



Message from  
Dr. Verna Yiu &  
Dr. Laura McDougall

*AHS Update: Average number of daily new cases rises for first time in 10 weeks, immunization begins for Albertans 75+, tentative deal for physicians*

*Please print and share with your teams as needed*

**Dear staff, physicians and volunteers,**

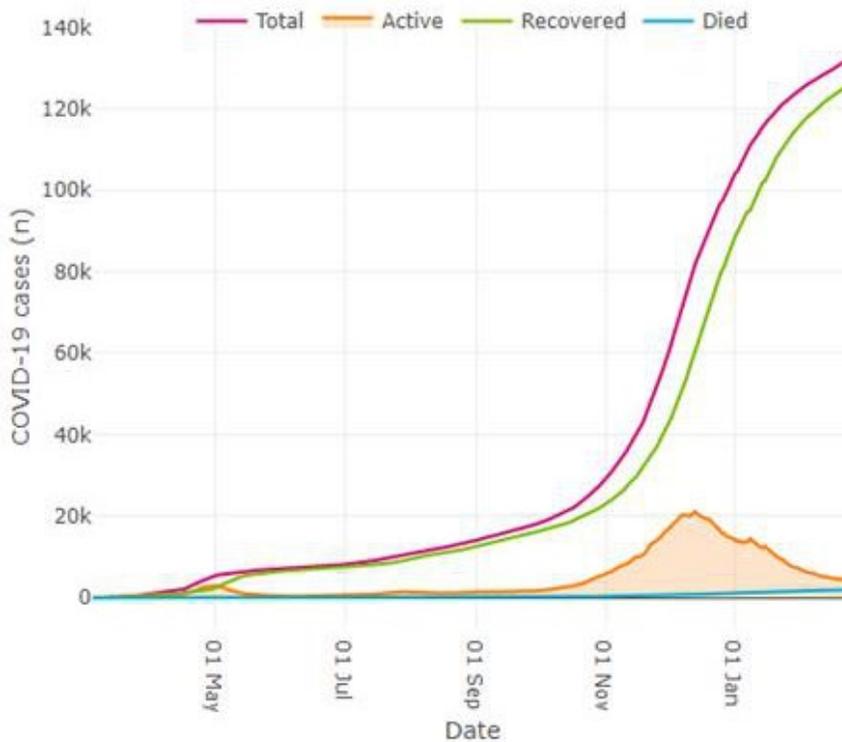
### **Today's Update**

- **COVID-19 Cases in Alberta**
- **Government, AMA Reach Tentative Agreement for Physicians**
- **COVID-19 Testing for Healthcare Workers — The Latest Numbers**
- **COVID-19 Immunization Update**
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After 10 consecutive weeks of declines, the average number of daily new COVID-19 cases in Alberta climbed this past week — a week also marked with encouraging news: the start of large-group public COVID-19 immunizations (see COVID-19 Immunization Update item for details).

There was an average of 348 new cases per day for the week ending Feb. 24, compared to 303 the previous week, a 14.9 per cent increase. The Calgary Zone had the most new cases this week at 817 — a third of all new cases in the province. Of concern, the North Zone, with a much smaller population, had the second-highest number of new cases this week, with 607.

Overall, the number of active cases in the province continues to drop. As of Feb. 24, there were 4,484 active cases, a decrease of 403 (or 11.2 per cent) from the previous week.



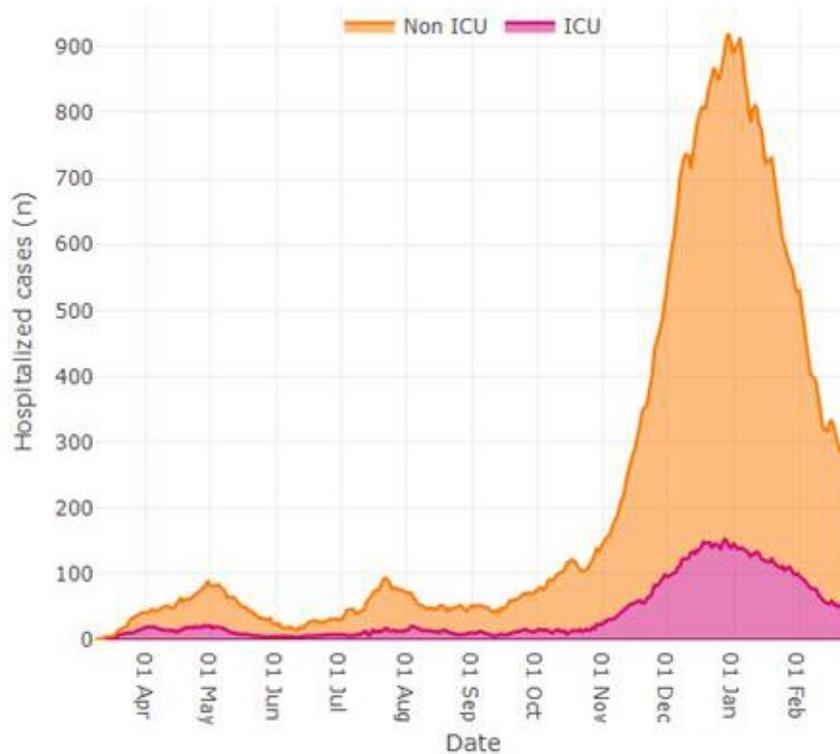
However, this decrease in active cases is not distributed equally between the AHS zones. The Edmonton Zone reported a 30 per cent reduction in its number of active cases, whereas the North Zone reported an increase of about 27 per cent. For the seventh consecutive week, the Calgary Zone has the most active cases at 1,510, though this a decrease of nearly 13 per cent from the previous week.

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

	Active Cases (as of Feb. 24)	Active Cases (as of Feb. 17)	Per cent Change
Calgary	1,510	1,734	-12.9%
North	1,016	799	+27.2%
Edmonton	897	1,287	-30.3%
Central	737	729	+1.1%
South	319	333	-4.2%
Unknown	5	5	0%

### Hospitalizations and ICU admissions

For the eighth consecutive week, Alberta reports another a week-to-week decline in the total number of individuals being treated in hospital for COVID-19. On Feb. 24, there were 280 individuals in hospitals compared to 330 on Feb. 17, a 15.2 per cent decrease. However, the number of individuals in intensive care units (ICUs) has climbed slightly over the past week with 56 in ICUs on Feb. 24 compared to 54 on Feb. 17.



The breakdown of hospitalizations by zone as of Feb. 24 is as follows:

	Hospitalizations	ICUs
Calgary	100	15
Edmonton	82	18
North	40	3
Central	32	10
South	26	10

### Update on variants of concern

Alberta Health has now reported 323 cases of COVID-19 variants of concern (VOC): 316

are B.1.1.7 variant (U.K. variant) and seven are the B.1.351 variant (South African variant). This represents a 35.1 per cent increase since Feb. 17, when 239 VOC cases had been detected. VOCs have been detected in the Calgary, Edmonton and Central zones and, this past week, the North Zone identified its first VOC case.

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

- As of Feb. 24, a total of 132,432 cases of COVID-19 have been detected in Alberta and a total of 5,844 individuals have been hospitalized, which amounts to 4.4 individuals for every 100 cases. In all, 126,074 Albertans have recovered from COVID-19.
- As of Feb. 24, 1,874 individuals have passed away from COVID-19, including 69 deaths over the past seven days (Feb. 18 to Feb. 24). 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 Feb. 18 to Feb. 24, 56,390 COVID-19 tests were completed, an average of 8,056 tests per day. During this period, the daily positivity ranged from 3.66 per cent to 4.67 per cent. As of Feb. 24, about 3.4 million tests have been conducted and 1.8 million individuals have been tested.
- The R value, also known as the reproduction number, describes the ability of a disease to spread. It tells us the average number of people that someone with COVID-19 will infect. An R value of 1 means an infected person will infect one other person on average. Values below 1 mean transmission is decreasing; above 1, transmission is increasing. The provincewide R value from Feb. 15 to 21 was 1.03, compared to 0.85 for the week ending Feb. 14.
- For the winter school term, as of Feb. 24, AHS has confirmed 1,375 individuals with COVID-19 were present at schools while infectious or acquired the disease in the school setting. A total of 532 out of 2,415 schools (or 22 per cent) in the province have reported an individual has attended their school while infectious or had in-school transmission.

## Things You Need to Know

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**Government, AMA Reach Tentative Agreement for Physicians**

Alberta Health Minister Tyler Shandro and Dr. Paul Boucher, President of the Alberta Medical Association (AMA), announced today a tentative new provincial agreement for physicians. Agreement details were not released.

Minister Shandro said the tentative agreement allows for fiscal sustainability into the future, while maintaining a strong focus on patient care and fairness and equity for physicians. Dr. Boucher said the tentative agreement addresses needs such as new models for delivering care and strategies to improve quality of care for patients.

A special meeting of the AMA's governing body will be held in the coming week via Zoom. The governing body will consider the tentative agreement and provide advice to the board of directors. On that advice, the AMA board will determine whether the

agreement will proceed to a ratification vote by our approximately 11,000 members. The AMA is prepared to open voting immediately for a three-week period.

### **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. New this week, an additional dashboard page has been added that summarizes the sources of infections acquired through a workplace exposure.

As of Feb. 24:

- 77,256 employees (AHS, APL and Covenant combined) have been tested for COVID-19 and, of those tested, 4,656 (or 6.0 per cent) have tested positive.
- Of the 1,718 employees who have tested positive and whose source of infection has been determined, 428 (or 24.9 per cent) acquired their infection through a workplace exposure. An additional 2,938 employees who have tested positive are still under investigation as to the source of infection.
- 4,968 physicians (AHS, APL and Covenant combined) have been tested for COVID-19 and, of those tested, 193 (or 3.9 per cent) have tested positive.
- Of the 64 physicians who have tested positive and whose source of infection has been determined, nine (or 14.1 per cent) acquired their infection through a workplace exposure. An additional 129 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 Immunization Update**

#### *By the Numbers*

As of 11 a.m. on Feb. 26, more than 207,600 total doses of COVID-19 vaccine have been administered in Alberta, including:

- 79,600+ doses to healthcare workers.
- 55,000+ doses to long-term care (LTC) and designated supportive living (DSL) residents.
- 51,500+ doses to LTC/DSL staff.

In total, 82,944 Albertans have received both Dose 1 and Dose 2, and 41,722 have received Dose 1 only.

#### *Immunization for Albertans born in 1946 or earlier*

On Feb. 24 at 8 a.m., AHS began large-group public COVID-19 immunizations with Albertans ages 75 years and older. Appointments continue to be available, as we work

towards immunizing all seniors 75+ in the community by April, pending vaccine supply.

We know many Albertans were frustrated and worried in the initial days of the public COVID-19 immunization campaign, as they experienced delays in booking an appointment, or waited in a long line to get their vaccination. I (Verna) wish to make a [personal apology](#) to anyone who experienced frustration, anger, or worry over what should be a hopeful time in the pandemic response.

We think it's also extremely important to acknowledge that we are leading the country in terms of getting our seniors immunized. In just two days, more than 120,000 Albertans signed up to get the COVID-19 vaccine. That's more than half the population in this age group.

We have already immunized upwards of 12,000 of these seniors aged 75 and over in two days, bringing the total number of immunized Albertans ages 75 and over (including those in congregate living settings) to 45,927. These seniors are on their way to being protected against the virus. That's a massive achievement.

As a society, we are one step closer to getting back to some semblance of normal life. The more people immunized, the less community transmission we will see.

So yes, there have been problems and, as an organization, we really feel that deeply. But we mustn't lose sight of the fact that, overall, this has been a good, positive week in our battle against COVID-19.

We know we can be better. That's why, when we learned of the long lineups yesterday, our teams rolled into action. We have added additional staff and signage at sites to encourage people with appointments to wait in their vehicles until their appointment times – people shouldn't have to wait in long lines.

Each appointment is booked in 10-minute increments. This helps ensure we can maintain physical distancing at all immunization clinics.

Yesterday, we saw that some individuals are arriving at appointments 30 to 60 minutes in advance; as a result, wait lines are forming outside some of the facilities.

We understand their desire to be on-time – for many people, getting their first dose is an exciting day – but this is why we have an appointment system. We have added “greeters” at our busiest sites to explain the process when they pull into the parking lot, and to encourage them to stay in their cars until five minutes before their appointment.

We also ask that, for people who are comfortable going into the site alone, please don't bring a support person or family member with you. We have staff inside who can help and assist you.

We are looking at opening more sites, particularly in Edmonton. This will also help add physical distance between people.

### *More on the appointment booking tool*

The site has stabilized significantly since Wednesday, and people are having a much easier and less frustrating experience.

The fact is, we had 150,000 people try to access that tool all at once, as soon as it went live. We had robustly tested the tool but we did not expect that many people to go to it right away.

We worked hard on Wednesday, and again yesterday, to fix the problems. We increased server capacity, we added Health Link phone lines and staff, we added a queuing tool to ease demand, and these things have helped significantly.

Being able to book appointments for more than 120,000 people since Wednesday is a significant achievement. Yes, it could have gone smoother, and yes there were challenges and frustrations.

But, people are getting their shots and are getting the protection they need against COVID-19. We can't forget that.

### *More on 811 routing for COVID-19 immunization appointments, other concerns*

AHS has improved access to 811. Albertans calling 811 now have a choice to route their calls to book a COVID-19 immunization appointment or to reach a registered nurse for medical concerns. The two options will help refer callers more quickly to the resource they need. A holding queue for callers requesting the immunization appointment option has also been created. This holding queue allows 350 individuals to wait for a Health Link team member to book their vaccine appointment.

Albertans can book a COVID-19 immunization by booking online at [ahs.ca/covidvaccine](https://ahs.ca/covidvaccine) or calling 811. Combined, the system can take approximately 5,000 bookings an hour. Additional Health Link team members have been made available to answer both types of calls.

We continue to anticipate there will be a wait time to get on the online booking tool and through to Health Link in the coming days. We are asking Albertans to please be patient if they are waiting to book their vaccine appointment. The AHS online immunization booking tool and Health Link are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Albertans can also book a COVID-19 immunization through some local pharmacies. Alberta Blue Cross is hosting that information [here](#).

### *COVID-19 immunization milestone*

On Feb. 25 and 26, more than 10,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccine were administered each day for the first time in AHS' COVID-19 immunization campaign. Thank you to all the teams that made this possible!

### *Important to sign up for immunization in sequence*

When staff and physicians are invited to sign up for immunization as the vaccine rolls

out, it is important to follow the appropriate immunization sequencing.

Staff and physicians will receive a direct phone call or email/text to sign up and will be reminded that their registration details are confidential and only intended for their own use. They should be aware of the [current sequencing eligibility](#) and should report any potential errors in sequencing to their leader.

Any staff member or physician who tries to book an immunization if not eligible would be in breach of the [Appropriate Prioritization of Access to Health Services Policy](#).

Where incidents are brought to our attention, a thorough review will be conducted and appropriate action taken where the investigation deems access to be out of sequence.

### *Resources*

Some of our website links have changed:

- [COVID-19 Vaccine FAQ](#) for staff and public
- [Healthcare Worker Immunization Online Booking Tool FAQ](#)
- COVID-19 Immunization Booking Tool for Seniors 75+ can be accessed here: [ahs.ca/covidvaccine](https://ahs.ca/covidvaccine)
- [FAQ](#) specific to immunization for seniors 75+
- [Poster](#) with current information for seniors on vaccine eligibility and how to book their appointments

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

Staff and physicians who have received their COVID-19 immunization are asked to complete 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.

### **PPE Safety Coach Program Update**

The Provincial PPE Safety Coach Program was developed by Infection Prevention & Control and endorsed by Workplace Health & Safety, and aims to increase the proper selection and use of PPE in front-line settings to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and other respiratory viruses, such as influenza.

As of Feb. 12, more than 650 staff have been fully trained as PPE Safety Coaches. Individuals interested in participating can do so at any time. AHS site leadership and unit management work with staff and physicians to identify coaches and are encouraged to identify at least two coaches per unit or program area for coaching training.

Visit [ahs.ca/ppesafetycoach](https://ahs.ca/ppesafetycoach) for more information.

### **Verna's Weekly Video Message: Reducing Diagnostic Imaging Wait Times**

Today, I (Verna) want to talk about the important role our diagnostic imaging team plays in the lives of all Albertans. They do fantastic work, performing more than 2.9 million

exams every year at 130 facilities across Alberta.

They are also projected to complete nearly 486,000 CT scans this year – an increase of 58,000 from last year.

But one thing we've heard from Albertans is that wait times to access diagnostic services like MRIs and CT scans are too long. We know how important it is for patients to receive timely access to these services, and to get their test results as quickly as possible.

We are working to improve this important service through our new CT and MRI Plan, which will focus on reducing wait times, decreasing costs, and better managing the demand for these services.

Joining me to tell us more are:

- Dr. Mark Joffe, Vice President and Medical Director, Cancer Care Alberta and Clinical Support Services and Provincial Clinical Excellence.
- Mauro Chies, Vice President, Cancer Care Alberta & Clinical Support Services.

[Mark and Mauro share the work the diagnostic imaging team is doing, the challenges they face, and more details on the CT and MRI Plan.](#)



### **Straight Talk — ‘Follow the Rules’**

Straight Talk is a video series in which we normally profile healthcare workers talking from the heart about what they're seeing and experiencing at work and in their communities as COVID-19 spreads across the province. This week, however, we share the thoughts of Greg Berube, whose 13-year-old daughter recently needed to spend time in hospital.



“Our village has become very small,” Berube says. “The grandparents can’t see their granddaughter. (My wife and I) are allowed to be with her during the day but we can’t both be there overnight.”

Berube says he understands the reason for visiting restrictions but adds he doesn’t understand why some Albertans don’t take COVID-19 seriously.

“Stay home. Wear a mask if you do go out. Follow the rules,” he says.

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.



This past year has been tough for Mary House, 80. She has relied on her family for help getting groceries and running errands since the COVID-19 pandemic began in Alberta.

“I’m in the age bracket that you don’t pull through this thing very easily,” she says.

This week, she received the first of her COVID-19 vaccines in Calgary.

“I still understand that this COVID-19 is something entirely different from anything we’ve ever seen before,” she says.

But the vaccine gives her hope, she says, that she will eventually spend quality time with her four new great-grandchildren, all born this past year.

“I’ve seen them once or twice, but I can’t touch them and they can’t touch me,” she says. “I get really excited about getting to know them and for them to recognize me as great grandma.”

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

### **Influenza Immunization Update**

As of Feb. 20, 1.55 million doses of influenza vaccine have been administered in Alberta. Immunizations are up by more than 171,000 compared to the same time last year.

For the 16<sup>th</sup> week in row, there are no reported cases of seasonal influenza in Alberta. Alberta Precision Laboratories (APL) have tested 97,714 respiratory swabs for influenza from Aug. 23, 2020 to Feb. 20, 2021.

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](#).

## **Be Well - Be Kind**

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### **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.

*On behalf of our Khalsa School Calgary community, I would like to take this*

*opportunity to express our sincere appreciation for the support and hard work of the contact tracing and case investigation staff at Alberta Health Services. Since our first confirmed cases back in October of 2020 until now with the current outbreak, everyone at AHS has been extremely responsive and supportive in helping to guide us through the challenges of COVID-19. With the continued guidance and support of AHS, I am confident that we will safely and successfully navigate through the school year.*

— Tony McConney, Principal, Khalsa School Calgary

*I am very thankful for all front-line heroes who are working during this time. We pray for them and (send them) lots and lots of love. Here is my daughter saying thank you.*

— Saba



*My two-year-old son Jack had a runny nose and cough, so we thought a COVID-19 test was a good and safe idea. AHS staff were efficient, competent and friendly. We had our results within 24 hours. We are so lucky to have such amazing front-line healthcare workers who put themselves at risk to help people like my son Jack. You are appreciated!*

— Joanna

*I thank you every day that you are there when I am sick, or my son has an asthma attack, or my sister has a baby, or my mom's blood sugar drops too low, or 1,000 other scenarios. We could not be where we are in this province without you. I will never take you for granted and know that so many of us wish we could help you the way you are so bravely helping all of us.*

— Jody

*So grateful! We can't imagine the stress you are under. Thanks so much for your amazing dedication. As a family, we are taking this situation very seriously and staying home.*

### **Wrapping Up — Big Thanks for a Big Week**

Next Friday, Alberta will mark the one-year anniversary of the first confirmed case of COVID-19 in the province. And yet we can approach this date with something more than fatigue. We can approach it with hope. Genuine, spirit-lifting hope.

The reason? Because, as mentioned previously, AHS started large-group public COVID-19 vaccinations this week with Albertans 75 years of age and older. There were problems, as we outlined above, but overall we should be proud of the fact we made huge strides over the past few days to protect the lives of Albertans.

So we'd like to wrap up this week's email with a message of gratitude:

- To our IT and Digital Solutions teams for their tireless behind-the-scenes work to launch and increase capacity for the booking tool, as well as for adding the queueing software and fixing other issues on the fly that improved user experience and helped Albertans book their appointments.
- To everyone at Health Link for bringing on extra staff that enabled us to increase our capacity to take calls and book appointments.
- To our immunizers who met with thousands of Albertans this week and provided them a vaccine that will hopefully keep them and their loved ones safe.
- And to everyone else who made all of this possible.

Yes, we had challenges this week. But as always, we learn and we move forward serving Albertans with respect and integrity.

With enduring gratitude and appreciation,

**Dr. Verna Yiu**

AHS President & CEO

**Dr. Laura McDougall**

Senior Medical Officer of Health

