



Message from  
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Dr. Laura McDougall

## *AHS Update: New and active COVID-19 case numbers spike across province*

*Please print and share with your teams as needed*

Dear staff, physicians and volunteers,

### Today's Update

- COVID-19 Cases in Alberta
- COVID-19 Vaccination Update
- COVID-19 Testing for Healthcare Workers — The Latest Numbers
- Critical Worker Benefit Update
- Food Donation Reminder
- Verna's Weekly Video Message — Rapid Flow-Through Clinics Contingency Planning
- Influenza Immunization Update
- \$33M Investment to Reduce CT, MRI Wait Times
- Gratitude from Albertans
- Wrapping Up — Let's Be Careful

## COVID-19 Status

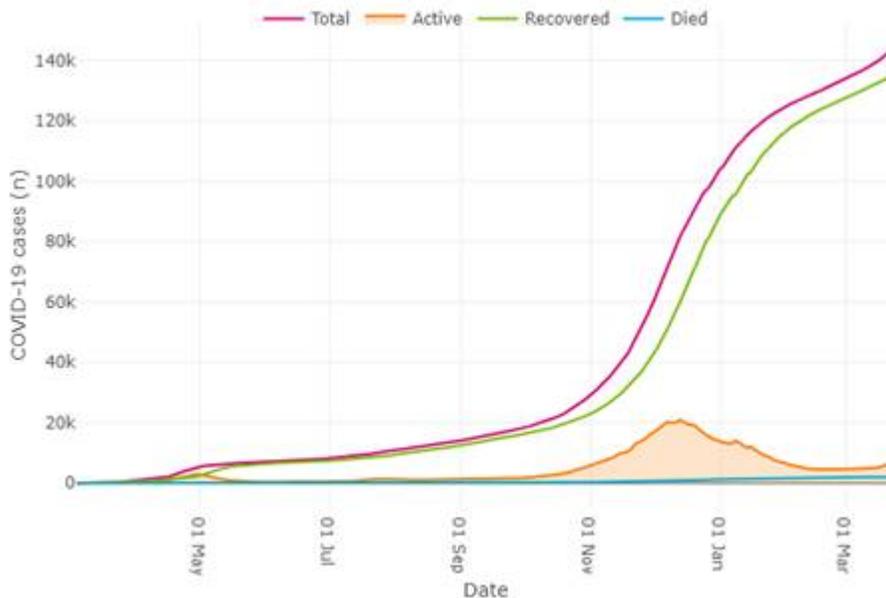
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This past week Alberta experienced a sharp spike in COVID-19 cases across the province, including a 57.2 per cent week-to-week increase in active cases in the Calgary Zone.

As of March 24, there were 6,835 active cases in the province, 1,751 more than the previous week, a 34.4 per cent increase. For the 11th consecutive week, the Calgary Zone had the most active cases, with 3,099, although active cases were up in the other four zones, as you can see in the table below.

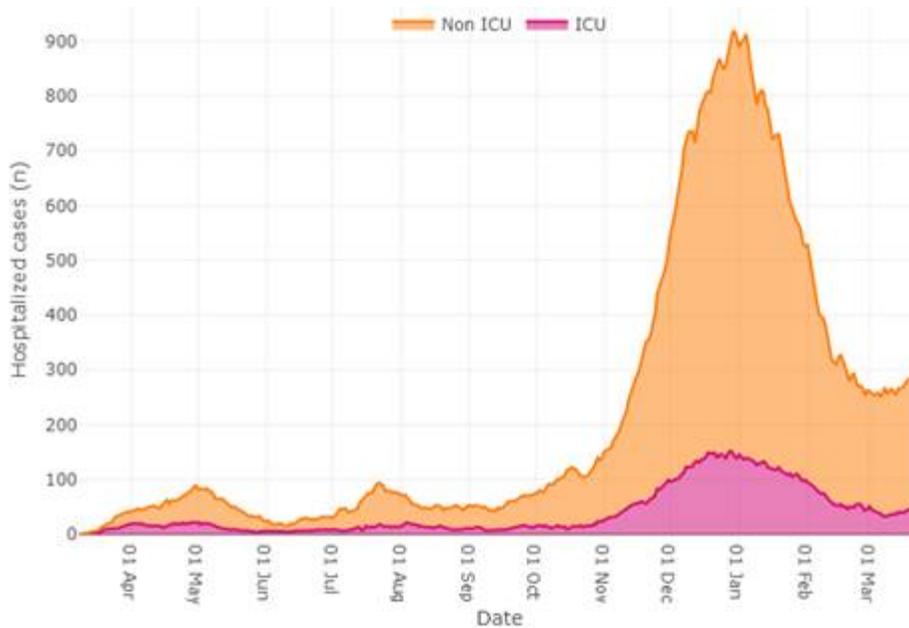
	Active Cases (as of March 24)	Active Cases (as of March 17)	Per cent Change
<b>Calgary</b>	3,099	1,972	+57.2%
<b>Edmonton</b>	1,512	1,231	+22.8%
<b>North</b>	798	750	+6.4%
<b>South</b>	790	647	+22.1%
<b>Central</b>	611	475	+28.6%
<b>Unknown</b>	25	9	+177.8%

For the seven-day period ending March 24, the number of average new COVID-19 cases rose to 597, compared to 434 the previous week, a 37.5 per cent increase. While all zones reported increases in their average new cases this week, the Calgary Zone had a particularly large spike, reporting 1,970 new cases (an average of 281 per day) this week compared to 1,223 new cases (an average of 175 per day) the previous week, a 61 per cent increase. Provincewide, individuals ages 20 to 49 represented about half of all new cases.



### Hospitalizations and ICU admissions

Hospitalizations and ICU admissions also climbed this week, the latter significantly. On March 24, there were 55 individuals in ICU with COVID-19, compared to 40 on March 17, a 37.5 per cent increase. A total of 239 individuals were in non-ICU hospital beds on March 24 compared to 235 individuals in non-ICU hospital beds on March 17, a 1.7 per cent increase.



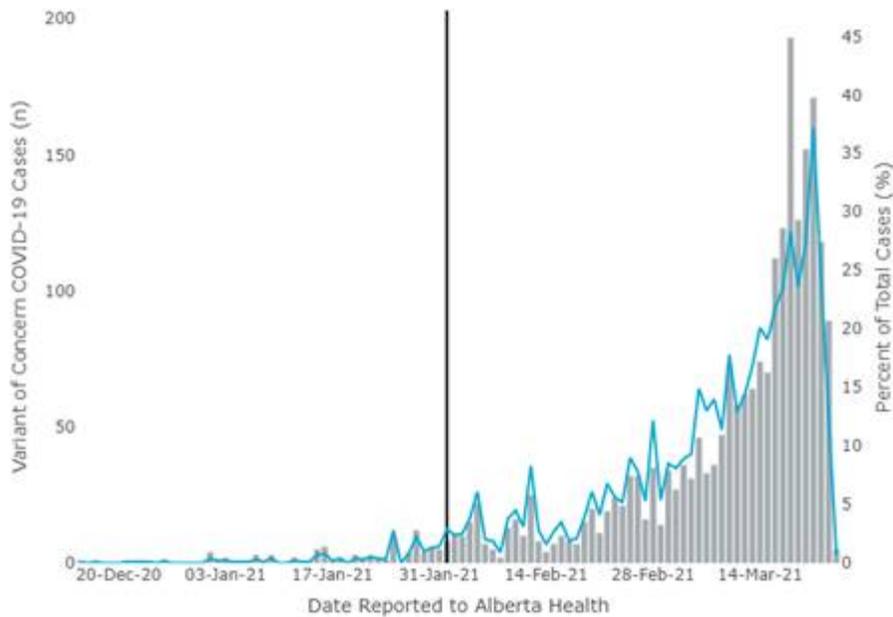
The breakdown of hospitalizations by zone as of March 24 is as follows:

	Hospitalizations	ICUs
<b>Calgary</b>	106	20
<b>Edmonton</b>	83	15
<b>South</b>	42	10
<b>Central</b>	35	5
<b>North</b>	28	5

### Variants of concern

Alberta Health has now reported 2,301 cases of COVID-19 variants of concern (VOC): 2,276 are B.1.1.7 variant (U.K. variant), 20 are B.1.351 variant (South African variant) and five are P.1 (Brazilian variant). Of all these VOC cases, 1,400 are active (20.5 per cent of total active COVID-19 cases), 881 people have recovered and 20 people have died.

The figure below shows new VOC cases (grey bars) and the percentage of VOC cases identified compared to other cases of COVID-19 (blue line). Between March 16 and March 22, the percentage of VOC cases ranged from 21.8 per cent to 37.2 per cent.



#### Other notable COVID-19-related information

- As of March 24, a total of 144,311 cases of COVID-19 have been detected in Alberta and a total of 6,418 individuals have been hospitalized, which amounts to 4.4 individuals for every 100 cases. In all, 135,500 Albertans have recovered from COVID-19.
- As of March 24, 1,976 individuals have passed away from COVID-19, including 19 deaths over the past seven days (March 18 to March 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 March 18 to March 24, 75,112 COVID-19 tests were completed, an average of 10,730 tests per day. During this period, the daily positivity ranged from 4.85 per cent to 6.71 per cent. As of March 24, a total of 3.6 million tests have been conducted and 1.9 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 March 15 to March 21 was 1.14, compared to 1.07 the previous week.

## Things You Need to Know

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### COVID-19 Vaccination Update

### *COVID-19 Immunization Milestone*

On March 25, more than 20,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccine were administered at more than 120 AHS immunization sites across Alberta.

We have hit another major milestone and another all-time high in AHS' COVID-19 immunization campaign.

From our front-line immunizers to the Public Health, Logistics, IT and Communications teams involved in the online booking tool development, and everyone who made this possible, thank you for your hard work and preparation that has culminated in this outstanding achievement. The level of co-operation and co-ordination you have displayed is truly outstanding. This is more than 20,000 lives changed for the better.

We will continue to work towards our goal to complete first doses for all Albertans who wish to have the vaccine by June, as vaccine supply allows.

Thank you again for sharing your skills, knowledge and expertise. We appreciate and value all the work you have done and continue to do.

### *By the Numbers*

As of 10 a.m. today (March 26), more than 451,600 total doses of COVID-19 vaccine have been administered by AHS. More than 267,200 Albertans have received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine and more than 92,100 have received both Dose 1 and Dose 2.

### *Update on Rollout of Phase 2A*

As of 10 a.m. today (March 26), AHS has booked 110,629 COVID-19 immunization appointments for eligible Albertans in Phase 2A. More than 50,100 Albertans received their COVID-19 immunization at AHS sites this week alone. Together with the pharmacy program in the province, we are hoping to complete Phase 2A by next week.

Albertans eligible to book through [AHS online immunization booking tool](#) or through Health Link 811 include Albertans born in 1956 or earlier and First Nations, Métis and Inuit people born in 1971 or earlier. Immunizations are also being offered to the entire Phase 2A cohort through [participating pharmacies](#) across the province.

We encourage all healthcare workers who become eligible in Phase 2A due to age or other eligibility criteria to get their vaccine as soon as possible.

We expect in early April to begin Phase 2B, which will target Albertans with [underlying health conditions](#). Phase 2C is anticipated to begin later in April. Exact timing will depend on vaccine supply and will be announced closer to the start of



each phase. Please note: appointment bookings are not yet available for either Phase 2B or 2C.

We understand there are many people anxiously waiting to receive the COVID-19 vaccine and many staff have questions about the eligibility criteria for healthcare workers in Phase 2C, which was announced by Alberta Health last week.

To help answer your questions, we have added a FAQ onto the [Vaccine Sequencing for Healthcare Workers page \(printable PDF\)](#) to clarify the following:

- Who will be eligible in Phase 2C
- What is considered a patient care facility
- Eligibility of healthcare workers in different settings
- Volunteers working in patient care facilities
- Eligibility of contracted providers
- Eligibility of healthcare workers on leave
- Student and instructor placements

We greatly appreciate the vital work you do, and we understand you require the most current information as soon as it is available.

#### *Commitment to Comfort Resources for COVID-19 Immunization*

Commitment to Comfort (CTC) is an evidence-based quality improvement initiative, which was initially developed at the Alberta Children's Hospital in 2014 and has now been expanded to support adult populations. The initiative aims to reduce pain and distress with any needle or medical procedure to improve comfort and overall client experience.

Up to a quarter of adults have needle fears and 10 per cent of those adults have such significant fear that they avoid immunization. CTC has five simple core principles, which are derived from research and current clinical practice guidelines, and supported by internationally renowned experts in vaccine pain and fear management.

The CTC team within the AHS COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force has expanded these principles and strategies to adult populations for the COVID-19 immunization program in Alberta. These principles have also been integrated into [AHS' provincial COVID-19 immunization policy](#).

Several resources have been developed for immunizers and clients, and are available on the [COVID-19 Resources Table for AHS Staff & Health Professionals](#). We encourage teams to embed these resources into their work.

#### **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 March 24:

- 78,745 employees (AHS, APL and Covenant combined) have been tested for COVID-19 and, of those tested, 4,917 (or 6.2 per cent) have tested positive.
- Of the 2,640 employees who have tested positive and whose source of infection has been determined, 592 (or 22.4 per cent) acquired their infection through a workplace exposure. An additional 2,277 employees who have tested positive are still under investigation as to the source of infection.
- 5,070 physicians (AHS, APL and Covenant combined) have been tested for COVID-19 and, of those tested, 204 (or 4.0 per cent) have tested positive.
- Of the 106 physicians who have tested positive and whose source of infection has been determined, 11 (or 10.4 per cent) acquired their infection through a workplace exposure. An additional 98 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](#).

### **Critical Worker Benefit Update**

On Feb. 10, the Government of Alberta (GoA) announced a one-time [Critical Worker Benefit](#) of \$1,200 for eligible workers. Payment of the Critical Worker Benefit is moving forward and will be processed in the coming weeks. AHS is working as quickly as possible to confirm the process and validate the list of eligible employees based on the criteria with the GoA.

As a government program, the Critical Worker Benefit requires personal information of all employees who meet the eligibility criteria of this benefit to be sent directly to the GoA from AHS through a secure data transfer process. Eligible staff will have an opportunity to object to the transfer of their personal information from AHS to the GoA and opt out of the benefit.

Unionized staff will receive an email from Human Resources confirming their eligibility based on the criteria established by the GoA and a process for opting out.

### **Food Donation Reminder**

As we approach the Easter weekend – Good Friday is April 2 – we want to remind healthcare workers that in accordance with Infection Prevention and Control, AHS employees are currently unable to accept food donations.

Accepting food donations, even commercially prepared and individually wrapped, creates opportunities for healthcare workers to congregate, removing masks and eye protection temporarily to eat. This can increase the risk of COVID-19 transmission.

While we understand the desire to get together in ways we are used to, these are actions that put yourselves, patients and clients at risk – particularly as variants of concern take hold.

With respect to break rooms and common areas where food and beverage may be consumed, please remember:

- Do not share food or drinks with others.
- Potlucks are not permitted at this time.
- Maintain two metres distance from one another whenever possible, including in break rooms.
- It is not safe to eat or sip coffee or other beverages in patient or client areas.
- Staff must not accept donated food.
- Stagger eating times or locations.
- It is very easy to transmit the virus when eating or drinking in common areas.

### **Verna's Weekly Video Message — Rapid Flow-Through Clinics Contingency Planning**

Since the provincial COVID-19 immunization program began in December, we have been following a phased immunization approach, aligned with anticipated vaccine supply.

As we have seen in the past, we have to be ready to adapt our approach in case the vaccine supply changes. That includes earlier this year, when we had to re-book second-dose appointments due to a vaccine shortage.

However, it's just as important to be prepared to manage unexpected surges of vaccines coming into Alberta, and be able to administer immunizations as quickly as possible.

That's why we have been developing a contingency plan that would be activated at the direction of Alberta Health, should we see a vaccine surge. This plan revolves around the mobilization of rapid flow-through clinics.

Joining me (Verna) to [tell us more about these clinics](#) are:

- Dr. Cheri Nijssen-Jordan, Co-Lead: AHS COVID-19 Task Force
- Debbie Goulard, Rapid Flow-Through Clinic Coordinator

Cheri and Debbie discuss situations where the clinics would be activated and what preparations are in place.



### **Influenza Immunization Update**

As of March 20, 1.6 million doses of influenza vaccine have been administered in Alberta. Immunizations are up by more than 193,800 compared to the same time last year. For the 20th week in row, there are no reported cases of seasonal influenza in Alberta.

Alberta Precision Laboratories (APL) has tested 107,820 respiratory swabs for influenza from Aug. 23, 2020, to March 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](#).

### **\$33M Investment to Reduce CT, MRI Wait Times**

Today Alberta Health and AHS announced a \$33-million investment to [improve access to CT and MRI diagnostic imaging healthcare services](#).

AHS has developed a three-year action plan to reduce wait times, and we will now take immediate steps to implement it, ensuring Albertans have more timely access to CT and MRI services.

The CT and MRI Implementation Plan will minimize wait times, decrease costs and better manage demand by using data to more accurately estimate where demand pressures may occur. This will allow us to allocate resources where they are most needed by reinvesting savings created by cost containment, clinical appropriateness and efficiencies back into diagnostic imaging.

The \$33-million commitment for Year 1 of the three-year plan will enable AHS to perform 50,000 additional CT scans in 2021/22 and 45,000 additional MR scans in 2021/22 throughout the province.

## 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](#).

*Thank you to the many people who care for us. Those who keep healthcare facilities clean and safe; who provide hands-on care that supports our well-being; who work behind the scenes to expedite supply chain; and those whose small acts of kindness buoy our spirits.*

— Lynn M.

*Thank you for your professionalism and gentle administration of my vaccine.*

— Bev Van Hout

*I was able to book my COVID-19 vaccine appointment within 30 minutes. Thanks for being so organized and efficient.*

— Anonymous

*I received my first Pfizer dose on Feb. 25. (The site) was very well organized with easy flow followed by excellent technique and teaching regarding the vaccine and follow-up care.*

— Elaine McKiel

### Wrapping Up — Let's Be Careful

As the number of active COVID-19 cases climbs, and as variants of concern (VOCs) spread throughout the province, we would like to remind you to consistently adhere to public health, Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) and [personal protective equipment \(PPE\)](#) measures. As you likely know, the VOCs are more transmissible than the original COVID-19 strain; not just in our communities but also in our workplaces. Even as the COVID-19 vaccines roll out, the dangers posed by this pandemic remain a threat to all of us and to the integrity of the healthcare system. So please, protect yourself and others by making sure you're aware of the latest public health, IPC and [PPE](#) measures, follow them and encourage others to do the same. As always, getting through this together involves helping one another stay safe. Thank you for everything you do, each and every day.

With enduring gratitude and appreciation,

**Dr. Verna Yiu**  
AHS President & CEO

**Dr. Laura McDougall**  
Senior Medical Officer of Health

