain reaction method, which remains the gold standard for large-scale testing programs. Rapid point-of-care testing is most effective when used on patients who are within the first week of showing symptoms of COVID-19, helping us to more quickly identify and manage positive cases in the community, especially in more rural and remote locations.

Testing continues to be a critical piece of Alberta's COVID-19 response, and our combined APL/AHS teams have now completed more than 2.8 million tests on almost 1.7 million people since the beginning of the pandemic.

Influenza Immunization Update

More than 1.47 million doses of influenza vaccine have been administered in Alberta. This is an increase of more than 26,000 doses from the last influenza update provided before the holiday break.

For the ninth week in row, there are no reported cases of seasonal influenza in Alberta. The weekly influenza data report is available at ahs.ca/influenza.

Check [Insite](#) for options to get the flu shot, [resources](#) to support this year's campaign and guidance on what to do if you experience [influenza-like symptoms after immunization](#).

[Click here](#) for more on the clinics for the public, including your families. And, if you got your flu shot at a [public health clinic](#), pharmacy or doctor's office, please complete the [Got My Flu Shot Form](#).

Let's continue to work together to protect each other from a vaccine-preventable illness and reduce the strain on our healthcare system.

Additional Resources for Physicians:

- [AHS Virtual Health](#)
- [COVID-19 FAQ for Clinicians](#)
- [COVID-19 Testing and Self-Isolation Criteria](#)
- [Acute Care Outbreak Prevention & Management Task Force](#)
- [CPSA's physician portal](#)
- [Cumming School of Medicine Continuing Medical Education \(CME\) Resources](#)
- [How to Access AHS Insite and Email](#)
- [How to do a Nasopharyngeal \(NP\) Swab](#) (New England Journal of Medicine)
- [IPC Emerging Issues](#)
- [Online Healthcare Worker Self-Assessment Tool](#)
- [Physician & Family Support Program](#) - 1-877-SOS-4MDS (767-4637)
- [Spectrum](#) – A mobile app customized to deliver local antimicrobial stewardship guidelines, resistance data, dosing information, and AHS COVID-19 related content.
- [Physician Wellness Educational Resources: Well Doc Alberta](#)
- COVID-19 Questions? Contact your local Zone Emergency Operations Centre (ZEOC):
 - ZEOC.South@ahs.ca
 - ZEOC.Calgary@ahs.ca
 - ZEOC.Central@ahs.ca
 - ZEOC.Edmonton@ahs.ca
 - PCH.ZEOCNorth@ahs.ca

For more information

- Visit the [COVID-19 Healthcare Professional information page](#) on the AHS website for more information or contact AHS.ECC@ahs.ca.
- Additional updates and information are being shared through the [College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta \(CPSA\)](#).
- AHS Medical Staff can also view the daily update from the AHS CEO and Senior Medical Officer of Health (SMOH) by accessing their AHS email inbox.

This update, provided every Friday, is intended to provide a summary of the key action items, information and decisions for AHS Medical Staff in relation to clinical policies and practices, and for the COVID-19 pandemic response. It is forwarded to physicians' preferred email inbox.

Do you have COVID-19 questions, information, or a physician or team who have gone above and beyond during the pandemic, that you would like to see covered in an upcoming edition of the COVID-19 CMO update? Let us know at CMO@ahs.ca.

Sincerely,

Dr. Francois Belanger

Chief Medical Officer and VP, Quality

Dr. Laura McDougall

Senior Medical Officer of Health

