



Message from
Dr. Verna Yiu &
Dr. Laura McDougall

AHS Update: Cases and hospitalizations on the decline, government announces major investments in healthcare infrastructure

Please print and share with your teams as needed

Dear staff, physicians and volunteers,

Today's Update

- **Support for Relationships**
- **COVID-19 Cases in Alberta**
- **Government Announces Funding for Healthcare Expansion**
- **Step 2 in Easing Health Measures to Possibly Start March 1**
- **Continuous Masking at AHS, APL, Covenant Remains in Place**
- **Resources Available to Support People with Long COVID**
- **Walk-in Pediatric Vaccine Clinics Available March 2 to 16**
- **COVID-19 Testing for Healthcare Workers — The Latest Numbers**
- **Influenza Immunization Update**
- **Verna's Weekly Video Message — Impact of Redeployment**
- **Tax Slips Now Available in e-People**
- **Milestone for Managing Outbreaks**
- **Gratitude from Albertans**
- **Wrapping Up**

We would like to recognize that our work takes place on historical and contemporary Indigenous lands, including the territories of Treaties 6, 7 & 8, and the homeland of the Métis. We also acknowledge the many Indigenous communities that have been forged in urban centres across Alberta.

Supports When You Need Them

Support for Relationships

The pandemic has touched all areas of our lives, including relationships with our loved ones. [Relationship Solutions](#) is part of the [Life Smart Coaching program](#), where you can receive specialty coaching from an expert on a range of topics to improve your well-being. It covers topics such as communication and resolving conflict.

To access Relationship Solutions, call the [Employee Family and Assistance Program \(EFAP\)](#) intake line at 1-877-273-3134. You will be asked a few questions to ensure you receive a customized service. A relationship specialist will call you and walk you through the types of personalized support that you could benefit from, such as written materials, online resources and printed materials. The specialist will continue to be in touch with you while you're using the materials.

If you feel overwhelmed about any issue, call the intake line any time at 1-877-273-3134. This service is confidential and available 24/7/365.

Physicians can contact the [AMA Physician and Family Support Program](#), also a confidential 24/7 support line at 1-877-SOS-4MDS for options and support.

There are many ways we can support you through these challenging times, no matter what your situation. See the [Resilience, Wellness and Mental Health Resource Guide](#) for a comprehensive list of health and wellness supports. You can also download [Headversity](#), the resilience app, to learn skills to proactively build your mental health. Questions? Contact wellness@ahs.ca.

COVID-19 Status

ICU Update

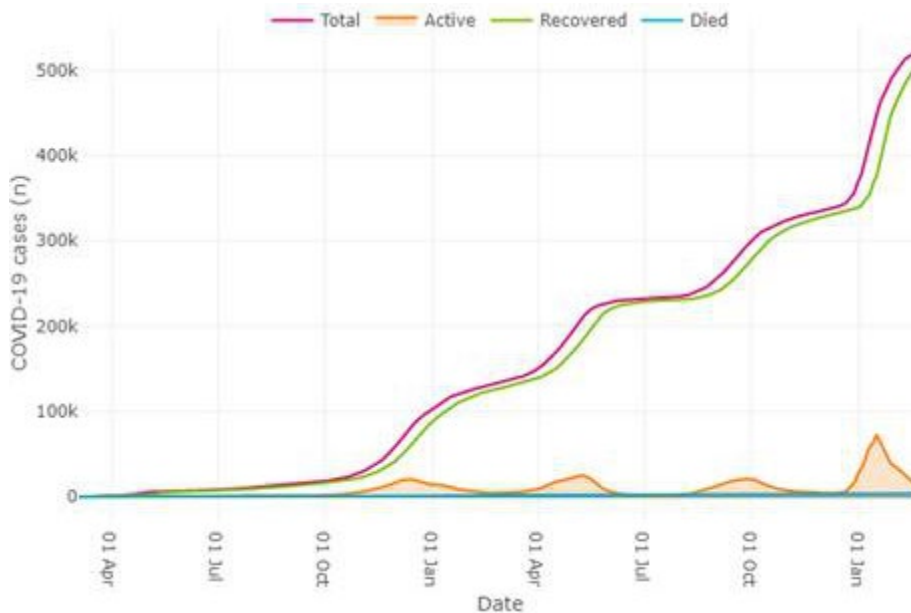
We currently have 235 general adult ICU beds open in Alberta, including 62 additional spaces above our baseline of 173 general adult ICU beds. There are currently 187 patients in ICU. Provincially, ICU capacity (including additional surge beds) is currently at 80 per cent. Without the additional surge spaces, provincial ICU capacity would be at 108 per cent; last week, we were at 112 per cent.

New and Active Cases

As of Feb. 23, there are 10,626 active cases in Alberta, a 35.8 per cent decrease compared to Feb. 16. All five zones reported a decrease in active cases compared to the last report, as you can see in the table below.

	Active Cases (as of Feb. 23)	Active Cases (as of Feb. 16)	Per cent Change
Calgary	3,591	6,094	-41.1%
Edmonton	3,014	4,809	-37.3%
North	1,480	1,948	-24.0%
Central	1,413	2,045	-30.9%
South	1,064	1,542	-31.0%
Unknown	64	113	-43.4%
Overall	10,626	16,551	-35.8%

For the seven-day period ending on Feb. 23, there was an average of 647 new cases of COVID-19 per day, compared to 993 cases per day the previous reporting period (Feb. 10-16), a 34.8 per cent decrease. The Calgary Zone reported the highest number of new cases with 1,460, an average of 209 new cases per day.

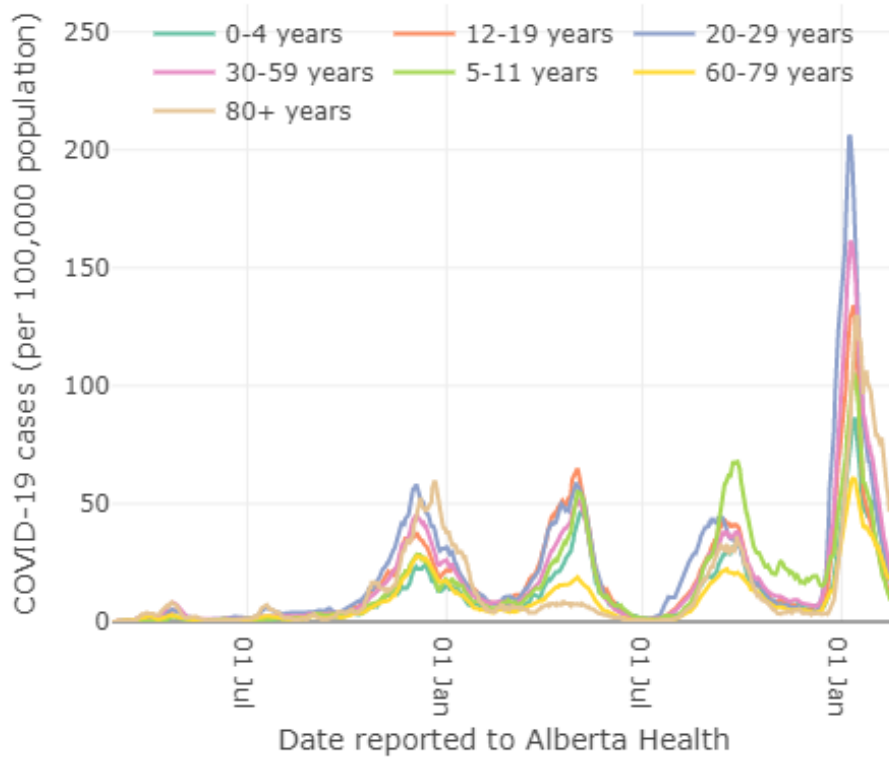


Please note: We know these data underestimate the number of people with COVID-19 across the province, and changes in testing eligibility make it difficult to compare cases week over week.

Cases by Age Group

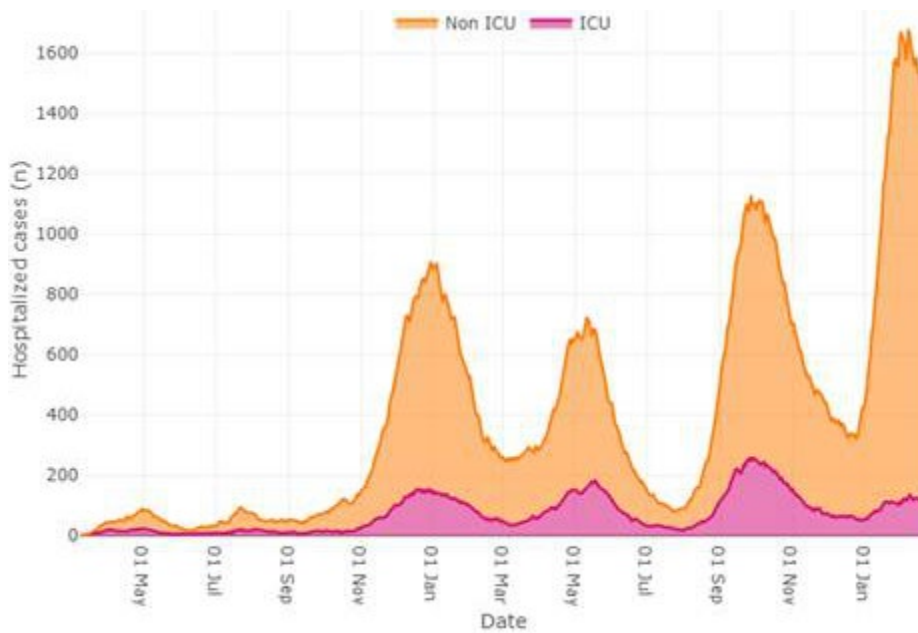
As of Feb. 20, Albertans aged 80+ have the highest seven-day rolling average rate of new daily COVID-19 cases, with 51.1 cases per 100,000 people. Albertans aged 30-59 had the second-highest rate with 15.9 cases per 100,000 people, followed by those aged 60-79 with 13.6 cases per 100,000 people. Targeted testing will be affecting age

groups differently. Trends in cases in Alberta by age group are in the figure below:



Hospitalizations

On Feb. 23, 1,265 individuals were in non-ICU hospital beds for COVID-19, compared to 1,416 on Feb. 16, a 10.7 per cent decrease.



Variants of Concern

From Feb. 15 to Feb. 21, an average of 73 per cent of positive samples were strain-

typed. Of those, the rolling average was 93.8 per cent Omicron variant, 0.1 per cent Delta variant, and 6.1 per cent wild type or presumptive variant. Strain-typing takes a number of days and these numbers may change as lab data becomes available.

Vaccine Efficacy Update

This week, we wanted to provide updated numbers showing how well COVID-19 vaccines are continuing to protect against hospitalizations and other serious outcomes in Alberta.

Consider the following regarding people aged five years and older in Alberta over the past 120 days. Those who were unvaccinated were about 3.2 times more likely to be admitted to hospital with COVID-19, seven times more likely to be admitted to ICU, and 4.3 times more likely to die of COVID-19 compared to people in the same age group who had two doses of vaccine.

Boosters are important for increasing vaccine effectiveness and protecting against waning immunity over time. This shows up clearly in the ICU admission data where unvaccinated people were 15.7 times more likely to be admitted to ICU compared to people with three doses of vaccine.

Other Notable COVID-19-related Information

- Data from the last seven days indicate 40.1 per cent of new admissions to non-ICU spaces are due to COVID-19 infection directly, 29.3 per cent had COVID-19 as a contributing cause and 30.6 per cent are cases where the infection was not determined to be a cause of admission, or where it was not possible to determine. For ICU, the percentage of new admissions due to COVID-19 directly was 55.8 per cent; 30.2 per cent had COVID-19 as a contributing cause and 14 per cent were incidental infections or unclear.
- As of Feb. 23, 3,885 individuals have passed away from COVID-19, including 63 deaths since the last report. We extend our condolences to the families of these individuals, and to all who have lost loved ones from any cause during this time.
- As of Feb. 23, 523,786 cases of COVID-19 have been detected in Alberta and 20,924 individuals have been hospitalized, which amounts to 4.0 individuals for every 100 cases. In all, 509,275 Albertans have recovered from COVID-19, meaning they are no longer considered contagious. The number of Albertans who have recovered from COVID-19 does not reflect the recovery time from a COVID-19 infection that could last beyond the time in which people are contagious.
- From Feb. 17 to Feb. 23, 19,944 COVID-19 tests were completed, a seven-day average of 2,849 tests per day. During this period, the daily positivity ranged from 18.8 per cent to 26.8 per cent. As of Feb. 23, 6.84 million tests have been conducted and 2.72 million individuals have been tested. COVID-19 testing eligibility has changed recently to accommodate the demand due to the increase in cases.

Things You Need to Know

Government Announces Funding for Healthcare Expansion

This week, the Government of Alberta made several funding announcements that support the province's healthcare infrastructure.

Earlier today (Feb. 25), government announced that \$63.5 million will be spent to complete 11 new operating rooms and 17 additional recovery beds at Foothills Medical Centre (FMC) in Calgary. The announcement is part of a \$133-million investment over three years to upgrade and expand hospital operating rooms and departments across the province under the Alberta Surgical Initiative. Currently, surgical teams at FMC perform more than 21,500 surgeries annually in the hospital's 32 operating rooms. Once construction is complete, the 11 additional operating rooms will accommodate approximately 7,000 more procedures at the hospital each year.

Upgrades at FMC will allow surgeons to focus on more complex surgeries and those with long wait lists. Most cancer surgeries in Calgary are performed at FMC, as it's home to the current and new Calgary Cancer Centre. Low-risk surgeries will be moved out of FMC and offered in Canmore, High River and chartered surgical facilities in Calgary. Design work on the FMC operating room expansion is underway with completion expected in late 2025.

Also this week, the government announced the Red Deer Regional Hospital Centre will undergo a \$1.8-billion expansion. It will begin with a \$193-million investment over the next three years that will add 200 new inpatient beds, increasing hospital capacity from 370 beds to 570 beds, or by 54 per cent. The expansion also provides for three new operating rooms, which will bring the site's total OR count to 14, including two dedicated obstetrical ORs.

A new cardiac catheterization lab will also be part of the hospital's expansion.

Completion of the expansion is slated for 2030-2031.

The Red Deer hospital is the busiest outside of Edmonton and Calgary. It has the fourth-highest patient volume of any AHS facility.

Also announced:

- \$46 million over three years towards a \$79-million total project cost to integrate ambulatory care, primary care, maternal health care and diagnostic services at the La Crete Maternity and Community Health Centre.
- \$99 million to add 30 treatment spaces in the emergency department of the Peter Lougheed Centre and 12 beds in a mental health intensive care unit.

- \$133 million over three years for the Alberta Surgical Initiative Capital Program, to increase surgical capacity at AHS-owned facilities to help ensure all patients receive their required surgeries within clinically recommended timelines.
- \$50 million over three years to begin construction of the neurosciences intensive care unit at the University of Alberta Hospital Brain Centre, increasing neuro ICU capacity from 11 to 24 spaces and adding 18 new inpatient beds at the U of A hospital. This is a foundation-partnered project and we are grateful for the new ongoing support of the University Hospital Foundation.
- \$36 million for the Recovery Communities Stream 2 project to create a new facility with 75 spaces on the Blood Tribe Reserve.
- \$204 million over three years to modernize continuing care facilities and create new spaces.

Step 2 in Easing Pandemic Health Measures To Possibly Start March 1

With hospitalizations continuing to trend downwards, the Alberta government could announce the province is entering Step 2 of its gradual reduction of pandemic health measures, starting on March 1. Premier Jason Kenney is expected to provide additional details tomorrow (Feb. 26).

When Step 2 comes into effect, the following measures could be updated:

- Remaining school requirements removed; for example, kindergarten to Grade 6 cohorting.
- Youth screening activities for entertainment and sport activities removed.
- Capacity on all large venues and entertainment venues lifted.
- Indoor and outdoor social gathering limits lifted.
- Indoor masking no longer required.

Government also could address its mandatory work-from-home requirements on March 1. If this happens, even though AHS employees can return to site as of March 1, employees currently working remotely should continue to do so until their longer-term work arrangements are confirmed through the remote-hybrid process.

The Government of Alberta first announced on Feb. 8 that CMOH orders related to the pandemic would be reduced and rescinded in three steps. As part of the first step, both the Restrictions Exemption Program and mandatory masking requirements have been removed for K-12 students and for children under 12.

An implementation date for Step 3 is to be determined and will be dependent on a continuing decline in hospitalization rates.

More information, including details of Step 2 and 3, is available on the [government's website](#).

Continuous Masking at All AHS, APL, Covenant Sites Remains in Place

While many public health guidelines and COVID-19 restrictions in Alberta are being reduced, all staff, physicians, volunteers, and designated support persons are still required to wear a mask while attending an AHS, Alberta Precision Laboratories (APL) or Covenant Health facility.

This applies both in patient care areas, as well as common spaces, including the cafeteria and waiting areas.

Patients seeking or receiving care are more vulnerable than the general population, and outbreaks in these settings have a serious impact on patient outcomes and our ability to deliver services. Masking is an additional safeguard to protect both patients and healthcare workers.

Continuous masking remains in place at all acute care, continuing care and community locations, including immunization and lab collection sites provincewide.

In addition to masking, all AHS and Covenant sites will continue to require visitors to perform hand hygiene, physical distancing and health screening upon entry.

For more information, see [AHS Guidelines for Continuous Masking](#). There are no changes at this time to [existing PPE policies](#).

Resources Available to Support People with Long COVID

Individuals who have contracted COVID-19 might struggle with symptoms that last longer than four weeks. They may also develop long COVID, which is a group of symptoms (such as [breathing difficulties](#), headache, [loss of smell and taste](#), [brain fog](#), and [fatigue](#)) that last more than 12 weeks after an initial COVID-19 infection. AHS has supports for both Albertans managing long COVID symptoms, and for clinicians helping care for this specific group of patients.

Resources for long COVID can be found at [COVID-19 Recovery & Rehabilitation After COVID-19: Resources for Health Professionals](#). Patients, caregivers and healthcare providers can also connect with the Rehabilitation Advice Line for information and support (1-833-379-0563).

Walk-in Pediatric Vaccine Clinics Available March 2 to 16

From March 2 to 16, several AHS vaccination clinics across the province will be open weekdays from 3 p.m. to 8 p.m. and on weekends from noon to 6 p.m. to accommodate pediatric walk-ins and appointments. To find an AHS clinic with extended hours and walk-in appointments, visit [ahs.ca](#).

Pharmacies with extended hours and experience vaccinating children will also administer pediatric vaccine to children. Pharmacies in the Edmonton, Calgary, Red Deer, Lethbridge, Grande Prairie, Medicine Hat and Fort McMurray areas will be

added, focusing on local geographic regions with under-vaccinated populations of five to 11 year olds, as well as 17 pharmacies in rural communities.

To find a pharmacy offering COVID-19 vaccinations for children, visit ab.bluecross.ca.

Several physician clinics that are currently offering COVID-19 vaccinations will receive doses of pediatric vaccine to administer for children ages 5 to 11 from March 2 to 16. These physicians will contact their current patient rosters directly.

Parents and guardians can still book appointments for children age 5 and older online, by using the [Alberta vaccine booking system](#) or by calling 811.

COVID-19 Testing for Healthcare Workers — The Latest Numbers

We continue to update the testing data for healthcare workers. 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. The testing data does not include rapid antigen test results for healthcare workers.

As of Feb. 22:

- 93,228 employees (AHS and APL combined) have been tested for COVID-19 and, of those tested, 22,482 (or 24.1 per cent) have tested positive.
- Of the 8,742 employees who have tested positive and whose source of infection has been determined, 727 (or 8.3 per cent) acquired their infection through a workplace exposure. An additional 14,076 employees who have tested positive are still under investigation as to the source of infection.
- 6,479 physicians (AHS and APL combined) have been tested for COVID-19 and, of those tested, 1,023 (or 15.8 per cent) have tested positive.
- Of the 358 physicians who have tested positive and whose source of infection has been determined, 27 (or 7.5 per cent) acquired their infection through a workplace exposure. An additional 677 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](#).

Influenza Immunization Update

As of Feb. 19, 1.2 million doses of influenza vaccine have been administered, which is approximately 27 per cent of the population. A total of 43 influenza cases have been confirmed this season.

Interactive aggregate data is available online at [Alberta influenza statistics](#). For more information on influenza, visit ahs.ca/influenza.

Staff, physicians and volunteers can choose to be immunized at a pharmacy, doctor's office or public health clinic (for children under five years of age and their family and

household members). Staff using these options are reminded to submit their [Got My Flu Shot form](#). See [Insite](#) for more on the staff immunization campaign.

Verna's Weekly Video Message — Impact of Redeployment

Throughout the pandemic, AHS has taken proactive steps to be prepared for expected increases in COVID-19 cases. And in each wave, we have been able to increase our hospital and ICU capacity as required to meet those demands. Of course, this is only possible through the hard work of countless people across AHS. Many of our people have been redeployed or reassigned throughout the pandemic response, and we're grateful for their willingness to adapt and their dedication to Albertans.

Joining me (Verna) to [talk about what the redeployment experience is like](#) are:

- Justine Bremner, registered nurse, Mazankowski Alberta Heart Institute.
- Nancy Coyne, clinical nurse educator, Sturgeon Community Hospital.
- Murray Crawford, Senior Operating Officer in Fort McMurray and area, and Emergency Coordination Centre Deputy Director.



Tax Slips Now Available in e-People

T4, T2200 and T2200S tax slips are now available in e-People Employee Self Service.

Information on viewing, downloading and printing tax documents is available on the [e-People Employee Resources page](#).

Employees can save their tax slips to their computer and/or mobile device, and either share electronically or print for tax purposes, as needed. Please refrain from submitting any requests for printed copies of these tax slips.

T2200S slips are automatically provided to all employees for the purpose of claiming

expenses resulting from working from home due to COVID-19, if applicable.

Employees who have previously approved work arrangements and had mileage reimbursed through Finance (not via their paycheque) will automatically receive a signed T2200 via Employee Self Service. Managers are not required to approve this.

New this year, all employees will see the option to request a T2200 in Employee Self Service. Requests for T2200 will be reviewed and approved/denied by the employee's manager. Remember: for those employees who wish to claim work-from-home expenses due to COVID-19, the T2200S is appropriate for eligible expenses.

More information on the T2200S and T2200 can be found on the [Employee Resources page](#). Managers can also find related resources on the [Manager Resources page](#).

- [Understanding T2200/T2200S for 2021 Tax Year](#)
- [What's Changing Overview – T2200 and T2200S for 2022](#)
- [Viewing and Requesting your T2200](#)
- [Viewing and Managing T2200 Requests\](#)

Employees should consult the [Canada Revenue Agency](#) or their tax professional for guidance on claiming work from home expenses.

Be Well - Be Kind

Milestone For Managing Outbreaks

AHS recently surpassed the 7,500 mark for number of confirmed COVID-19 outbreaks opened and managed (with 265 of those still open).

In total across all outbreaks, 81,721 cases were confirmed by the laboratory and there have been 1,814 deaths (more than 46 per cent of all deaths.) And there is another 300+ investigations undertaken in which COVID-19 was ruled out.

We wish to acknowledge this represents a massive amount of work and a huge amount of transmission averted.

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. If you need some encouragement, please take a moment to read the messages of gratitude on our [Sharing the Love webpage](#).

Wrapping Up

We end this week's message encouraging you to find time to watch this week's vlog.

Guests on the vlog are always asked to speak with candour about their experiences — even if they have hard truths to share — and this week’s guests clearly articulate the difficulties and distress that they’ve gone through over the past two years. Their stories are powerful and, at times, gut-wrenching. Yet, while discussing the challenges of redeployment, they also embody the resilience and dedication of our teams across the province. We always end this weekly email with a message of gratitude, and this week’s conversation on the vlog is a reminder of how much you give, how much you sacrifice and how much you care. Thank you for everything you do.

With enduring gratitude and appreciation,

Dr. Verna Yiu

AHS President & CEO

Dr. Laura McDougall

Senior Medical Officer of Health



Healthy Albertans.
Healthy Communities.
Together.

