



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

*AHS Update: Active cases decline in all five zones,  
ICUs deal with record capacity for fourth consecutive  
week*

*Please print and share with your teams as needed*

**Dear staff, physicians and volunteers,**

### **Today's Update**

- **COVID-19 Cases in Alberta**
- **COVID-19 Immunization Update**
- **Quarantine Exemptions for Immunized Individuals**
- **COVID-19 Testing for Healthcare Workers — The Latest Numbers**
- **Even When Vaccinated, Follow Safety Measures**
- **Edmonton Oilers Show Support for Front-line Healthcare Workers**
- **Verna's Weekly Video Message – New, Made-in-Alberta Cancer Therapy**
- **Mental Wellness Moment – Helping Children Cope with COVID-19 Fatigue**
- **Oilers' McDavid, Front-line Healthcare Hero Aleem Rajani Named NHL 'First Stars'**
- **Gratitude from Albertans**
- **Wrapping Up — Gratitude, Reverence for Front-line, ICU Staff**

## COVID-19 Status

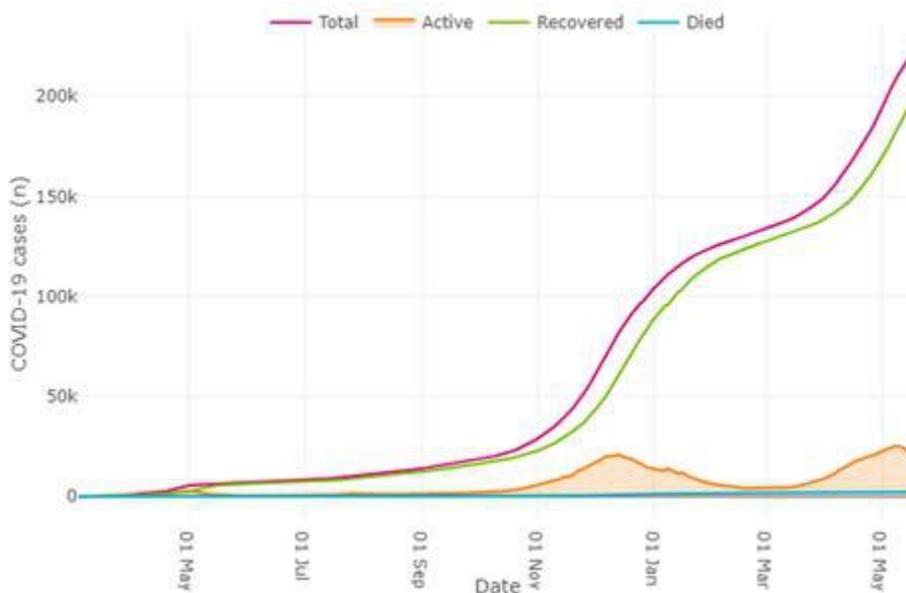
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Despite all zones reporting decreases in active cases, the number of individuals in our intensive care units (ICUs) hit a new peak again this past week.

As of May 19, there are 17,675 active cases in Alberta, a 27.8 per cent decrease compared to May 12. All five AHS zones reported a decrease in active cases, with the Calgary Zone reporting the most active cases for the 19th consecutive week, as you can see in the table below.

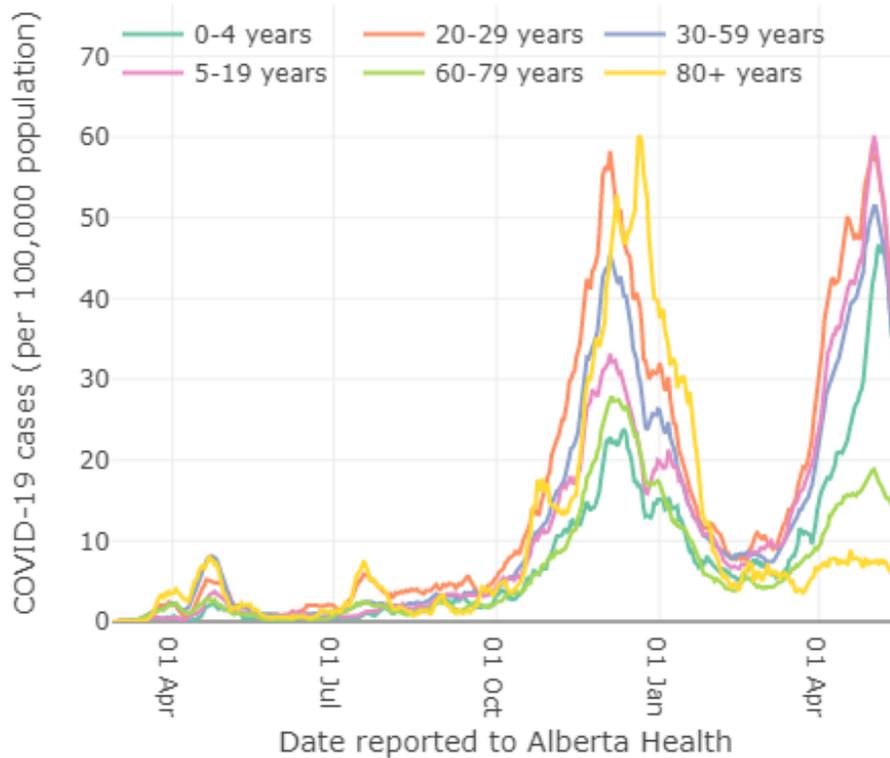
	Active Cases (as of May 19)	Active Cases (as of May 12)	Per cent Change
<b>Calgary</b>	8,132	11,584	-30.2%
<b>Edmonton</b>	4,195	5,470	-23.3%
<b>North</b>	2,657	3,618	-26.6%
<b>South</b>	871	1,255	-30.6%
<b>Central</b>	1,814	2,647	-31.5%
<b>Unknown</b>	6	12	-50.0%

There was an average of 1,047 new cases per day for the seven-day period ending on May 19, compared to 1,731 cases the previous week (May 6 to May 12), a 39.5 per cent decrease. Although the Calgary Zone had the highest total number of new cases this week with 3,082, it also reported the largest per cent decrease (46.7 per cent) compared to the previous week when 5,778 new cases were reported.



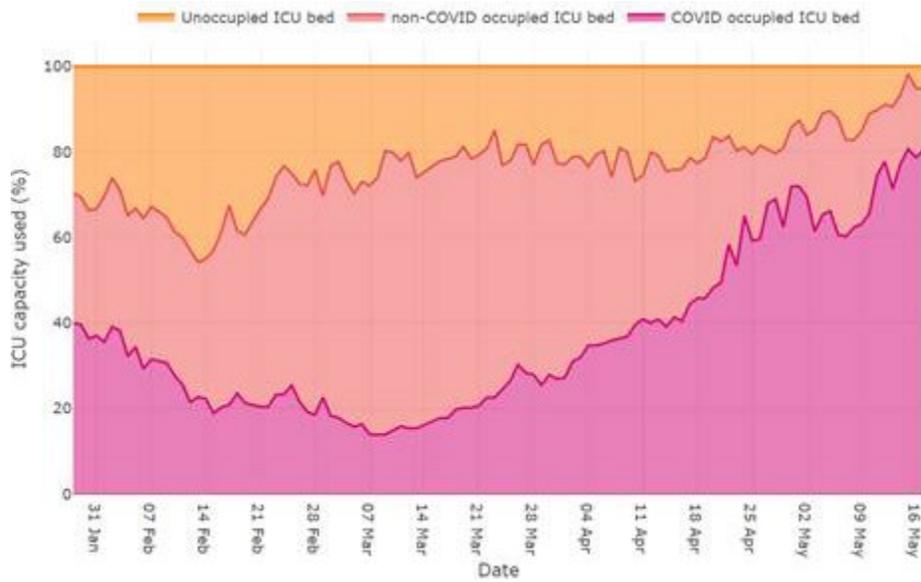
### Cases by age group

On May 16, the seven-day rolling average among school-aged children (5-19 years) was 27.86 cases per 100,000 people, compared to 47.00 cases per 100,000 people reported on May 9. Individuals aged 20-29 had the highest rate: 29.86 cases per 100,000 people. The rate for people 80+ years and those aged 60-79 years, was 5.29 and 11.29 cases per 100,000 people, respectively. A visual representation of these trends in cases in Alberta by age group is provided in the figure below.

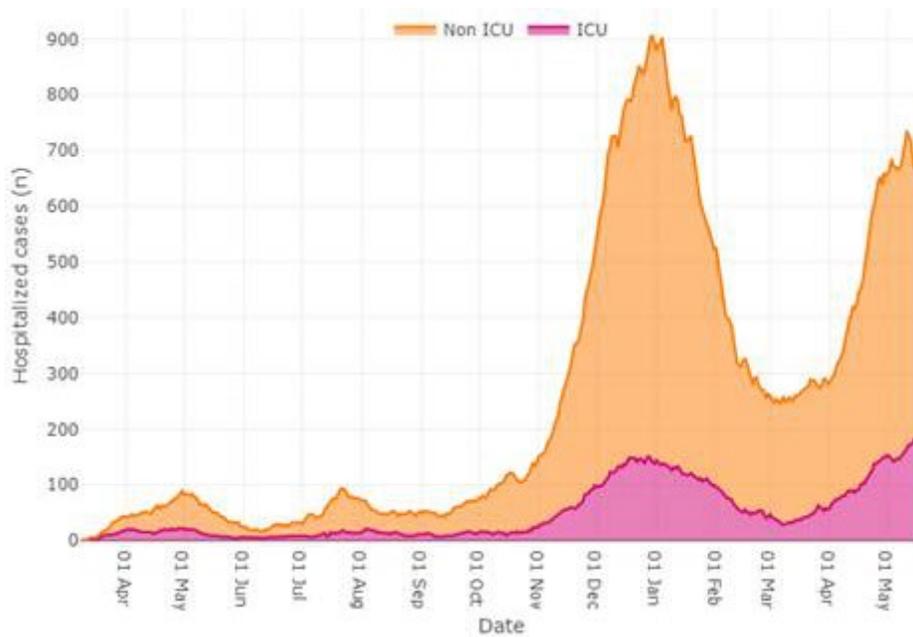


### Hospitalizations and ICU admissions

For the fourth consecutive week, Alberta set a new record for individuals with COVID-19 being treated in ICU. On May 18, a record 184 individuals were in the ICU for COVID-19. The next day, that number dropped to 177, which still represents a 2.9 per cent increase from the week prior, when there were 172 individuals in ICU on May 12. The most recent ICU capacity reporting, from May 17, shows our ICU capacity at 94.7 per cent, with 80.4 per cent of ICU beds being occupied by a patient with COVID-19. The figure below is a visual representation of ICU capacity in Alberta:



A total of 488 individuals were in non-ICU hospital beds on May 19 compared to 554 individuals in non-ICU hospital beds on May 12, an 11.9 per cent decrease.



The breakdown of hospitalizations by zone as of May 19 is as follows:

	Hospitalizations	ICUs
<b>Calgary</b>	254	73
<b>Edmonton</b>	226	65
<b>North</b>	77	13
<b>Central</b>	66	15
<b>South</b>	42	11

## Variants of concern

For the seven-day period ending May 19:

- 87.1 per cent of samples successfully screened was the B.1.1.7 (U.K.) variant
- 4.3 per cent of samples successfully screened was the P.1 (Brazil) variant
- 0.3 per cent of samples successfully screened was the B.1.351 (South Africa) variant

The remaining per cent of samples successfully screened are either a presumptive variant, a presumptive variant of interest, or not a variant.

## Other notable COVID-19-related information:

- As of May 19, a total of 222,279 cases of COVID-19 have been detected in Alberta and a total of 9,002 individuals have been hospitalized, which amounts to 4.0 individuals for every 100 cases. In all, 202,442 Albertans have recovered from COVID-19.
- As of May 19, 2,162 individuals have passed away from COVID-19, including 30 over the seven-day period ending May 19. 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 May 13 to May 19, 74,351 COVID-19 tests were completed, an average of 10,622 tests per day. During this period, the daily positivity ranged from 9.11 per cent to 11.42 per cent. As of May 19, a total of 4.45 million tests have been conducted and 2.12 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 May 10 to May 16 was 0.84 whereas R value the previous week was 1.00.
- For the winter school term, as of May 19, AHS has confirmed 8,884 individuals with COVID-19 were present at schools while infectious or acquired the disease in the school setting. A total of 1,352 out of 2,415 schools (56.0 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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### COVID-19 Immunization Update

#### *By the Numbers*

As of 8 a.m. today (May 21), more than 2,324,000 total doses of COVID-19 vaccine have been administered in Alberta. More than 1,672,000 Albertans have received one dose of COVID-19 vaccine and more than 326,000 people have received both

Dose 1 and Dose 2.

*More than 36,000 doses administered on Super Thursday*

Yesterday (May 20) was Super Thursday for our immunization teams. It was a planned stress test to see what capacity we could manage within our current clinics if we pushed to capacity. Teams have been preparing for Super Thursday by increasing staffing, extending hours and adding immunization stations in clinics with the ability to safely expand.

AHS clinics typically administer between 20,000 and 25,000 shots per day. Yesterday, we administered a record 36,326 doses across the province.



Congratulations to our Public Health teams and to all of our staff who have stepped up to support this critical piece of our fight against COVID-19. Thank you for your commitment and willingness to take on different challenges, work in a different place and adapt quickly to rapidly changing requirements. We couldn't do this without you.

Our goal remains to complete first doses for all Albertans who wish to have the vaccine by June, as vaccine supply allows.

*Alberta Health reviewing evidence related to AstraZeneca, second doses*

Alberta Health, which sets immunization policy, has not made a decision at this time about second doses for Albertans who have received the AstraZeneca vaccine. The

ministry is reviewing all available evidence and awaiting results of clinical trials in the U.K.

Alberta Health is still committed to waiting at least 12 weeks before beginning second doses for those who received the AstraZeneca vaccine. Clinical trials on this vaccine showed that shorter intervals resulted in a lower overall level of protection than waiting for 12 weeks.

We do not yet know when Canada — and, in turn, Alberta — will receive additional doses of AstraZeneca. The remaining AstraZeneca supply is being used for those who have a contraindication to an mRNA vaccine, or for those Albertans who will need a second dose in early June.

We will provide updates as soon as more information becomes available.

In addition, all current Health Canada-approved COVID-19 vaccines will be provided to Albertans within a 16-week (four-month) timeline between the first and second dose. This aligns with current National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) recommendations.

The only exception is for profoundly immunocompromised individuals with [eligible conditions](#) who are able to receive their second doses earlier. Those who got Pfizer or Moderna are eligible for a second dose 21-28 days after their first dose. Those who received AstraZeneca are recommended to get a second dose at 12 weeks after their first dose but may choose to get their second dose as early as 28 days after.

This approach will allow for all Albertans eligible for a vaccine to have at least one dose before the end of June.

#### *Immunization in pregnancy*

Emerging evidence suggests it's safe for pregnant women to get the COVID-19 vaccine. The mRNA vaccines have shown to be the safest type of COVID-19 vaccine to get at any time (any trimester) during pregnancy. The risk of contracting COVID-19 and having serious complications is higher than the risk of receiving the COVID-19 vaccine during pregnancy. To learn more, watch the [AHS COVID-19 Vaccine and Pregnancy video](#) and visit [ahs.ca/vaccinepregnancy](https://ahs.ca/vaccinepregnancy) for COVID-19 pregnancy information, including [translated resources](#).

Those who are pregnant can get the COVID-19 vaccine at any time during pregnancy. Vaccines are safe and effective, and lower the chance of becoming severely ill from COVID-19 and spreading the virus to others.

#### *Strategies to assist immunization for special-needs clients*

COVID-19 immunization is important but, for some, receiving the vaccine may be difficult because of developmental challenges and/or needle phobia.

A document for healthcare providers has been created and includes [strategies to assist with delivery of COVID-19 vaccine to special-needs clients with needle phobias or developmental challenges](#).

Additionally, a [patient information sheet](#) has been developed and can be shared with patients, which provides information about supports available to help reduce pain and distress associated with immunization. It also includes information about how a person can improve the comfort and overall experience of special-needs clients who have needle phobia or live with development challenges that may interfere with them being immunized against COVID-19.

### **Quarantine Exemptions for Immunized Individuals**

As announced by Alberta Health yesterday (May 20), Alberta has changed quarantine requirements for fully and partially immunized asymptomatic individuals.

Individuals who are asymptomatic and [fully immunized](#) with two doses of the COVID-19 vaccine are no longer required to quarantine for 14 days if they are a close contact of a COVID-19 case.

Individuals who are asymptomatic and [partially immunized](#) will have a shortened quarantine period if they are a close contact of a confirmed case. Partially immunized asymptomatic individuals are required to quarantine for 10 days with the option to get tested on Day 7 or later and be released from quarantine on receipt of a negative test result.

This new quarantine policy is retroactive and applies to individuals who are currently in quarantine.

These quarantine changes **do not** apply to international travellers returning to Canada as they must comply with the 14-day quarantine required by the [Federal Quarantine Act](#).

In addition, a Medical Officer of Health and the Infection Prevention and Control team responsible for a public health investigation may direct a close contact to follow a 14-day quarantine period regardless of their immunization status.

For more information, please refer to [alberta.ca/isolation](#) and [ahs.ca/quarantineaftervaccine](#).

Please continue to use all existing AHS guidance and documentation that is currently in place until updates are made in the coming days. This includes screening tools for designated support persons. This will take some time and we appreciate your patience as we work to incorporate this change into our existing processes, as quickly as possible.

## **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 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 May 18:

- 77,383 employees (AHS and APL combined) have been tested for COVID-19 and, of those tested, 5,690 (or 7.4 per cent) have tested positive.
- Of the 3,665 employees who have tested positive and whose source of infection has been determined, 550 (or 15.0 per cent) acquired their infection through a workplace exposure. An additional 2,025 employees who have tested positive are still under investigation as to the source of infection.
- 5,333 physicians (AHS and APL combined) have been tested for COVID-19 and, of those tested, 238 (or 4.5 per cent) have tested positive.
- Of the 157 physicians who have tested positive and whose source of infection has been determined, 18 (or 11.5 per cent) acquired their infection through a workplace exposure. An additional 81 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](#). Please note: An update will not be provided next week but will resume the following week.

## **Even When Vaccinated, Follow Safety Measures**

As more employees get their COVID-19 vaccine, it's still extremely important to take the necessary precautions to reduce the spread of COVID-19. This includes:

- [Wearing your mask and eye protection](#).
- Continuously and adhering to all [personal protective equipment measures](#).
- Completing your [daily fit for work screening](#).
- [Washing your hands](#) regularly.
- [Physically distancing](#) even after you have been vaccinated.

As a valued member of the AHS team, please remember your actions are closely observed by all Albertans. We've come this far and this is not the time to be letting our guard down. We cannot overstate the importance of consistent compliance with all safety measures put in place to keep us safe, especially during this third wave.

Thank you for your ongoing support and for continuing to stay vigilant. Let's continue to be positive role models both on the job and while in our communities.

## **Edmonton Oilers Show Support for Front-line Healthcare Workers**

On Wednesday (May 19), the Edmonton Oilers received an exemption from Alberta

Health, allowing 12 front-line healthcare workers to attend Wednesday night's home playoff game against the Winnipeg Jets, and another 12 for Game 2 tonight, while adhering to safe public health measures.

The 24 front-line staff were randomly selected from programs, including intensive care, emergency, environmental services, public health, food and nutrition services, medical device reprocessing, Indigenous health, respiratory therapy, pharmacy, medicine, surgery, cardiac and women's health.

For the first two games of the 2021 Stanley Cup Playoffs, the Edmonton Oilers Community Foundation online 50/50 will support Operation Frontline Impact, which will create an emergency, distress and critical programming fund for nurses, nursing aides, doctors and non-medical staff working in hospitals across the AHS North, Edmonton and Central zones.



A dozen randomly AHS front-line healthcare workers join the Edmonton Oilers' anthem singer in the stands of Rogers Place to watch the May 12 NHL playoff game with the Winnipeg Jets.

Also, to help you get in the spirit of the NHL playoffs, we've created an [Edmonton Oilers Zoom background](#), giving hockey fans have another way to cheer on the only Alberta team vying for Lord Stanley's Cup this spring.



### **Verna's Weekly Video Message – New, Made-in-Alberta Cancer Therapy**

While we continue to focus on our COVID-19 response, we can't forget some of the amazing work that continues to go on in other areas of healthcare.

Today, we want to share some groundbreaking work taking place at the Cross Cancer Institute for patients with specific types of leukemia and lymphoma.

A new therapy, Chimeric Antigen Receptor T-cell therapy, also known as CAR T-cell therapy, is now available in Alberta. Having this treatment available in Alberta will ensure cancer patients who need this treatment in our province have access to care closer to home.

[Joining me \(Verna\) to talk about this new therapy](#) is Dr. Michael Chu, a medical oncologist in Cancer Care Alberta and lead of the Made-in-Alberta CAR T-cell therapy clinical trial.

Alberta Precision Laboratories also played a role in bringing CAR T-cell therapy to Alberta, and I encourage you to check out a [recent article highlighting this great work](#).



## Be Well - Be Kind

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### **Mental Wellness Moment – Helping Children Cope with COVID-19 Fatigue**

After more than 15 months of pandemic, many Albertans are naturally experiencing COVID-19 fatigue — and not just adults. Children and youth surely want to see an end to a pandemic that has turned their lives upside down and affected important events, such as birthdays and graduations. In the [latest Mental Wellness Moment](#), Dr. Nicholas Mitchell — Provincial Medical Director of Addiction and Mental Health — provides parents and guardians advice on how they can help children manage their COVID-19 fatigue.



**Oilers' McDavid, Front-line Healthcare Hero Aleem Rajani Named NHL 'First Stars'**

Throughout the 2020-21 season, the NHL is celebrating the remarkable efforts of the off-ice stars by honouring front-line healthcare heroes from the regions represented by the league's weekly and monthly stars.

During the month of May, Edmonton Oilers centre Connor McDavid and Alberta Health Services (AHS) program manager Aleem Rajani were named the NHL's first stars of the week.

Rajani, an occupational therapist, works as a program manager with the AHS primary care and colorectal cancer screening program. He has been instrumental to the AHS Edmonton Zone's COVID-19 pandemic response over the past year, helping to set up the first coronavirus swabbing centre as well as the largest assessment facility in the city, a pandemic response unit, and a rapid-flow vaccine centre.

A leader for many aspects of the front-line response to COVID-19 in the Edmonton area, Rajani's motto of "be excellent" has been an inspiration to the redeployed staff working in assessment and vaccination facilities across the city.

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

*My Mom was admitted to the Peter Lougheed Centre (in Calgary) with COVID-19. It was her first time in hospital and she is not comfortable talking in English. We were worried about her but the nurses and healthcare aides were so helpful and really took care of her. We called them almost every day to keep updated about mom's condition. When she was discharged, she was so grateful and so were we.*

— Lea

*Huge thank you to the vaccination team at the Spruce Grove Health Centre. I received my vaccine this weekend and was amazed at how organized the team was and how well-spaced the appointments were. There was a continuous flow of people but never a line or crowd. Staff were all very friendly and helpful. Thank you for all of your hard work!*

— Anonymous

### **Wrapping Up — Gratitude, Reverence for Front-line, ICU Staff**

This week we've seen our ICU numbers continue to climb to unprecedented highs, and we know how much strain this puts on our front-line staff and physicians, and on the health system overall. To everyone on the front lines, especially those in the ICUs: thank you for doing everything you can to keep Albertans alive. We know your

work is physically and emotionally draining, and surely never more than it is now. And yet, more than 15 months into this pandemic, you're still finding the strength within yourselves to once again rise to the occasion and help others in their time of crisis. Words seem inadequate to fully convey our gratitude and reverence for you, your work and your sacrifice.

As we approach the long weekend, we are buoyed somewhat by the decreasing new and active case numbers. We're crossing our fingers that this trend continues and is eventually reflected in our hospitalization and ICU numbers. Time will tell, and we hope Albertans do the right thing this long weekend and follow public health measures. We also hope all of you find time to rest and recharge, if not this long weekend, then soon, because we need to take care of ourselves if we're to take care of others. There is, after all, more pandemic response ahead of us. In times of fatigue or frustration, try to draw strength from the fact the vast majority of Albertans appreciate everything we're doing to protect them from this deadly pandemic, to return them to health, and to save lives. Please know, in our eyes, there can be no work more important than that.

With enduring gratitude and appreciation,

**Dr. Verna Yiu**

AHS President & CEO

**Dr. Laura McDougall**

Senior Medical Officer of Health

