



Message from Dr. Verna Yiu & Dr. Laura McDougall

AHS Update: Vaccine updates, self-care, mobile testing

Please print and share with your teams as needed

Dear staff, physicians and volunteers,

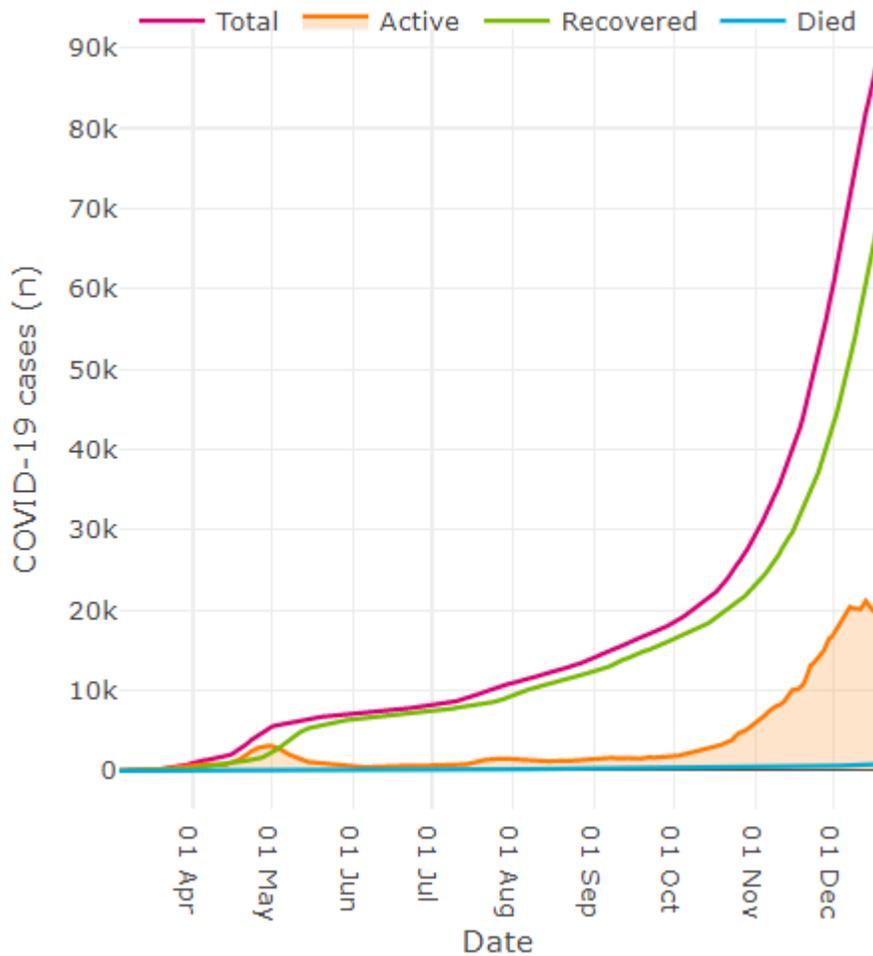
Today's Update

- **COVID-19 Cases in Alberta**
- **COVID-19 Testing for Healthcare Workers — The Latest Numbers**
- **First COVID-19 Vaccines Administered, More Vaccines Arriving Next Week**
- **COVID-19 Immunizations Continue Next Week for Eligible Staff; Vaccine Sequencing Announced**
- **APL Expands Clinical Pilots for Rapid Point-of-Care COVID-19 Testing**
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COVID-19 Status

Alberta's COVID-19 vaccine rollout started Tuesday (see below for details) and for the first time in three months, the average number of new daily cases for the week has decreased. Between Dec. 10 and Dec. 16, there was an average of 1,588 new

COVID-19 cases daily compared to 1,733 the previous week, an eight per cent decrease. It should be noted that the last time Alberta reported a decrease was in late September when the average number of daily cases was under 150. So, yes, it's good the average number of daily new cases went down this past week but, clearly, there's plenty of room for further improvement.



Alberta reported 124 deaths this past week — that represents 15.7 per cent of all COVID-19-related deaths in the province and brings our total deaths to 790 individuals. We extend our deepest sympathies to the families of these individuals, and to all who have lost loved ones from any cause during this time.

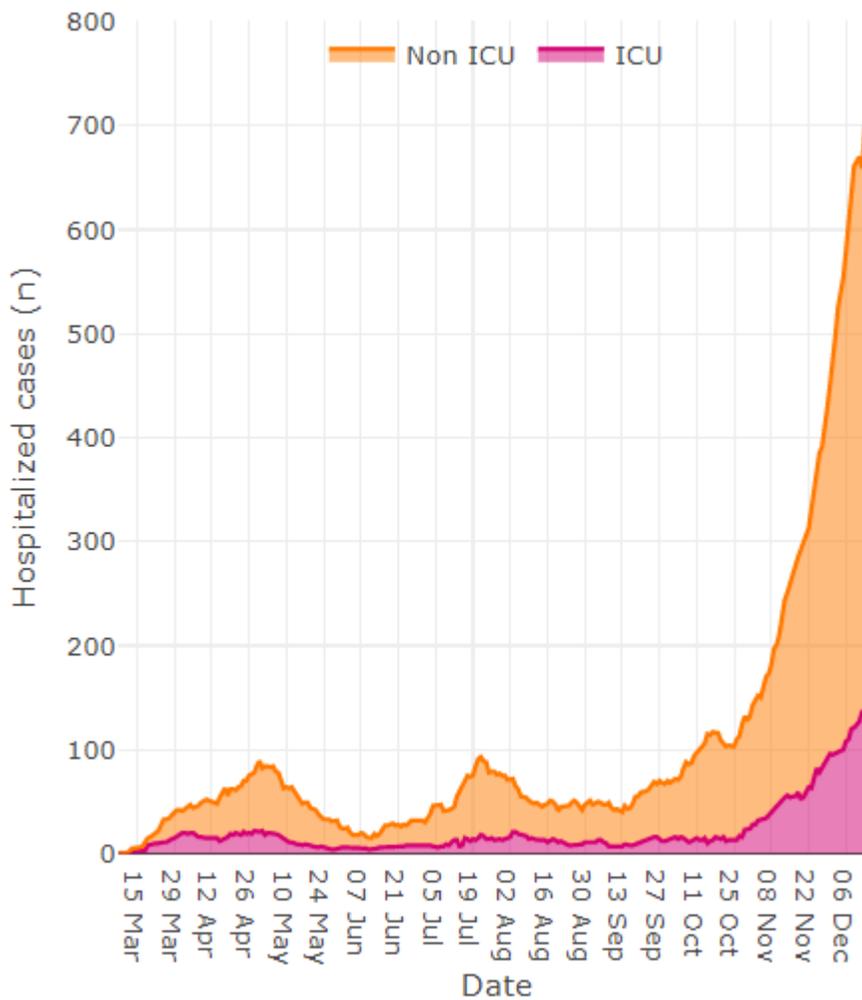
For the week ending Dec. 16, there were 5,846 cases among individuals ages 20 to 49 years; 2,030 new cases among school-aged children (five to 19 years); and 1,830 new cases among adults 60 years and older.

On Dec. 13, Alberta reported a record number of active cases with 21,123, and on that same day, the Edmonton Zone surpassed 10,000 active cases, before falling back to 9,525 three days later.

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

	Active Cases (week ending Dec. 16)	Active Cases (week ending Dec. 9)	Per Cent Change
Edmonton	9,525	9,464	0.6%
Calgary	7,043	7,304	-3.6%
Central	1,462	1,480	-1.2%
North	1,214	1,247	-2.7%
South	541	601	-10.0%
Unknown	80	67	-19.4%

Hospitalizations and ICU admissions



On Dec. 16, there was a record of 763 individuals being treated for COVID-19 in Alberta hospitals, with 138 of those intensive care units (ICUs) and 625 in non-ICUs. One week earlier on Dec. 9, there were 682 total hospitalizations, which is a 12 per

cent increase in total hospitalizations this week. The breakdown of hospitalizations by Zone as of Dec. 16 is as follows:

	Hospitalizations	Patients in ICU
Edmonton	420	83
Calgary	229	40
Central	64	4
North	34	7
South	16	4

Other notable COVID-19-related information:

- As of Dec. 16, a total of 86,168 cases of COVID-19 have occurred in Alberta and a total of 2,935 individuals have been hospitalized, which amounts to 3.4 individuals for every 100 cases. In all, 65,513 Albertans have recovered from COVID-19.
- In the past week, 137,272 COVID-19 tests were completed, an average of 19,610 per day. From Dec. 10 to Dec. 16, the daily positivity ranged from 7.34 per cent to 9.22 per cent. As of Dec. 16, a total of 2,582,185 tests have been conducted and 1,594,292 individuals have been tested.
- As of Dec 17, AHS has confirmed 3,447 individuals with COVID-19 were present at schools while infectious or acquired the disease in the school setting. Currently, two of every five schools (962 out of 2,415) in the province have reported an individual has attended their school while infectious or had in-school transmission.

Things You Need to Know

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 Dec. 16:

- 70,877 employees (AHS, APL, and Covenant combined) have been tested for COVID-19 and, of those tested, 2,956 (or 4.17 per cent) have tested positive.
- Of the 986 employees who have tested positive and whose source of infection has been determined, 304 (or 30.8% per cent) acquired their infection through a workplace exposure. An additional 1,970 employees who have tested positive are still under investigation as to the source of infection.
- 4,554 physicians (AHS, APL, and Covenant combined) have been tested for COVID-19 and, of those tested, 137 (or 3.01 per cent) have tested positive.

- Of the 45 physicians who have tested positive and whose source of infection has been determined, seven (or 15.6 per cent) acquired their infection through a workplace exposure. An additional 92 physicians who have tested positive are still under investigation as to the source of infection.

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

A [summary report](#) on healthcare worker COVID-19 testing data from May 15 to Aug. 31 is now available. AHS reviews the healthcare worker testing data on a quarterly basis to monitor any trends and ensure our COVID-19 guidance continues to reflect the current environment.

COVID-19 Immunizations Continue Next Week for Eligible Staff; Vaccine Sequencing Announced

This week, Alberta Health Services rolled out the first of 3,900 doses of COVID-19 vaccine to healthcare workers in Edmonton and Calgary. As of 3 p.m. today, 1,306 doses have been delivered. We thank everyone involved in the vaccine rollout; the effort has been tremendous, and everyone involved has made extraordinary efforts.

Next week, we anticipate receiving an additional 25,350 doses for provincewide distribution.

Alberta Health is responsible for COVID-19 vaccine policy, including purchase and allocation of vaccine. AH has updated its website today with some additional information on vaccine sequencing. With not enough vaccine available to offer immunizations to everyone at the same time, Alberta is undertaking a phased approach. To date, one product, Pfizer-BioNTech, has Health Canada approval. AHS is responsible for administering COVID-19 vaccine as part of the provincial immunization program, and we are working within the immunization allocation parameters outlined by Alberta Health to provide immunization to groups as vaccine supply becomes available. Exact amounts and timelines are subject to change and the approach will be amended as needed depending on vaccine supply.

Alberta Health, with input from AHS, has identified the following staff to be included in the sequenced phased approach:

Early Phase 1: December - Focus on acute care sites with the highest COVID-19 capacity concerns in Edmonton and Calgary:

- Healthcare workers in intensive care units
- Respiratory therapists
- Staff in long term care (LTC) and designated supportive living (DSL) facilities

Phase 1A: January (timeline subject to change depending on vaccine supply)

- Respiratory therapists

- Healthcare workers in intensive care units
- Staff in long term care (LTC) and designated supportive living (DSL) facilities
- Home care workers
- Healthcare workers in emergency departments

Phase 1B: February (timeline subject to change depending on vaccine supply)

- Healthcare workers in medical, surgical and COVID-19 units and operating rooms.

Phase 2 (April to Sept 2021)

- Work to identify sequencing for Phase 2 groups is underway. Decisions will be made in 2021. While Alberta Health has not finalized details, frontline healthcare workers who have not been included in the Early Phase or Phase 1 A and B, are expected to be included in Phase 2.

Phase 3 (Fall 2021)

- Anticipated start of roll-out to the general public

Healthcare workers identified for immunization in Phase 1 were selected as the first to receive the vaccine as a way to support acute care capacity and to protect populations at highest risk of severe outcomes. This includes those who provide care to residents in long term care and designated supportive living, as well as home care staff, to help ensure their higher-risk clients can remain in their homes and prevent hospital admissions.

At this time the sequencing for Phase 2 is to be determined. Discussions are underway with Alberta Health. Additional information will be shared as timing and availability of vaccine is known.

Resources on COVID-19 vaccine have been developed and are available [here](#). A [website](#) for public has also been developed and will be updated as information becomes available.

We appreciate the hard work and dedication of the many staff involved in COVID-19 immunization planning and applaud your willingness to adapt to the quickly changing needs and priorities.

The COVID-19 vaccine provides hope for all, and we thank everyone for your ongoing commitment to Albertans.

APL Expands Clinical Pilots for Rapid Point-of-Care COVID-19 Testing

Today Alberta Precision Laboratories expanded its clinical pilots of rapid point-of-care testing for COVID-19 to include long-term care and designated supportive living facilities in the Edmonton Zone using dedicated mobile testing centres that will be focused on high-risk outbreak sites.

The new mobile testing centres are expected to be ready to deploy in Calgary Zone starting Monday. Expansion to long-term care and designated supportive living facilities outside Edmonton and Calgary zones is expected to follow shortly after.

Expansion of the rapid-testing clinical pilot began during the week of Dec. 7 with the deployment of systems at the first non-AHS sites – Calgary’s Drop-In Centre and Edmonton’s isolation facility – where staff nurses have been trained to use the systems with homeless shelter clients who are difficult to reach through the existing COVID-19 testing program. Work is underway to bring the systems to more homeless shelters in urban and rural locations in the coming weeks.

Rapid point-of-care testing systems provide faster and more convenient testing, helping to identify and isolate positive cases more rapidly than previously possible. Further expansion of the clinical pilot will also include the addition of rapid point-of-care testing at 25 rural hospitals in the AHS North, Central and South zones through the rest of December and early January, enhancing the testing system in more remote rural communities that currently require all patient samples to be transported to centralized public laboratories for analysis.

More information can be found [here](#).

ABTraceTogether Available on AHS Mobile Phones

To make contact tracing easier and help prevent the spread of COVID-19, the ABTraceTogether app will be installed on most AHS-owned mobile phones on Dec. 22.

ABTraceTogether is a mobile app developed by the Alberta government to enable community-driven contact tracing to support efforts to manage COVID-19.

Using ABTraceTogether is entirely voluntary and, while it will show up on most AHS-owned mobile phones, it will remain inactive until users complete steps to register and activate it. If they choose to use the app, they must take the steps to register the app and turn it on for it to function. It can also be turned off whenever the user decides.

Given the increasing pressure on the system related to managing COVID-19-positive individuals, we want to do all we can to support contact tracing. Quickly identifying and isolating positive cases is an important part of our response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and in preventing spread of the virus.

If your AHS-owned mobile phone does not automatically receive the app and you’d like to use it, you can download it and find more detailed information about ABTraceTogether on the [Government of Alberta website](#). You can also find more information about the app and how it works in these [frequently asked questions and answers](#).

More Details on Eye Protection

As announced on Dec.2, AHS PPE Guidance now includes the use of eye protection.

Eye protection should now be worn by all healthcare workers involved in patient care, which includes all interactions within two metres of a patient. The enhanced eye protection will supplement our current PPE recommendation of continuous masking. Eye protection and a mask can be worn continuously for multiple patients but should be changed as per IPC protocols. Eye protection is to be changed or disinfected every time a mask is changed.

Face shields continue to be the preferred option for eye protection and are readily available provincewide. Other forms of eye protection will also be available, including disposable face shields, mask/face shield combinations, reusable goggles and safety glasses. Units, sites and clinics have adequate, safe PPE on hand for staff as well as others who may be on the unit, such as physicians, specialists and lab services. Workers need to know the location of PPE in all areas where they work. Please work with your manager to find ways to make AHS supplied eye protection (non-prescription) work for you.

Bringing your own personal eye protection

Healthcare workers may bring their own prescription eye protection (e.g. safety glasses or goggles) for comfort reasons providing the prescription eye protection serves the function of both prescription glasses and eye protection. Workers may also purchase their own non-prescription eye protection (e.g. safety glasses or goggles) for comfort reasons providing the eye protection meets the [requirements of protective eyewear to be worn in healthcare settings](#).

Standards for personal eye protection

Both personal prescription and non-prescription eye protection must meet the following criteria:

- Eyewear must be equivalent to AHS-supplied eye protection. Eyewear must be intended for use in a healthcare setting to protect the eyes from droplet exposure (eyes are protected from small particles by fitting closely to the face at top/brow area and both sides).
- Eyewear must meet CSA and/or ANSI 87.1 standards for personal protective equipment.

Workers who bring either prescription or non-prescription eyewear must ensure this is only for their own personal use, and not shared or distributed to others in AHS.

Workers who choose to bring in their own prescription or non-prescription eye protection are responsible for the cost, cleaning and disinfection of eye protection. This is in accordance with IPC routine practices or IPC PPE matrix for specific areas or roles. Follow [IPC COVID-19 PPE Recommendation for the Preservation and Reuse of Eye Protection](#) when using personal prescription eye protection.

Thank you for your continued diligence to help keep our patients and each other safe.

Adding Layers of PPE Can Increase Risk of Exposure

Proper use of PPE is essential in keeping you and patients safe by reducing the spread of COVID-19. Our guidelines are based on best practices and evidence, and we rely on the co-operation of all staff to ensure they are following these guidelines.

We've learned some staff are adding additional layers to their masks, including double masking, wearing a procedural mask over or under a fit-tested N95 respirator, or wearing a cloth mask over a procedural mask. Other examples of improper PPE use: adding an N95 when not required, adding contact/droplet precautions when not required, or continuing to use contact/droplet precautions when no longer needed.

Adding layers does not enhance protection; in fact, it will likely increase your risk of exposure and could be dangerous. More PPE does not mean safer PPE. Adding layers makes doffing of PPE more challenging. Doffing of PPE is a critical time during which you may contaminate yourself. Doffing requires a precision of execution and excellence in hand hygiene in order to prevent self-contamination. As well, an N95 respirator is fit tested to ensure a tight seal is achieved and requires a good match between the individual's facial features and the appropriate model of N95. Wearing of a procedure mask beneath the N95 will interfere with the tight seal, rendering the respirator ineffective.

As a reference, please review the [PPE checklist](#), and AHS' staff [PPE page](#).

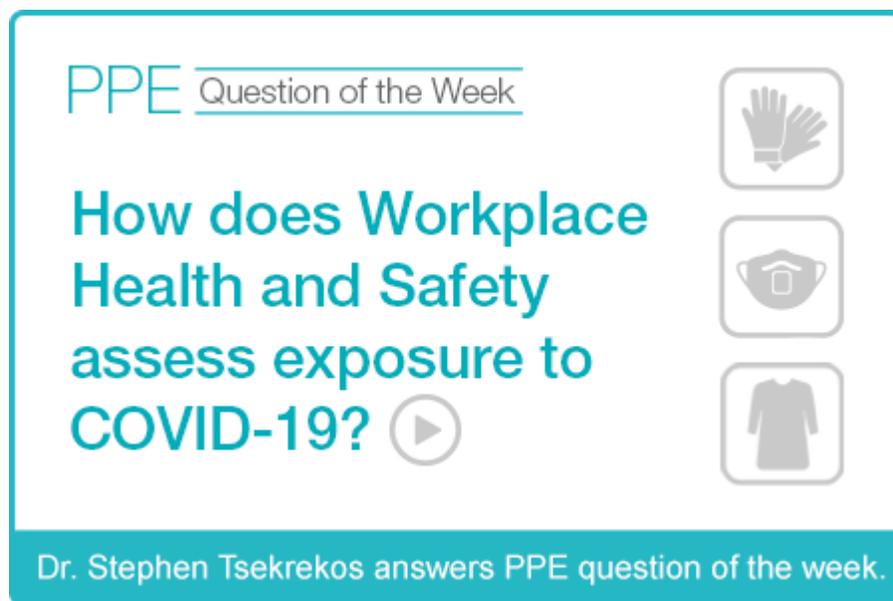


Dr. Mark Joffe, PPE Taskforce Chair, shows an example of double masking, which actually increases your risk of COVID-19 exposure.

PPE Question of the Week — How Does Workplace Health and Safety Assess COVID-19 Exposure?

In the latest instalment of [PPE Question of the Week](#), Dr. Stephen Tsekrekos, Medical Director of Workplace Health and Safety (WHS), talks about the many

factors that WHS considers when a healthcare worker has had a possible exposure to SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19) and whether workplace exclusion, or quarantine, might be required. These factors include the nature of the interaction between a healthcare worker and a COVID-19-positive individual, proximity to that individual, and duration of the exposure.



The image is a video thumbnail for a 'PPE Question of the Week' video. It features a teal border and a teal bar at the bottom. The text 'PPE Question of the Week' is at the top left. The main title 'How does Workplace Health and Safety assess exposure to COVID-19?' is in large teal font, with a play button icon to its right. To the right of the title are three icons: gloves, a face mask, and a lab coat. The bottom teal bar contains the text 'Dr. Stephen Tsekrekos answers PPE question of the week.'

Previous videos in PPE Question of the Week series are available on the PPE webpage as well at ahs.ca/covidppe.

COVID-19 Relaunch Playbook Updated

Version 3 of the [COVID-19 Relaunch Playbook](#) was recently published, with updated guidance to ensure proper safety, cleaning and physical distancing measures are being implemented consistently across AHS.

The updated version also includes additional resources on managing and supporting remote workers. Staff who are able to work from home are asked to continue doing so until further notice.

Please review the playbook as needed to ensure your workplace continues to meet the proper health and safety requirements, so we can keep patients and staff safe.

If you have questions or feedback about the updated playbook, please email COVIDRelaunch@ahs.ca.

Verna's Weekly Video Message — Self-Care Builds Resilience

We know this year has been difficult. There have been many long days and nights. In spite of that, you continue to do great work to protect the health of patients, families and each other.

These efforts are inspiring and we sincerely thank you. But we know COVID fatigue is real, and it's more important than ever to look after our mental wellness and continue to use self-care to help build our resilience.

Thankfully, self-care and resilience can be learned and developed.

With me (Verna) today to talk about [resilience and mental wellness is Dr. Nick Mitchell, Provincial Medical Director, Addiction and Mental Health.](#)



There are many resources available to support your health and wellness during this time. Please visit the [Employee and Family Assistance Program \(EFAP\) on Insite.](#)

Straight Talk from You — ‘We Have to Follow the Rules’

Straight Talk is a video series in which healthcare workers talk from the heart about what they're seeing and experiencing at work and in their communities as COVID-19 spreads across the province. AHS is posting a new Straight Talk video every day on YouTube and sharing it through our AHS accounts on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Please feel free to share these with your networks and on your social platforms as you see appropriate.

Here is another Straight Talk video, featuring Dr. James Shapiro, a surgeon and Director of the Living Donor Liver Transplant Program.

“We'll get through this. We'll get past it,” says Dr. Shapiro. “But for the next months, we're going to face quite a storm. If you're young and healthy, you feel invincible and I understand that. But at the same time, you're a potential spreader.

“Right now, we have to follow the rules. We have to (physically) distance. We have to not gather in groups. The best gift we can possibly give for Christmas this year is to follow those rules. Stay separate and not spread this disease.”



You can see all of the [Straight Talk videos](#), and new ones daily, on the AHS website.

Photos of the Week

Every week, we normally highlight one photo in this space that illustrates your efforts, compassion and achievements as we respond to the pandemic and support Albertans who come to us for care.

This week, though, we're sharing two photos because both images are historic and represent great news for Alberta Health Services and the province.



This is registered respiratory therapist Sahra Kaahiye of Edmonton, who was the first healthcare worker in Alberta to receive the COVID-19 vaccine on Tuesday afternoon.



Minutes after Sahra received her first dose of the vaccine, registered nurse Tanya Sawyer became the second healthcare worker in Alberta — and first in Calgary — to receive the vaccine.

To see all our AHS photos, visit our [Instagram Gallery](#) on the AHS website.

Stay Home If You're Sick, Be Fit for Work

We have a shared responsibility in creating and maintaining a safe and healthy workplace so we can provide quality and safe patient care. If you are unsure if your symptoms should require you to stay home, please check your symptom and close contact risk by visiting ahs.ca/fitforwork and talk to your leader.

Starting this weekend, we will have pop-up messages appear on all AHS workstations to raise awareness of the importance of being fit for work should you experience symptoms during your shift.

Influenza Immunization Update

More than 1.4 million doses of influenza vaccine have been administered in Alberta, an increase of more than 85,000 doses from last week. For the eighth week in row, there are no reported cases of seasonal influenza in Alberta. The weekly influenza data report is available at ahs.ca/influenza.

For staff, 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](#).

More on clinics for the public, including your families, is available on the [AHS website](#).

If you got your flu shot at a [public health clinic](#), pharmacy or doctor's office, please remember to complete the [Got My Flu Shot Form](#). This online form can be submitted with just the click of a button.

Remember to Unplug Seasonal Decorations

Before leaving your AHS workspace for the holidays, please remember to unplug your seasonal decorations, personal appliances and electronics.

Please leave your IT devices and equipment powered and running, with the exception of your computer monitor/screen.

Taking these small actions any time you are away from your worksite will help secure AHS information, reduce the risk of fire from powered and unsupervised devices, and help us save energy.

Be Well - Be Kind

Supports to Manage Seasonal Stress are Available

As we prepare for the holiday season in a time of pandemic, it's important to take care of ourselves and be there for each other.

There are many resources available to support your health and wellness during this time. Visit the [Employee and Family Assistance Program \(EFAP\)](#) on Insite or check out the resources below:

- [Feeling overwhelmed?](#)
- [Learn how to support each other during times of stress](#)
- [How do I support someone who may be struggling?](#)
- [Employee and Family Assistance Program](#)
 - [Wellness Check-in](#)
 - [e-AP](#)
 - [Wellness Seminars and E-Learning](#)
- [Resilience, Wellness and Mental Health Resource Guide](#)

Self-care is so important. To learn more, listen to [Our People Podcast – Holiday Reflections](#).

If you have questions or feedback on the resources above, contact wellness@ahs.ca.

Gratitude from Albertans

Everything you and your colleagues do every day to provide safe quality care to all Albertans is being noticed. Messages of gratitude keep pouring in from across the

province and beyond during the COVID-19 pandemic. We want to share a few recent messages of thanks with you — and you can see others on our [Sharing the Love webpage](#).

A world of thanks! Thank you to our amazing health heroes for risking your lives every single day to keep us safe. You give us hope and are so inspiring and we're cheering you on. You're in our thoughts and hearts and we are eternally grateful for you.

— Ash

I want to thank the healthcare workers for working so hard during this hard time and I can't imagine having all that pressure on you. All healthcare workers are incredible for putting their needs after everyone else's. It is so amazing all of the loyalty you have to your job.

— Sarah

You are valued. On dark nights driving home on very little sleep, after hard days that drained you physically, spiritually and emotionally, when you are missing your family and giving up many meaningful moments with them so that we may have more meaningful moments with our loved ones who you selflessly cared for, please know that the world values you. We honour your work. We see you. We value you. Thank you for this sacrifice.

— Deb

I respect what you are doing and I'm doing my part by staying home. It's hard with three kids to stay home but I know it will be worth it and that soon enough things will start getting back to normal. I'm sure it can be stressful having your job and I'm just so thankful for you.

— Megan

I sincerely thank our healthcare workers for all the sacrifices and hardships you've endured this pandemic. You are our real-life superheroes. I will surely tell these stories of heroism to my children so they can pass it on to their children, as well and remember what you have done in these difficult times.

— Andrea

Wrapping Up — Hold onto Hope this Holiday Season

The holiday season is a time for hope and renewal. The fact we started providing vaccine to healthcare workers this week represents a ray of light during what has been a dark year. Of course, what we're seeing on the front lines won't suddenly change because the province's vaccination plan is now underway. You've seen this week's numbers for new cases, hospitalizations and ICU admissions; we all know there are more difficult days and weeks ahead. As we face today's challenges, let's continue to hold onto hope and remember there are brighter days ahead. Let's take care of one another and take care of ourselves. Let's celebrate this holiday season with loved ones and colleagues (as Executive Leadership Team members Dr. Mark Joffe and Mauro Chies did this week with their virtual holiday party, see below.)



Most important, let's give ourselves permission to unplug; put work behind us, even briefly; and find some peace, quiet and contentment.

Thank you for everything you do and please do what you can to find time to rest, recharge and enjoy the season. We'll have another all-staff on Dec. 24 and, if it arrives in your inbox while you're taking some time off, you have our full permission to file that email under 'read later' and return to your loved ones.

As always, with gratitude and appreciation,

Dr. Verna Yiu
AHS President & CEO

Dr. Laura McDougall
Senior Medical Officer of Health

