



Message from
Dr. Verna Yiu &
Dr. Laura McDougall

AHS Update: Most public health measures to be lifted next week as immunization numbers climb, case and hospital numbers plummet

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**
- **COVID-19 Testing for Healthcare Workers — The Latest Numbers**
- **Continuous Masking in AHS Facilities Continues**
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COVID-19 Status

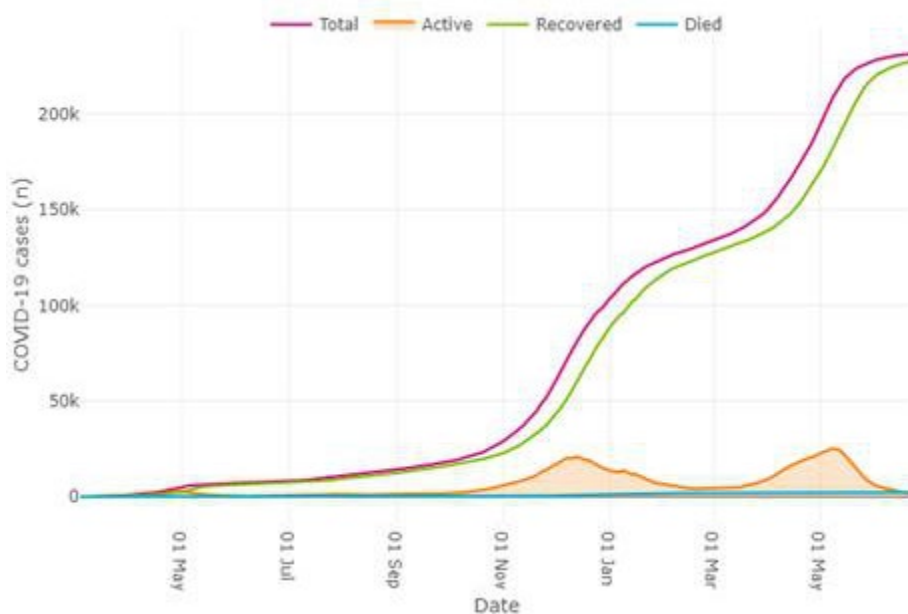
Case, hospitalization and intensive care unit (ICU) numbers continued to plummet this past week, as record numbers of Albertans booked their first or second doses of a COVID-19 vaccine as eligibility expanded (see Immunization Update).

The Government of Alberta plans to lift most public health restrictions on Thursday, July 1, in response to declining COVID-19 numbers and increasing vaccine uptake.

As of June 23, there were 1,580 active COVID-19 cases in the province, a 36.1 per cent decrease compared to June 16. All AHS zones reported a decrease in active cases as you can see in the table below.

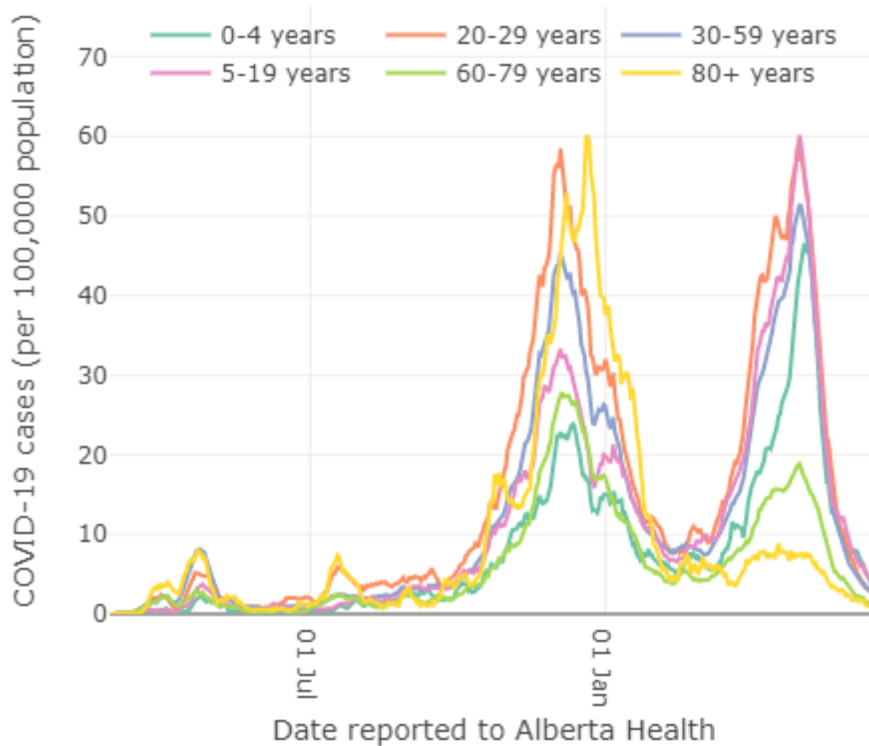
	Active Cases (as of June 23)	Active Cases (as of June 16)	Per cent Change
Calgary	814	1,078	-24.5%
Edmonton	246	535	-54.0%
North	291	486	-40.1%
Central	159	284	-44.0%
South	70	88	-20.5%
Unknown	0	0	0%
Total	1,580	2,471	-36.1%

There was an average of 89 new daily COVID-19 cases for the seven-day period ending on June 23, compared to 152 the previous week, a 41.4 per cent decrease. The Calgary Zone had the highest number of new cases this past week with 339, which represents a 31.4 per cent decrease from the previous week when the zone reported 494 new cases.



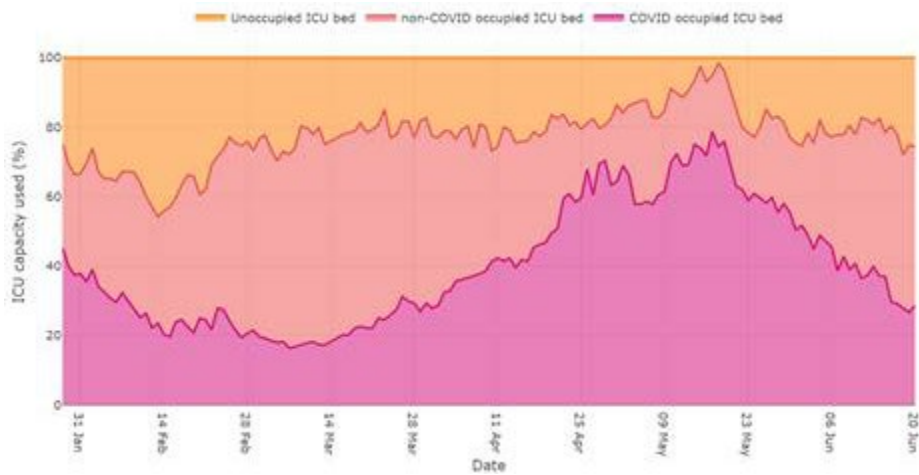
Cases by age group

On June 20, school-aged children (aged 5-19 years) had the highest seven-day rolling average of daily cases with 2.86 cases per 100,000 people, followed by children aged 0-4 years with a rate of 2.71. Albertans aged 80 years and older continue to have the lowest rate of average daily cases, with 0.57. A visual representation of these trends in cases by age group is provided in the figure below.

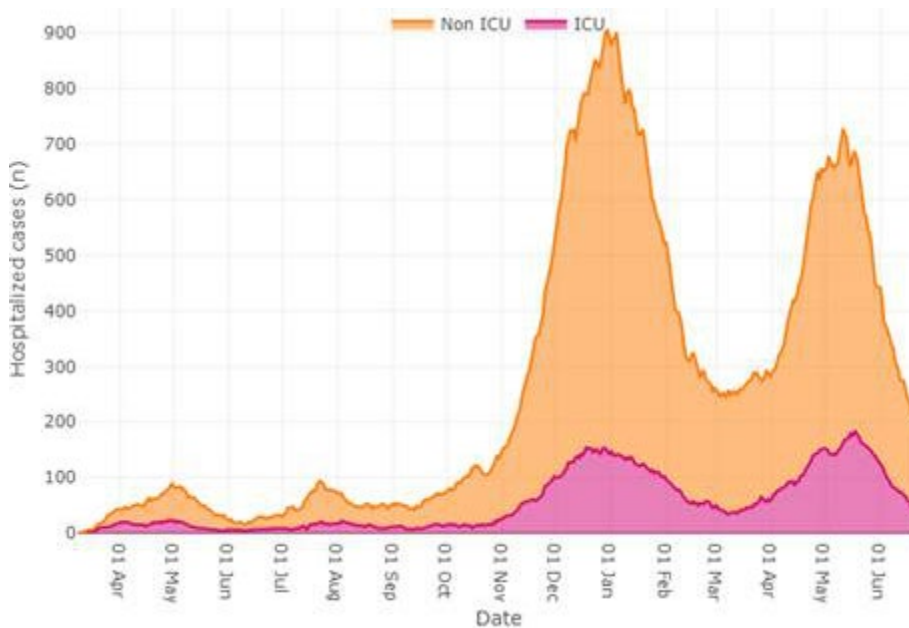


Hospitalizations and ICUs

On June 23, 50 individuals with COVID-19 were in ICUs compared to 59 on June 16, a 15.3 per cent decrease. The most recent reporting, on June 20, shows ICU capacity being used at 74.4 per cent, with 28.6 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.



Also on June 23, 140 individuals with COVID-19 were in non-ICU hospital beds compared to 185 on June 16, a 24.3 per cent decrease.



The table below shows hospitalization by zone as of June 23.

	Hospitalizations	ICUs
Calgary	94	22
Edmonton	49	18
Central	19	5
North	18	4
South	10	1

Variants of concern

The lab is screening samples of all positive cases for variants and, as a result, the proportion of active cases that are variants is reportable once again.

COVID-19 Variant	Proportion of active cases (June 23)	Proportion of active cases (June 16)	Difference
B.1.1.7 (UK) variant	48.6%	59.5%	-10.9%
B.1.351 (South Africa) variant	0.1%	0.2%	-0.1%
B.1.617 (India) variant	17.1%	9.0%	+8.1%
P.1 (Brazil) variant	4.1%	3.9%	+0.2%
Overall	69.9%	72.7%	-2.8%

Other notable COVID-19-related information

- As of June 23, a total of 231,641 cases of COVID-19 have been detected in Alberta and a total of 9,584 individuals have been hospitalized, which amounts to 4.1 individuals for every 100 cases. In all, 227,768 Albertans have recovered from COVID-19.
- As of June 16, 2,293 individuals have passed away from COVID-19, including 13 over the seven-day period from June 17 to June 23. 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 June 17 to June 23, 38,405 COVID-19 tests were completed, an average of 5,058 tests per day. During this period, the daily positivity ranged from 1.34 per cent to 2.38 per cent. As of June 23, a total of 4.66 million tests have been conducted and 2.17 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 June 14 to June 20 was 0.75 whereas R value the previous week was 0.76.
- For the winter school term, as of June 23, AHS has confirmed 9,598 individuals with COVID-19 were present at schools while infectious or acquired the disease in the school setting. A total of 1,393 out of 2,415 schools (57.7 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

COVID-19 Immunization Update

Another record-breaking day for COVID-19 immunization bookings

Friday, June 18, was another record-breaking day for COVID-19 immunization bookings, when 177,000 appointments were booked — and 300,000 were booked by the end of the weekend. This surge in bookings followed the Government of Alberta announcement that Alberta’s COVID-19 immunization rollout is expanding to include

anyone who has had a first dose of vaccine 28 days ago or longer.

This is great news for Albertans as more people do their part to help stop the spread of COVID-19. A big thank you to all staff who are keeping Albertans safe by supporting the immunization rollout plan.



Vaccine supply update

There is currently more Moderna vaccine supply available in Alberta than Pfizer, meaning Moderna is more readily available for first- and second-dose appointments. Albertans looking to book a second dose of a COVID-19 immunization can get an earlier appointment by choosing Moderna as their preference.

Both Pfizer and Moderna are mRNA vaccines and work the same way. They are considered interchangeable and about 95 per cent effective in preventing COVID-19 disease. Both protect against severe COVID-19 illness, risk of hospitalization or death.

People who received Pfizer as a first dose can choose to book Moderna as their second dose. This would be considered a safe and fully protective vaccine series.

No-appointment, walk-in clinics are available across Alberta for a first dose of Moderna only. You can find these sites and hours of operation at ahs.ca/covidvaccine.

Appointments for an mRNA vaccine can be made online at ahs.ca/covidvaccine, by calling Health Link at 811, or by contacting a [participating pharmacy](#) or physician's office.

Booking second-dose AstraZeneca appointments

Albertans who received AstraZeneca for their first dose can book their second dose with AstraZeneca or an mRNA vaccine by calling Health Link at 811.

Second-dose appointments for those who received AstraZeneca can no longer be made through pharmacies or the AHS online booking tool.

This is to ensure Albertans who received AstraZeneca receive their second dose of vaccine in the most appropriate timeframe to provide the most protection possible.

While a second dose of AstraZeneca can be provided as early as 28 days after the first dose, we encourage Albertans to wait a minimum of eight weeks between doses to ensure maximum effectiveness with this vaccine product.

Two doses of any of the COVID-19 vaccines available in Alberta are considered a complete, safe and protective vaccine series.

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 June 22:

- 78,345 employees (AHS and APL combined) have been tested for COVID-19 and, of those tested, 5,880 (or 7.5 per cent) have tested positive.
- Of the 4,486 employees who have tested positive and whose source of infection has been determined, 582 (or 13.0 per cent) acquired their infection through a workplace exposure. An additional 1,394 employees who have tested positive are still under investigation as to the source of infection.
- 5,383 physicians (AHS and APL combined) have been tested for COVID-19 and, of those tested, 240 (or 4.5 per cent) have tested positive.
- Of the 189 physicians who have tested positive and whose source of infection has been determined, 19 (or 10.1 per cent) acquired their infection through a workplace exposure. An additional 51 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](#).

Continuous Masking in AHS Facilities Continues

For the past 16 months, Albertans have lived with a wide range of protective measures designed to stop the spread of COVID-19 and safeguard our healthcare system from being overwhelmed. Now, as most restrictions in the general public space are easing, all Albertans, including our staff and physicians, will need to learn how to live with the ongoing public health reality of COVID-19. This means entering a phase where there are fewer mandatory barriers on what we can do in our day-to-day lives, while remaining thoughtful about managing potential risks, particularly in healthcare settings.

As healthcare providers, it is important for us to remember that as community restrictions begin to ease, we need to continue to make safe choices which protect vulnerable people who have risk factors for severe outcomes, and those who are not fully immunized, including patients under the age of 12, and those with immunologic conditions that limit their ability to respond to vaccines.

To ensure the safety of all staff, physicians, patients and families, masking will still be required in both continuing care and acute care settings. This directive will continue to be applicable to all staff, physicians, volunteers, designated support persons and visitors provincewide.

While active cases are declining in our province, there continues to be COVID-19 transmission in the community. Continuous masking is one additional step we can take to protect the vulnerable individuals we provide care to, as well as one another.

It has been a very long 16 months, and our staff, physicians, patients and all Albertans are understandably tired. We thank all staff, physicians, designated support individuals and visitors for continuing to follow our guidance, as we continue our pandemic journey and work towards a more normal way of life for all Albertans as soon as possible.

For more information on continuous masking, please visit our [Continuous Masking Insite page](#).

Use of Eye Protection

Eye protection remains an important component of Contact and Droplet precautions in our facilities, even for those who are fully vaccinated. Eye protection must be used for clinical contact (within two metres) of patients with COVID-19, possible COVID-19, or having respiratory symptoms consistent with influenza-like illness or a respiratory tract infection. Continuous eye protection will also continue to be maintained in COVID-19 units and in settings with COVID-19 outbreaks.

Continuous eye protection may be discontinued by those who are fully vaccinated which is defined as two weeks post-second dose of vaccine. Those who are fully

vaccinated will not be considered at risk should they be exposed and will not be quarantined, as long as they remain asymptomatic.

Those who are not yet fully vaccinated must maintain continuous eye protection as part of personal protection. Should these individuals have a potential exposure, they will require assessment by WHS and potential quarantine.

For more information on the use of eye protection, please visit our [PPE webpage](#).

Temporary Remote Work Still Recommended

On Thursday, July 1, Alberta will be entering Stage 3 of the Government of Alberta's [Open for Summer Plan](#). Stage 3 will see the lifting of most public health restrictions.

AHS continues to recommend remote work arrangements where possible, and asks staff who are able to work from home effectively within their role to continue doing so until at least the end of September.

AHS will provide an update on remote work expectations and future post-pandemic remote work arrangements later this summer.

Remote staff should only return to the workplace if they receive approval from their leader and are aware of the safety requirements for their site. The [Relaunch Playbook](#) offers resources to support leaders with remote staff, as well as information about proper safety, cleaning and physical distancing measures to protect staff who have remained on site.

Verna's Weekly Video Message — The ICU Experience

This week, I (Verna) would like to talk about the incredible work being done in our ICUs, which has been vital to Alberta's COVID-19 response.

Our ICU teams have been incredibly busy – especially in May, when we had a record 184 patients receiving intensive care. Albertans depend on our ICU staff and their specialized skills to be there for them when they are needed. And despite the often difficult and stressful circumstances of the pandemic, our ICU staff have continued to show resilience and provide safe, quality care to patients, no matter the circumstance.

[To give you a better idea of what working in the ICU during a pandemic is like](#), I've invited three guests to share their experiences:

- Shalayne Grainger, registered nurse, Northern Lights Regional Health Centre ICU.
- Dr. Curt Johnston, Deputy Zone Medical Director, Edmonton Zone, and one of AHS' medical advisors in the Acute Care Node of the Emergency Co-ordination Centre.
- Rhonda Laroy, lead respiratory therapist, Red Deer Regional Hospital Centre

ICU



Dr. Fields Named Chancellor at MacEwan University

Yesterday (June 24), the MacEwan University Board of Governors announced the election of Dr. Anthony (Tony) Fields as its first chancellor. In addition, Dr. Fields will also be receiving an honorary doctorate from the university. Dr. Fields has had a distinguished career in oncology – as a physician, professor of oncology at the University of Alberta, and vice-president of Cancer Care for Alberta Health Services before retiring in 2011. The leadership he will bring to MacEwan University over the next four years marks an important milestone in the university’s history and its role as an undergraduate university.

The chancellor plays an important role in representing MacEwan University in the community, building relationships and connections to help increase the institution’s profile and contribute to realizing its vision. The impact Dr. Fields has had on lives touched by cancer – both patients and their families — as well as his passion for building community will contribute to the university’s journey as it looks ahead to its next 50 years.



Congratulations, Dr. Fields!

Be Well - Be Kind

Be Kind to Yourself and Others

Focusing on your mental health is an act of kindness. You can take simple steps such as incorporating [self-care](#) into your day, attending a [wellness seminar](#) on mindfulness or doing some [physical activity](#).

You can also check out resources on [stress](#), [fatigue](#), [mental health](#), [self-compassion](#) and maintaining a [positive mindset](#). Other health and wellness resources and supports can be found in the [Resilience, Wellness and Mental Health Resource Guide](#).

Confidential support is always available to you through the [Employee and Family Assistance Program](#) (EFAP) or by contacting wellness@ahs.ca.

Help Available for Those with Lingering COVID-19 Symptoms

In-person, phone and online resources are available for those struggling with lingering symptoms of COVID-19 and can be found on [MyHealth.Alberta.ca](#) or [Getting Healthy after COVID-19](#).

Most people who have tested positive for the virus fully recover. However, as many as one in four individuals are left with lingering physical, psychological, social and cognitive effects that can include chronic fatigue, muscle weakness, 'brain fog,' anxiety/depression and shortness of breath, known as 'Long COVID.' Most of these individuals can manage their own symptoms, with the appropriate resources and supports.

They include:

- A [symptom self-management guide](#) to help patients recover after COVID-19.
- General information related to COVID-19 and seniors/continuing care; mental and spiritual health; cancer; and expectant and new parents.
- Information on COVID-19 Recovery Clinics.
- [Finding My Way Back video](#) about one Albertan's experience with long COVID.

[Resources for health professionals](#) are also available. They include care pathways and toolkits; and a Post-COVID-19 Rehabilitation and Functional Screening and Assessment Tool to help providers determine what rehabilitation supports may be required moving forward.

Sharing the Love

Health Link also links us to hope

We recently received this email from a member of our Health Link COVID-19 vaccination booking team that we'd like to share:

My current role as a non-clinical staff member in a healthcare setting will never be seen as visibly exciting. From a distance, I look like a regular office clerk glued to a chair, attentively engaged in a call, with eyes fixed on the computer screen, hands on the keyboard hitting 50 words per minute. As I sat still for eight hours per day, no one really knew what went on at the other end of the line each time I took a call. Each caller, a different story.

I spoke to a 72-year-old grandmother. She was sweet. She did not have any health issues and, in fact, she did not sound her age at all. I spoke to a 20-year-old woman who sounded eager to get the vaccine because she was immunocompromised. Very often, I spoke to mothers who worried about their spouses, their children and their extended families. I spoke to younger males and those were the shortest calls. They just wanted things done and over with. Of course, there were those who were not so nice and spent more time ranting and complaining. They were probably frustrated and, during this time when there is too much going on for everybody, you just don't know what to expect. People have different coping mechanisms, trapped in different life situations. With COVID-19, I guess the word 'normal' has been hard to define.

With each call, a different experience. With each call, a window opens showing bits and pieces of the larger world existing outside my little box. With each call, I take that someone is just trying to get out of their own little box and be part of something bigger again. A bigger family. A bigger circle of friends. A bigger work setting. Who doesn't want to get their old life back?

After each call, I would take a minute to breathe.

With each call I receive, I feel hope. I feel optimistic that we are looking forward to better days ahead. With AHS, I have been given the privilege to be part of the healing process. I am one tiny part of the process where people start feeling more secure and unafraid. For that, I am grateful. With each call, I become part of someone else's life-changing story. For that, I feel blessed.

In my mind and in my heart, I just gave this workplace its new name: Hope Link.

— Anonymous Health Link vaccination booking team member

Oilsands vaccination efforts applauded

Kudos to North Zone public health nurses Pam Lund, Charlotte Goodyear and Michelle Major, and their entire COVID-19 immunizing team based at the Fort McMurray Community Health Centre, for supporting COVID-19 immunization efforts in the oilsands.

Throughout the COVID-19 vaccine rollout, the immunizing team has worked tirelessly to ensure widespread access to vaccine clinics for oilsands employees. Partnerships with several corporations — including Suncor, Syncrude, Imperial Oil, ConocoPhillips, and Cenovus — have resulted in several initiatives to encourage vaccine uptake in these remote areas.

Most recently, the immunizing team planned, set up and executed one of the largest COVID-19 immunization clinics to date, located at the Suncor Industrial site.

Approximately 2,400 individuals were immunized over the two-day clinic, helping ensure the health and safety of not only those who received the vaccine but also their families and other loved ones.

The COVID-19 immunization efforts have efficiently rolled out provincewide due to the hard work, innovative thinking, and dedication of our leaders and their teams. We are so thankful for all of you who continue to work tirelessly to help ensure the health and safety of our communities and all Albertans.

— the AHS Vaccine Task Force

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](#).



The ICU team continues to amaze us. Their resilience throughout the pandemic is truly remarkable. This patient has been in the hospital for over 20 days and had one request: to go outside. The ICU staff made this happen. Thank you!

— Tanya

Thank you to the team at the Bannister Road vaccination centre! Everything was so well-organized and everyone was very friendly and professional. The different ways of keeping everything organized and safe are genius: colour-coded aisles, rolling desks for the nursing staff, different lines for Moderna and Pfizer, etc. Great job!

— Meaghan Nystrom

I am visiting Alberta from out of province and, while here, I booked my second-dose COVID-19 vaccine for the Edmonton Expo Centre. I was so impressed with the efficiency of the process. All staff I encountered were friendly and helpful. The public health nurse who gave me my vaccine answered all my questions and was so nice. Thank you!

— Tracy Waterman

I want to give a huge shout-out to the public health community immunizers who attended Ottewell Manor recently to provide second doses to the residents there. The Ottewell site staff were particularly thankful for the immunization team members who took the extra time to reassure and support residents who had difficulties due to their mental health symptoms. Some residents were seen in their rooms and some were offered support in other ways. The team really met the clients where they were at. Their kindness, thoughtfulness and compassion toward this group of community members were very much appreciated.

— Christina

Wrapping Up — You've Made This Possible

Next week, on Canada Day (July 1), the province will enter Stage 3 of its reopening plan, with many public health restrictions lifted. This will be welcome news for many Albertans who have been waiting patiently to spend time with loved ones, or to go out for a meal or entertainment like we used to do. Alberta has arrived at this moment thanks to your efforts over the past 16 months to limit the spread of the virus through public health education and measures, to care for Albertans who contracted the virus, and to protect Albertans through our ongoing and successful COVID-19 immunization campaign. We all know the pandemic is not over. We all know there remains much work ahead of us. We know that, as a province, we must remain vigilant as variants of concern continue to circulate. But we do hope, in the days ahead, you find time to rest, reflect on your contributions to our collective pandemic response, and enjoy a long-awaited semblance of normalcy in your personal lives. You've made this all possible. 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

