



## Message from Dr. Verna Yiu & Dr. Laura McDougall

### *AHS Update: Numbers of active cases, hospitalizations, ICU admissions continue to drop; more variant of concern cases detected*

*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
- COVID-19 Vaccination Update
- What We Know About COVID-19 Variants of Concern
- Verna's Weekly Video Message — More on COVID-19 Variants of Concern
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## COVID-19 Status

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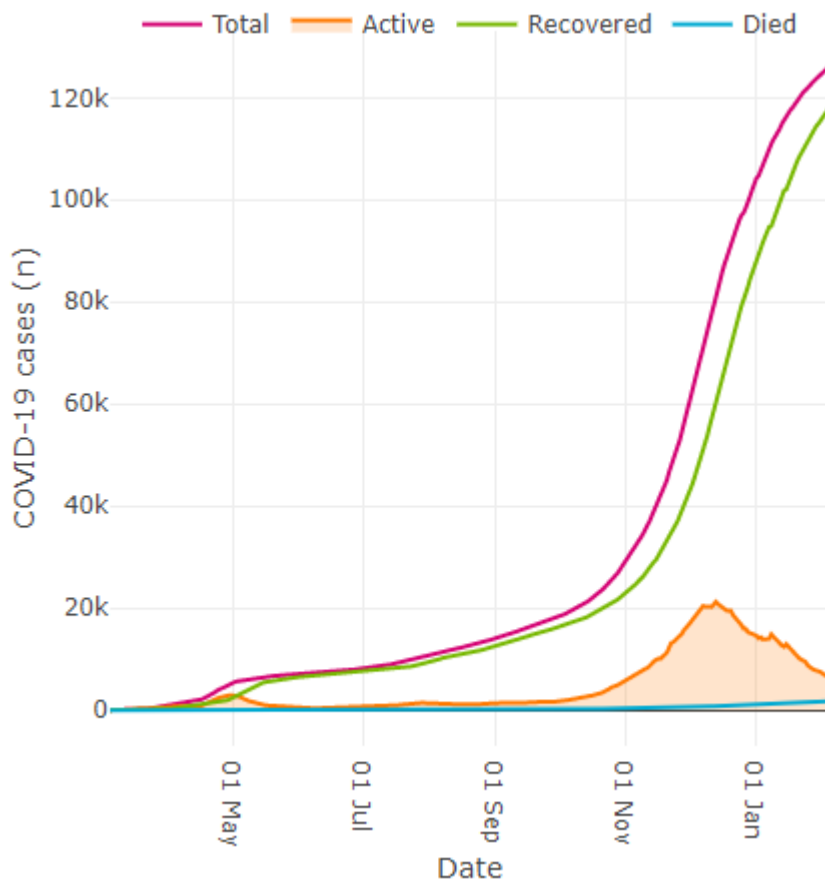
Many of Alberta's COVID-19 numbers continued to trend downward this past week, although we are also seeing an increasing number of cases involving more infectious variants of concern.

For a second consecutive week, all five zones of Alberta Health Services (AHS) are reporting fewer active COVID-19 cases than the prior week. As of Feb. 3, there are 6,588 active cases in the province, the lowest number since early November and 1,544 fewer cases than on Jan. 27 — a 19 per cent decrease.

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

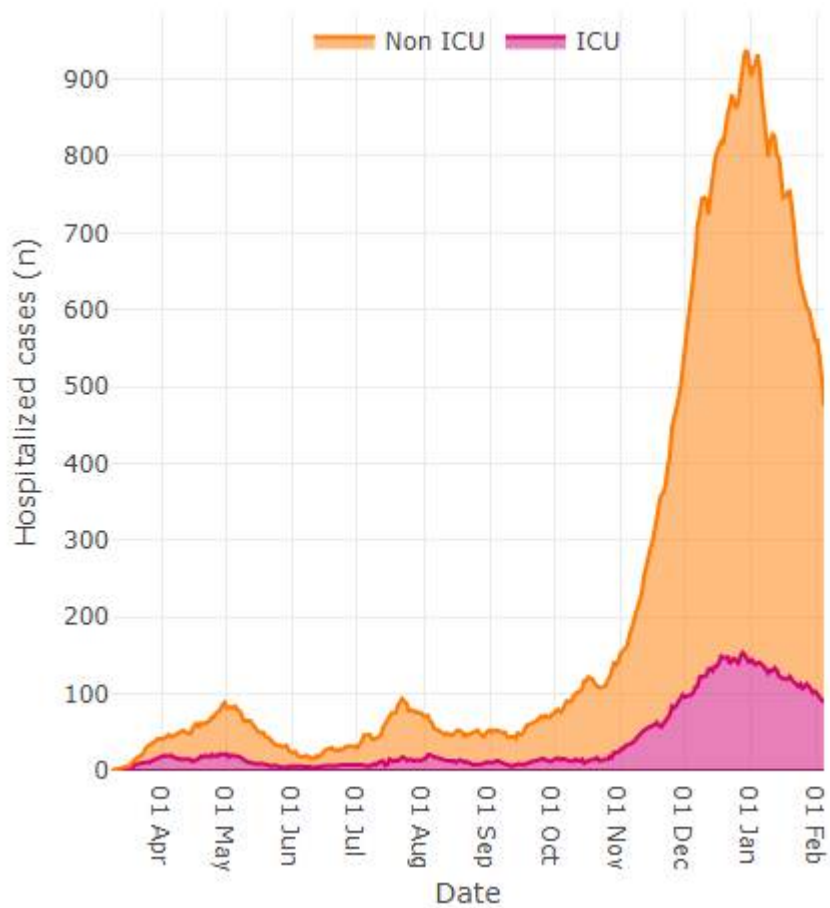
	Active Cases (as of Feb. 3)	Active Cases (as of Jan. 27)	Per cent Change
<b>Calgary</b>	2,710	3,202	-15.4%
<b>Edmonton</b>	2,117	2,764	-23.4%
<b>North</b>	811	1,010	-19.7%
<b>Central</b>	645	710	-9.2%
<b>South</b>	288	336	-14.3%
<b>Unknown</b>	17	19	-10.5%

Meanwhile, there was an average of 415 daily new cases of COVID-19 for the week ending Feb. 3, compared to 477 cases the previous week, a 13 per cent decrease. Individuals ages 20 to 49 years represented half of all new cases over the past week.



### Hospitalizations and ICU admissions

For the fifth consecutive week, there has been a week-to-week decline in the total number of individuals being treated for COVID-19 in Alberta’s hospitals. On Feb. 3, there were 517 individuals with COVID-19 in hospitals across the province compared to 612 on Jan. 27, a 15.5 per cent decrease. Also on Feb. 3, there were 93 individuals in intensive care compared to 113 on Jan. 27, a 17.7 per cent decrease.



The breakdown of hospitalizations by zone as of Feb. 3 is as follows:

	Hospitalizations	ICU
Edmonton	215	32
Calgary	169	38
North	59	8
Central	38	7
South	36	8

### Variants of concern

As of Feb. 3, Alberta Health has detected a total of 68 COVID-19 variant of concern (VOC) cases in the province. All 11 VOC cases identified on Feb. 3 are the B.1.1.7

strain, which first emerged in the U.K. Seven of these cases have no known links to travel, suggesting community transmission, though investigations still continue.

**Other notable COVID-19-related information:**

- As of Feb. 3, a total of 125,672 cases of COVID-19 have occurred in Alberta and a total of 5,495 individuals have been hospitalized, which amounts to 4.4 individuals for every 100 cases. In all, 117,400 Albertans have recovered from COVID-19.
- As of Feb. 3, 1,684 individuals have passed away from COVID-19, including 78 over a seven-day period ending Feb. 3. 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 Jan. 28 to Feb. 3, 70,694 COVID-19 tests were completed, an average of 10,099 tests per day. During this period, the daily positivity ranged from 3.53 per cent to 5.30 per cent. As of Feb. 3, a total of 3,213,391 tests have been conducted and 1,765,546 individuals have been tested.

## Things You Need to Know

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### **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 Feb. 3:

- 76,147 employees (AHS, APL and Covenant combined) have been tested for COVID-19 and, of those tested, 4,492 (or 5.9 per cent) have tested positive.
- Of the 1,497 employees who have tested positive and whose source of infection has been determined, 457 (or 30.5 per cent) acquired their infection through a workplace exposure. An additional 2,995 employees who have tested positive are still under investigation as to the source of infection.
- 4,901 physicians (AHS, APL and Covenant combined) have been tested for COVID-19 and, of those tested, 192 (or 3.9 per cent) have tested positive.
- Of the 57 physicians who have tested positive and whose source of infection has been determined, eight (or 14 per cent) acquired their infection through a workplace exposure. An additional 135 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 Update**

### *By the Numbers*

As of 10 a.m. on Feb. 5, more than 113,000 total doses of COVID-19 vaccine have been administered in Alberta, including:

- 43,700+ healthcare workers
- 38,400+ long-term care (LTC) and designated supportive living (DSL) residents
- 30,100+ LTC/DSL staff
- 23,200+ Albertans who have received both Dose 1 & Dose 2

### *Update on Second-Dose Appointment Rebooking*

As of Feb. 5, more than 90 per cent of second-dose COVID-19 vaccine appointments have been rebooked for eligible healthcare workers in [Phase 1A](#). Appointments have been rebooked within the allowable window: 38 to 42 days after the first dose appointment.

We encourage those who still need to rebook their second-dose appointment to do so. Every day is critical to our current vaccine supply to ensure that all Albertans can be immunized according to the recommended timelines.

If you booked your appointment through the [online booking tool](#), you need to rebook by going to your COVID-19 immunization confirmation email from AHS Booking and clicking on the link at the bottom of the email to modify your booking, or visit [ahs.ca/updatebooking](https://ahs.ca/updatebooking). You will still see your current appointment in the online booking tool but it will not be accommodated. It needs to be rescheduled to a later date.

Those who were not booked through the online tool have been contacted by text and automated phone call, not email. These people are asked to contact Health Link (for Edmonton and Calgary Zone) or your zone public health in North, Central, and South zones to arrange second-dose appointment booking or rebooking.

We know many people are anxious to be immunized for COVID-19 and that updates and information about the COVID-19 pandemic can change daily, including the immunization rollout process. We appreciate your patience during this time.

### *COVID-19 Vaccine Toolkit & Other Resources*

An updated [COVID-19 Vaccine Toolkit](#) is now available on [Insite](#) and contains resources to help keep you updated on the latest information as it becomes available. This toolkit includes answers to frequently asked questions, links to additional resources, and more. These resources will be updated on an ongoing basis to reflect the latest updates.

For information about the vaccine and the AHS vaccine rollout process, please visit: [COVID-19 Vaccine Key Messages](#).

- For a list of the top frequently asked questions about sequencing and eligibility, please visit: [Top COVID-19 Vaccine Sequencing Questions](#).

- [Vaccine Sequencing for Healthcare Workers](#) outlines sequencing considerations and the role of the COVID-19 Vaccine Sequencing for Healthcare Workers Committee.
- Physicians and staff can visit [Insite](#), our [staff FAQ](#) and [Alberta Health's Q & A for healthcare practitioners](#) for more information.
- Regular updates and more information can also be found at [ahs.ca/covidvaccine](https://ahs.ca/covidvaccine).

#### *Complete your Got My COVID-19 Immunization Form*

For staff and physicians who have received their COVID-19 immunization, please fill out the Got My COVID-19 Immunization Form on [Insite](#). It's important employees report their immunization status after receiving their second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. This information will be used by AHS to appropriately plan, manage and allocate resources in the event of a COVID-19 outbreak to protect our patients, families and healthcare workers.

#### *Government, AMA Looking to Expand Vaccination Efforts*

The Government of Alberta and the Alberta Medical Association [announced on Feb. 5](#) they will work together to examine opportunities for community physician offices to participate in COVID-19 vaccination when more vaccine becomes readily available for distribution.

#### **What We Know About COVID-19 Variants of Concern**

Several new “variant” strains of the SARS-CoV-2 virus have been identified in Alberta and around the world. These variants are similar to, but more infectious than the strain we’ve experienced so far.

Evidence is still emerging on the effectiveness of our vaccines on these variants. It’s important to remember the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are only a few months old, just like the variants. There is much we do not yet know, though researchers around the world are investigating.

Early investigations so far appear to suggest the current vaccines may be somewhat less effective against some of the new variants, in terms of preventing all symptoms of COVID-19. However, even against the variants, these vaccines still appear to be extremely effective at preventing severe cases, hospitalizations and deaths.

Research is emerging, and there are many vaccines being developed as we speak, so we will continue to watch the emerging literature closely. This is a positive sign. At the same time, it is also a reminder we all cannot simply wait for vaccines to arrive. We need to keep focused on following the measures in place and trying to limit in-person interactions whenever we can.

#### **Verna’s Weekly Video Message — More on COVID-19 Variants of Concern**

Joining me (Verna) on [this week’s vlog to talk more about the variants of concern](#) are:

- Dr. Laura McDougall, AHS Senior Medical Officer of Health.

- Dr. Lynora Saxinger, Physician and Medical Lead, AHS Antimicrobial Stewardship, North, and co-chair of the Scientific Advisory Group.
- Dr. Graham Tipples, Medical Scientific Director, Public Health, Alberta Precision Laboratories.

Laura, Lynora and Graham explain what the COVID-19 variants of concern are, their potential risk to the health system, and how we monitor and test for them.

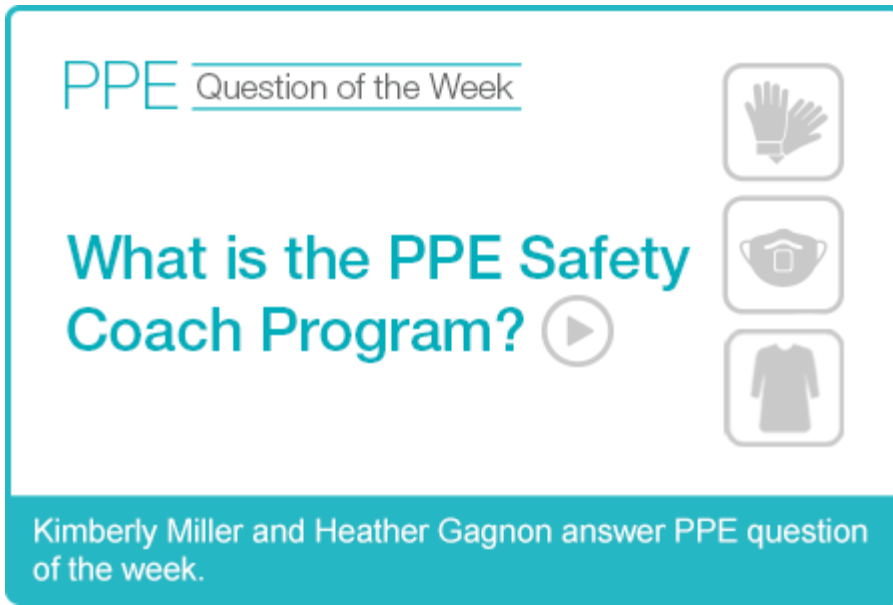


#### **PPE Question of the Week — What is the PPE Safety Coach Program?**

As we continue to work together to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in our facilities, appropriate selection and use of personal protective equipment (PPE) remains critical. To support AHS staff in following PPE guidelines, AHS launched a voluntary [Provincial PPE Safety Coach Program](#) at the end of 2020.

[Kimberly Miller, Director, Infection Prevention and Control, and Heather Gagnon, Senior Project Manager, Infection Prevention and Control, discuss the PPE Safety Coach program, the role of a PPE safety coach, the benefits of the program and how to get involved if you want to become a PPE safety coach at your site.](#)





Previous videos in the PPE Question of the Week series are available on the PPE webpage as well at [www.ahs.ca/covidppe](http://www.ahs.ca/covidppe).

**Reminder: Please Stay Vigilant, Adhere to All Safety Measures**

While the number of active COVID-19 cases is trending downward in the province, we still have work to do. It is critical we all continue to take the required precautions to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

We cannot overstate the importance of staying home when sick. If you have new symptoms, or if your usual symptoms get worse, stay home, minimize contact with others and complete the [Self-Assessment Tool](#) to determine your need for COVID-19 testing. We each have a role to play in protecting each other — patients, staff, physicians, volunteers and visitors. We must all be diligent in modelling safe work practices. Simple actions — such as adhering to all [personal protective equipment \(PPE\)](#) measures (including [continuous masking and eye protection](#)), completing your daily [fit for work screening](#), [washing your hands](#) regularly and [physically distancing](#) — can slow the spread of COVID-19.

As we continue to monitor our COVID-19 response and the impact on AHS healthcare workers, we know transmission is continuing to occur within our workplaces. There is a significant risk for transmission of COVID-19 in common areas, such as break rooms, charting areas and open work spaces if appropriate control measures are not followed. By following all of the safety measures in place, we can help keep everyone safe. This is not merely an expectation; this is a requirement — and applies to all zones and all AHS or subsidiary facilities (clinical and corporate).

Please talk to your leader if you have questions or if you are unsure if your symptoms should require you to stay home. Thank you for your continued support and dedication.



### **Straight Talk From You — ‘We Can Do This’**

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 new Straight Talk videos every week on YouTube and sharing them through 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.

This week, we highlight a video featuring Maria Van Der Hoek, a medical lab assistant with Alberta Precision Laboratories.



“COVID-19 has affected every aspect of society and our lives, and laboratory services is not immune to that,” she says. “We have adapted to the challenges at hand by implementing precautions, screening our patients, providing new masks and hand sanitizer, all the necessary PPE, additional testing and services.

“We understand that your time is valuable and we want to get you in and out in a fast and safe way. And we are trying to do that. Stay home if you’re able. Stay well if you’re able. Get the vaccination when it becomes your turn.

“We can do this and we will get through this.”

You can see all of the [Straight Talk videos](#) on the AHS website.

### **Photo of the Week**

Every week, we highlight a 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.



Laboratory technologist Kara Gill is part of Alberta Precision Laboratories' specialized diagnostics team, a team of scientists that has been actively monitoring the genetic code of COVID-19 since the beginning of the pandemic. Genetic sequencing of the coronavirus' RNA (ribonucleic acid) helps us understand how the virus is evolving in our population and is used to detect the arrival of variant strains from outside the province that may pose new challenges for diagnosing and treating the disease in our community.

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

### **Influenza Immunization Update**

As of Jan. 30, 2021, 1,527,367 doses of influenza vaccine have been administered in Alberta. Immunizations are up by more than 180,000 doses compared to the same time last year.

For the 13th week in row, there are no reported cases of seasonal influenza in Alberta.

Alberta Precision Laboratories (APL) has tested 91,401 respiratory swabs for influenza from Aug. 23, 2020, to Feb. 2, 2021. Our labs are doing more weekly influenza testing than ever before, completing about 300 per cent more influenza tests than they would in a typical year.

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

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

### **New Messaging Guidelines for Virtual Care**

AHS Virtual Health has developed a new resource, [Messaging Guidelines for Virtual Care](#), to help guide clinical practice when communicating with patients or their alternate decision-maker, using messaging platforms (Connect Care MyAHS Connect patient portal, AHS secure email or text messaging).

Find this new resource on the [AHS Virtual Health Insite page](#) under Virtual Health Recommendations and the [external](#) page under Information for Health Professionals.

Contact the AHS Virtual Health team at [VirtualHealth.Info@ahs.ca](mailto:VirtualHealth.Info@ahs.ca) with questions about virtual care, or complete the [Virtual Health Intake Form](#) to request support integrating virtual care technologies into your practice.

### **Connect Care Wave Updates**

Due to the demands of the pandemic on our health system and province, a decision was made in December to alter the timing and scope of Connect Care's Wave 3, now launching this April. Following that decision, updates have now been made to the scope and timing of the upcoming waves.

There will still be nine implementation waves in total, which started in late 2019 and will be completed in 2023.

As previously announced, a modified Wave 3 is launching on April 10, primarily in North Zone. Waves 4, 5, 6 and 7 are as follows:

- Wave 4 will launch Nov. 7, 2021, and will include Royal Alexandra Hospital and Glenrose Rehabilitation Hospital in Edmonton; Alberta Children's Hospital and Peter Lougheed Centre in Calgary Zone, as well as Calgary Zone rural and urgent care sites, and the clinics and services aligned with those; the Southern Alberta Forensic Psychiatric Centre; Central Production Pharmacy, and all labs in the Edmonton Zone that have not already implemented Connect Care.
- Wave 5 will launch May 14, 2022, and will include the west area (former David Thompson Health Region) of Central Zone; Centennial Centre for Mental Health and Brain Injury in Central Zone; Richmond Road Diagnostic and Treatment Centre and Foothills Medical Centre in Calgary; Cancer Care (and associated pharmacy and lab services); Alberta Kidney Care South; all pharmacy services in Calgary Zone; and all lab services in the rural portion of the west area of Central Zone.
- Wave 6 will launch Nov. 6, 2022, and will include Grey Nuns Community Hospital, Misericordia Community Hospital and Alberta Hospital Edmonton in the Edmonton Zone; the east area (former East Central Health Region) of Central Zone; Rockyview General Hospital and South Health Campus in the Calgary Zone; the associated pharmacy services in Edmonton, Central and

Calgary zones; the lab services in the rural portions of the east area of Central Zone; and Alberta Precision Laboratories in the Calgary Zone.

- Wave 7 will launch in the spring of 2023 and will include the east side of the North Zone (former Aspen and Northern Lights Health regions), the South Zone, including the stand-alone long-term care sites, and the associated pharmacy and lab services for these sites and programs.

Details for Waves 8 and 9 are still being determined and will be shared when available. For more detailed information, please see the [Wave Implementation Diagram](#).

Our commitment to Connect Care has not changed and its successful implementation remains an organizational priority. We are continually assessing what's happening across our organization and may need to make future adjustments to safely and effectively put Connect Care in place.

#### **Update Voicemail to Reduce External Call Forwarding**

AHS Telecommunications is restricting requests to use external call-forwarding on AHS desk phones to maintain phone system reliability and avoid any additional risks to our system capacity.

If you are working from home, please update the voicemail greeting on your AHS desk phone to guide callers to direct-dial your preferred out-of-office number rather than using external call forwarding.

Questions? See [Insite](#). Need support? Contact [AHS.Telecom@ahs.ca](mailto:AHS.Telecom@ahs.ca).

#### **February is Black History Month**

Racism and discrimination exist in our healthcare system and we need to take steps to do better to foster inclusion, connection and collaboration. We know it will take all of us standing together to ensure people and patients feel safe, included and respected. If you experience or witness acts of racism or discrimination, please refer to the [Respectful Workplaces and Prevention of Harassment & Violence Policy](#).

In recognition of Black History Month, and with partnership between AHS Diversity & Inclusion, Ethnic Minorities Workforce Resource Group, and Talent Acquisition, a number of activities have been planned for Black History Month. Details on events are outlined below:

#### *Have your say in guiding the work of the AHS Anti-Racism Advisory Group*

- This includes developing an anti-racism action plan for AHS. Your feedback is essential as we continue to look for ways to further address racism and discrimination at AHS. You can provide your input through an [anonymous survey](#) or by participating in a [focus group](#).
- For more information on the activities of the Anti-Racism Advisory Group or for resources on how you can contribute to a safer and more inclusive

workplace at AHS, visit our [Insite page](#) or email [diversityandinclusion@ahs.ca](mailto:diversityandinclusion@ahs.ca).

#### *Our People Survey Lunch & Learn: Supporting Black History Month*

- Topic: Significant Contributions of Black People to the Canadian Healthcare System: A Focus on Alberta.
- When: Feb. 25, noon to 1 p.m.
- Register: Go to MyLearningLink and search “Our People Survey” in courses and registrations.

#### *Our People Podcast*

In these podcasts, we recognize Black History Month by learning about the experience of black people in AHS.

- Podcast Part A – Feb. 19
- Podcast Part B – Feb. 22
- You can listen to these and all of Our People Podcasts at: <https://soundcloud.com/ahs-communications/sets/our-people-strategy/s-RpdsW>

## Be Well - Be Kind

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### **Take A Mental Health Moment**

Keeping yourself mentally and physically healthy is one of the best ways to manage [stress](#) and anxiety. We know you have lots going on right now and, if you need assistance, the [Employee and Family Assistance Program \(EFAP\)](#) offers an online cognitive behavioural therapy program called i-Volve. It’s a self-paced, web-based treatment program for depression and anxiety. See a full description [here](#). You can access i-Volve by visiting [homeweb.ca](http://homeweb.ca) or [e-AP](#).

Additional supports are available below:

- [Resilience, Wellness and Mental Health Resource Guide](#)
- [EFAP Life Smart Coaching](#)
- [EFAP Counselling Services](#)
- [EFAP Resilience App](#)
- [Health and Wellness](#)

Call EFAP at 1-877-273-3134 and get started today. If you have questions, contact [wellness@ahs.ca](mailto:wellness@ahs.ca).

### **Sharing the Love — Thank You to Our Contact Tracing and Case Investigation Teams**

Our case investigation and contact tracing efforts – and the size of our teams – have grown by leaps and bounds since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic response.

When the pandemic began, we had a small but mighty team of 50. As of Jan. 29, AHS has more than 2,000 contact tracers and case investigators, and we continue to hire, train and onboard staff.

Our teams are contacting and investigating all COVID-19 cases we receive each day and we are able to reach out to cases within 24 hours of receiving confirmation of their positive COVID-19 test result.

We have seen tremendous success with recruitment efforts. In addition, we have partnered with IT to implement innovative approaches, and have done numerous process and quality improvement projects that have increased the speed and efficiency with which we are contacting cases and their close contacts. We now have the capacity to contact trace about 1,300 cases per day.

We wouldn't be able to do any of this without each and every one of you.

Thank you to everyone on the case investigation and contact tracing team that is comprised of Communicable Disease Control staff, redeployed and reassigned staff, as well as new hires. Our thanks also extends to all teams involved in recruitment, training, onboarding and the implementation of new processes and technologies to modernize our case investigation and contact tracing approach.

Thank you for your tireless work over the last 11 months and thank you for stepping up during the pandemic response. With the emergence of COVID-19 variant cases in our province, your work is critical now more than ever as we work to contain the variant strains. You have a direct impact on slowing the spread of COVID-19 in our communities and protecting Albertans. We appreciate you and value your work. We could not have come this far without you.

Thank you.

— Laura McDougall, Senior Medical Officer of Health

### **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](#) on Insite.

I know the hoopla has died down but the work you do is just as hard as it was six months ago. Please know that I'm as grateful today as I was then. Thank you.

— Donovan Hoggan

I was in the emergency due to a fall I had. Everyone I interacted with was extremely helpful, friendly and skilful. Thank you; it's so good to know we are in good hands.

— Jan Novotny

Your dedication gives patients comfort in scary times. I always felt safe in your kind hands.

— Earl Stoll

Thank you to all the health workers for their selfless dedication and relentless effort to continuously serve in the pandemic world. Stay safe.

— Nashania Patel

### **Wrapping Up — Use Knowledge as an Antidote for Unease**

This week we've addressed variants of concern on several occasions. And if you're worried about them, that's natural and expected: the unknown has a way of making people feel uneasy. Please know we are monitoring this situation, and proactively building our capacity to do genetic analysis on samples to identify any arising variants to ensure our response is timely and effective. We encourage you to read the What We Know about COVID-19 Variants of Concern item and watch this week's CEO vlog (above) to find out what we know about the variants and what we're doing to slow their spread. Let's arm ourselves with evidence, and continue doing what we know protects us from COVID-19 and its variants: avoiding large gatherings outside our households, reducing in-person interactions, practising physical distancing, wearing a mask where physical distancing cannot be maintained, and practising good hand hygiene. Let's encourage others to do the same. As a number of people have said recently, "Viruses can't mutate if they don't replicate," and variants can't spread if we don't give them the opportunity. If we control what we can control, and use the knowledge that we have, we will continue protecting ourselves, each other and our communities. Thank you for everything that you do.

With enduring gratitude and appreciation,

**Dr. Verna Yiu**

AHS President & CEO

**Dr. Laura McDougall**

Senior Medical Officer of Health

