Message from
Dr. Verna Yiu &
Dr. Laura McDougall

AHS Update: Another week of record high numbers, PPE guidance changed to add eye protection

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
- Eye Protection Added to AHS PPE Guidance
- Update to WHS Exposure Criteria
- Champions of Continuous Masking — Raman Grewal
- APL Launches Clinical Pilot Involving Rapid Point-of-Care COVID-19 Testing
- COVID-19 Vaccine Update
- Verna’s Weekly Video Message — Updated Family Support and Visitation Guidelines
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- Gratitude from Albertans
- Wrapping Up — Vaccine News Brings Hope in Difficult Times

COVID-19 Status

The spread of COVID-19 in the province showed no signs of slowing down over the past week (Nov. 26-Dec. 2), as Alberta set highs for daily new cases, hospitalizations and ICU admissions.
Over those seven days, more than 1,200 new cases were reported each day, with records set on Nov. 27 and Dec. 2: 1,730 and 1,861 new cases respectively. There was an average of 1,596 new daily cases, compared to 1,295 the previous week, a 23 per cent increase. There were 6,226 cases among individuals ages 20 to 49 years, which represents 56 per cent of all new cases.

Four of the five zones reported an increase in active cases; South Zone being the exception. Edmonton Zone continues to have the most active cases with 8,331, a 29 per cent increase over the previous week. Central Zone reported a 32 per cent increase in active cases, the largest proportional increase among the zones.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zone</th>
<th>Active Cases (week ending Dec. 2)</th>
<th>Active Cases (week ending Nov. 25)</th>
<th>Per Cent Change</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Died</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Region</td>
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<td>ICU</td>
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<td>----------</td>
<td>---------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Edmonton</td>
<td>8,331</td>
<td>6,444</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>6,445</td>
<td>5,126</td>
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</tr>
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<td>-5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Hospitalizations and ICU admissions**

The number of individuals being treated for COVID-19 in Alberta hospitals continues to trend upward. As of Dec. 2, there are a record 511 individuals being treated in Alberta hospitals for COVID-19, with 97 in ICUs. The highest number of COVID-19 patients in the ICU since the start of the pandemic occurred on Nov. 30, with 101.

Other notable COVID-19-related information:
- As of Dec. 2, a total of 63,023 cases of COVID-19 have occurred in Alberta and a total of 2,038 individuals have been hospitalized, which amounts to
3.2 individuals for every 100 cases. In all, 44,705 Albertans have recovered from COVID-19.

- Alberta has reported 575 deaths since the start of the pandemic, including 65 in the past week. We extend our condolences to the families of these individuals, and to all who have lost loved ones from any cause during this time.

- In the past week, 135,729 COVID-19 tests were completed, an average of 19,389 per day. A record number of tests were performed Nov. 27 and 28: 21,693 and 23,317, respectively. The daily positivity rate reached 9.46 per cent on Dec 2. A total of 2,309,153 test have been conducted as of Dec 2.

- As of Dec 3, AHS has confirmed 2,681 individuals with COVID-19 were present at schools while infectious or acquired the disease in the school setting. As of Dec. 2, 831 out of 2,415 schools in the province have reported an individual has attended their school while infectious or had in-school transmission. Since September, 22 students from Alberta schools have been hospitalized for COVID-19 with two being treated in ICUs.

Things You Need to Know

**COVID-19 Testing for Healthcare Workers**

We continue to update the testing data for healthcare workers in the [AHS Healthcare Worker COVID-19 Testing dashboard](https://www.ahealth.ca/Covid-19/Healthcare-Worker-Covid-19-Testing). 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. 2:

- 67,523 employees (AHS, APL, and Covenant combined) have been tested for COVID-19 and, of those tested, 2,087 (or 3.09 per cent) have tested positive.
- Of the 899 employees who have tested positive and whose source of infection has been determined, 296 (or 32.9 per cent) acquired their infection through a workplace exposure. An additional 1,188 employees who have tested positive are still under investigation as to the source of infection.
- 4,331 physicians (AHS, APL, and Covenant combined) have been tested for COVID-19 and, of those tested, 98 (or 2.26 per cent) have tested positive.
- Of the 44 physicians who have tested positive and whose source of infection has been determined, seven (or 15.9 per cent) acquired their infection through a workplace exposure. An additional 54 physicians who have tested positive are still under investigation as to the source of infection.

Eye Protection Added to AHS PPE Guidance

Protecting staff, physicians and patients is our top priority and the need for ongoing and appropriate use of personal protective equipment (PPE) remains critical to preventing the transmission of COVID-19.

As such, our PPE guidance will now include the use of eye protection. Eye protection should now be used continuously for all healthcare workers involved in patient care, which includes all interactions within two metres of a patient. Continuous 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.

Face shields continue to be the preferred option for eye protection and will be available provincewide. AHS Contracting, Procurement and Supply Management (CPSM) is aware of this update and will continue to provide all necessary supplies to sites.

Individuals may be permitted to bring their own prescription protective eyewear, provided it meets specifications outlined in the bringing your own PPE to work document. Current PPE guidance documents, as well as the bringing your own PPE to work document, have been updated to align with this change.

Dr. Mark Joffe, Chair of the PPE Taskforce, talks about this change in the latest PPE Question of the Week video.

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

Update to WHS Exposure Criteria
To ensure alignment with the enhanced PPE guidance described in the previous item, Workplace Health and Safety’s (WHS’s) approach to worker exposure assessment has been updated.

Contact and droplet precautions (gloves, gown, mask and eye protection) are appropriate PPE for providing care to those with COVID-19, suspected COVID-19 or influenza-like illness (ILI). The use of a mask and eye protection, together with diligent hand hygiene, are most critical for preventing respiratory infections. Subsequently, WHS will no longer exclude workers who wore a mask and eye protection, but were not wearing gloves or a gown, at the time of their patient interaction.

A fit-tested N95 respirator should always replace a surgical/procedure mask for anyone in the room when an aerosol-generating medical procedure (AGMP) is performed for patients with COVID-19, suspected COVID-19, ILI or any new or changing respiratory illness or diarrhea. In settings where an AGMP is performed on a patient with no respiratory symptoms who is later found to have COVID-19, use of a mask and eye protection at the time of the AGMP will now be considered sufficient protection.

These changes are being made to ensure AHS continues to follow best practices, while protecting staff and physicians and limiting the need for workplace exclusions.

Please visit ahs.ca/covidppe for full information.

Champions of Continuous Masking — Raman Grewal

Masking remains critical to our efforts to reduce transmission of COVID-19 in Alberta and, most particularly, within our facilities.

It is important we continue to work together to identify, implement and maintain strategies that will slow down and prevent transmission of COVID-19 to our patients, families and each other.

Continuous masking is a critical action taken by all AHS staff physicians, volunteers and contractors to protect the health and safety of our patients and one another.

We all must comply with our Continuous Masking Directive, which requires all staff, physicians and volunteers to mask in all patient areas at all times, and also to mask in areas — including corporate offices — where a minimum physical distance of two metres or six feet cannot be maintained.

As noted earlier, on Dec. 2, AHS updated PPE guidance to include the use of eye protection for patient-facing staff. Continuous eye protection will supplement our current PPE recommendation of continuous masking. Eye protection should now be used continuously for all healthcare workers involved in patient care, which includes all interactions within two metres of a patient.
In a new video series, we are profiling Champions of Continuous Making. Here, Raman Grewal, an advisor with Workforce Health and Safety, explains why she’s passionate about continuous masking and talks about supports available to AHS staff and physicians.

See the [PPE web page on Continuous Masking](#) for more information.

**APL Launches Clinical Pilot Involving Rapid Point-of-Care COVID-19 Testing**
Starting today at the hospital lab in Bonnyville, Alberta Precision Laboratories (APL) will begin piloting point-of-care rapid testing for COVID-19, providing faster, more convenient testing for the disease.

Patients who are within the first seven days of exhibiting symptoms are eligible for testing, allowing APL to quickly identify and notify positive cases within hours. This will speed up the appropriate care and isolation of patients, which will help reduce the spread of the virus in our communities. It will also divert many positive samples from the volumes going to the lab, which will help reduce turnaround times for COVID-19 tests overall.

Rapid point-of-care testing will also begin next week at COVID-19 assessment centres in Slave Lake and St. Paul, as well as one assessment centre in both Calgary and Edmonton.

These pilots will inform APL and AHS on how to streamline processes related to patient management, results notifications and digital record-keeping before the tests are deployed widely across the province, to ensure accuracy and enhanced turnaround times while alleviating pressure on our labs.

**COVID-19 Vaccine Update**
We are witnessing the toll COVID-19 has taken on our communities. As we have seen with many infection agents, vaccines are a critical way to limit the spread of a virus. They are effective and safe for protecting our health, as well as the health of family and community members.

As announced by the Government of Alberta earlier this week, once COVID-19 vaccines have been approved by Health Canada, Alberta will begin receiving vaccine doses by early next year. Specialized vaccination centres are being set up across the province, and distribution plans on how the vaccine will be distributed are being finalized.

AHS is working closely with Alberta Health to ensure higher-risk populations — including seniors in long-term care facilities and healthcare workers caring for COVID-19-positive and other vulnerable patients in high-risk situations — are prioritized for early COVID-19 vaccination.

As vaccine planning progresses, we will continue to keep you updated.

More information is available at www.ahs.ca/covidvaccine.

**Verna’s Weekly Video Message — Updated Family Support and Visitation Guidelines**

As we all know, family and loved ones play an essential role in the emotional, physical and mental well-being of patients and residents.

We continue to work with families and facilities to welcome family presence and visitation wherever we can. But the daily rise in COVID-19 cases, including outbreaks at our facilities, is a growing concern to the safety of everyone.

I know we’re all working hard to ensure patients and staff remain safe and stop further spread of the virus. Part of that involves regularly reviewing our family support and visitation guidelines, and adjusting them to reflect the current evidence and COVID-19 transmission in Alberta.

That’s why, last week, we made the difficult decision to place further limits on the number of designated family/support persons permitted at facilities with outbreaks and in areas of high community transmission.

Joining me (Verna) to talk more about these changes are two familiar faces from the Family Presence and Visitation Taskforce:

- Dr. Jim Silvius, Senior Medical Director, Provincial Seniors Health and Continuing Care.
- Paul Wright, Manager, Calgary Zone, Patient and Family-Centred Care.

Jim and Paul discuss what we take into account when making these changes, where these changes apply, and how we support people who aren’t able to visit in person.
Straight Talk From You — ‘Smaller Sacrifices’ So Others Can Live

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 Jocelyn Wensley, a registered nurse in the emergency department of Chinook Regional Hospital in Lethbridge.
“COVID is real. It’s in our community. We’ve got people who are intubated upstairs in our ICU because of COVID,” Wensley says.

She says that’s why we need to continue to wear our masks and wash our hands.

“Stick to your smaller cohorts,” Wensley says. “Make these smaller sacrifices so that other people can continue to live. That’s what it’s coming down to, right?”

You can see all of the Straight Talk videos, and new ones daily, on the AHS website.

**Photo of the Week**
Every week, we highlight a photo that illustrates your efforts, compassion and achievements as we respond to the pandemic and support Albertans who come to us for care.

Licensed practical nurse Alexis Mansit is a member of our incredible front-line teams that are staffing COVID-19 testing sites across the province. Thank you for all your efforts!

To see all our AHS photos, visit our Instagram Gallery on the AHS website.

**Updated Food Donations Policy for Staff**
With the start of the holiday season, many Albertans are looking to show their appreciation for AHS front-line staff. While we are grateful for this show of support, AHS has recently updated its policy around accepting donations of food. In accordance with Infection Prevention and Control, AHS employees are currently unable to accept food donations.

Although we cannot accept donations of food, Alberta’s food banks can — and we ask people to please consider passing your kindness on to them. Many Albertans
are turning to their food banks for support right now and these organizations are happy to accept donations in honour of front-line staff. Although monetary donations are preferred so food banks can buy what they need and at a bulk rate, people can also donate non-perishable food as well. We would encourage you to visit the website for your local food bank to see how you can help.

If you have any questions about donations to AHS staff, please contact Foundation Relations and they can assist.

**Influenza Immunization Update**

More than 1.3 million doses of influenza vaccine have been administered in Alberta, an increase of more than 39,000 doses from last week. For the sixth 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](https://inside.ahs.ca) for options to get the flu shot, [resources](https://www.ahs.ca/programs/services/influenza-vaccine) 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](https://www.ahs.ca/programs/services/influenza-vaccine). 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](https://www.ahs.ca/programs/services/influenza-vaccine).

**Think Before Sharing or Posting Information**

There are many reasons to champion the work we do and we understand people may want to add their personal voice to public conversations — and that’s OK. However, while we have our personal views and opinions, please remember it is inappropriate to access, use or disclose AHS business, health or personal information outside of your job role or responsibilities.

AHS business information is anything other than health or personal information. A privacy breach can occur whether AHS information is shared through email, text and personal social media accounts, or with outside organizations, such as the media.

Under [FOIP](https://www.foip.gov.ab.ca) and [HIA](https://www.healthdata.ab.ca) legislation, we are obligated to protect and secure the information we are entrusted to hold. This is applicable to AHS employees, physicians and midwives, volunteers, students and anyone acting on behalf of AHS.

A privacy breach is a serious matter that will be investigated by our Privacy team and could result in potential workplace disciplinary action, college sanctions, fines, and/or criminal charges. Section 3.3 of AHS’ [Code of Conduct](https://www.ahs.ca/policies/ahs-code-of-conduct), and our [Communications policy](https://www.ahs.ca/policies/ahs-communications-policy) will guide you in better understanding your responsibilities.

We all share a responsibility to report suspected privacy breaches of AHS business, health or personal information, that we become aware of, regardless of who caused them. To report a privacy breach, use the online breach notification form. If you need support, speak with your manager or contact infocare@ahs.ca.
Should you feel the need to raise concerns at AHS there are appropriate ways to do so. For concerns that:

- Are about routine AHS operational or HR matters, speak with your manager if you can, or follow existing procedures to resolve them.
- You believe are unlawful, dangerous to the public, or injurious to the public interest, review the Safe Disclosure / Whistleblower policy.
- Are serious wrongdoings that you feel unable to address with your leadership, you may call the external confidential Safe Disclosure Line 1-800-661-9675 offered by AHS’ Ethics and Compliance Office.

To help you make ethical decisions and follow best practices, see the following additional resources:

- [InfoCare Behaviours](#)
- [Confidentiality and User Agreement](#)
- [How to Email Confidential Information](#)
- Social Media Privacy:
  - [Considerations: think before you post](#)
  - [Scenarios](#)

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**Be Well - Be Kind**

**Why It Matters**

Dealing with a pandemic on the front lines can feel overwhelming, especially for those of you who have been deployed to support other areas of need, putting you in unfamiliar territory — from swabbing to screening and contact tracing. In those situations, it can be easy to lose sight of the meaning in the new assignment. However, staying grounded in the work is possible with supportive colleagues and leaders. Let us share an example.

Before the East Drive-Though Assessment Centre in Edmonton closed, Cathie Komant, manager of allied health community in the Edmonton Zone, encouraged her team to look for moments in the day that reminded them of why their work matters and to share that with each other. The staff took it a step further by taking their “why it matters” moments and posting them on sticky notes in the staff room.

Here are some photos of the sticky notes.
The sticky notes were displayed for staff to see, inspiring others to dig deep and continue to find joy and purpose in the work they do.

This is an excellent reminder that healthcare is a team sport and we’re at our best when we bring our caring and compassion to work every day. Great idea, Cathie and team!

**Mental Health and Wellness Supports for Staff**

There are many resources available to support your health and wellness during this time. Please visit the [Employee and Family Assistance Program](https://www.ahs.ca/services-and-programs/employee-wellness-supports) (EFAP) on Insite or check out the resources below:

- **Self-care Tactics**
- **Going Home Checklist**
- **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**

Remember simple acts like reaching out to your coworkers, friends and family, asking questions, listening and being kind can make a difference.

If you have questions or feedback, contact [wellness@ahs.ca](mailto: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.

Thank you to all of our front-line healthcare workers and everyone behind the scenes. Your never-ending commitment to serving the public during these very trying times is outstanding. Society, as a whole, is often easy to criticize. You should be very proud of what you accomplish each day. Hold your head up and know that people all over the province support you and value what you achieve each day to keep us safe.

— Myron

I truly want to say thank you for the best care I have ever received. You all (at Foothills Medical Centre in Calgary) are an inspiration for the healthcare system. You all did an amazing, attentive, kind, respectable and empathetic service to me. No words can express the gratitude I have. I am blessed to have met you all. Thank you.

— Alison

To all healthcare workers and support staff: a huge thank you for your dedication, persistence, courage, hard work and resilience these past eight months! You are shining stars, leading the way for the rest of us by your selfless example. We are mindful of what you are doing and keeping to ourselves to support you. Keep on keeping on.

— Janis

Dear COVID-19 testing team, thank you for all your long hours spent taking care of the sick and (I’m) very thankful to AHS for the quick turnaround with the result — it took less than 12 hours. Really appreciated!

— Anonymous

Wrapping Up — Vaccine News Brings Hope in Difficult Times
This week brought news we’ve all been waiting for — preliminary plans for distributing a COVID-19 vaccine. Many people — including many of you, we suspect — are excited about the prospect of a vaccine that could finally start bringing this terrible pandemic to an end. We’ve already lost too many people. We’ve seen too many people get seriously ill. And many of us have made the heartbreaking but correct decision to stay physically distanced from loved ones for most of the year. So news of a vaccine is undoubtedly welcome. It brings us hope at a time when we are managing what we might look back upon as the worst days of the pandemic. We know the immediate days and weeks ahead likely won’t get any easier. The spread of COVID-19 in Alberta will continue to push healthcare workers, and the health system, to our limits. During this time, let us stick together. Let us stand by one other. Let us use our standing as leaders at work and in the community to urge our families, friends and neighbours to follow the public health measures. We don’t have the vaccine quite yet. But we do have each other.
As always, with gratitude and appreciation,

Dr. Verna Yiu  
AHS President & CEO

Dr. Laura McDougall  
Senior Medical Officer of Health