



Message from Dr. Verna Yiu & Dr. Laura McDougall

AHS Update: New cases increase in three zones, webpages added with war supports for staff and Albertans, Ukrainian and Russian speakers sought

Please print and share with your teams as needed

Dear staff, physicians and volunteers,

Today's Update

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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

AHS Supports for Ukraine

As the crisis in Ukraine continues, we want Albertans to remain informed about what steps AHS is taking and what resources are available to them. We have developed two new pages on AHS Supports for

Ukraine: an [Insite page](#) with resources for staff and an [AHS website page](#) with resources for Albertans. We encourage you to check the Insite page frequently, as it will be updated with resources as they become available.

We also want to thank everyone for reaching out with offers of [support](#), supplies and volunteering. We anticipate many evacuees arriving in our province will not have English as their first language. We want to ensure we can communicate as effectively as possible and provide first-hand support wherever we can. We are currently seeking staff who speak Ukrainian and or Russian so we can ask these individuals to help if and when necessary. Although we do not know exactly what kind of help we will be looking for, we want to be prepared. If you are fluent in Ukrainian and/or Russian language and willing to be contacted, please email Ukraine.inquiries@ahs.ca. All volunteers will be asked to participate in a 30-minute training and/or certification exercise prior to being deployed, if and when needed.

No evacuee who arrives in Alberta will be denied healthcare. We will care for everyone who arrives in our province and we will do everything we can to ensure their care is culturally appropriate and accessible. Some evacuees have already arrived in Alberta and we are expecting hundreds more over the coming weeks. Should any evacuee require health services from AHS, healthcare facilities and providers are asked not to turn away any requests for care and to respond as needed.

AHS is working with Alberta Health to establish official processes around how we can continue to support those in need. In the meantime, we encourage you to visit the [Government of Canada website](#) that provides information about how can help during a disaster abroad.

We know the situation in Ukraine is having an emotional impact on people. We want to remind everyone to practise self-care and to use the [resources and supports](#) in place to help manage grief, stress and anxiety during this difficult time.

If you have questions or concerns, please email Ukraine.Inquiries@ahs.ca

Help for Fatigue, Poor Sleep Available

The time change and lengthier days can impact your sleep and energy levels, especially if you work shifts.

If you're feeling fatigued, there is help through [Shift Worker Support](#) to keep you healthy, support your well-being and help you maintain a balance between your family commitments, social life and work. When you call the [EFAP](#) intake line, you'll connect with a specialist who will reach out to explain the supports available to you, and continue to check in as you access resources.

For support with any issue, including burnout, you can call the [EFAP](#) intake line 24/7/365 at 1-877-273-3134.

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.

Support is available if you ever feel uncertain or overwhelmed. 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

As of noon today (March 25), AHS has 220 general adult ICU beds open in Alberta, including 47 additional spaces above our baseline of 173 general adult ICU beds. There are currently 156 patients in ICU. Provincially, ICU capacity (including additional surge beds) is currently at 71 per cent, slightly up from 70 per cent a week ago when there were nine more surge beds. Without the additional surge spaces, provincial ICU capacity would be at 90 per cent, down from 93 per cent a week ago.

New Cases

For the seven-day period ending on March 21, there was an average of 524 new cases of COVID-19 per day, compared to 490 cases per day the previous reporting period (March 8 to March 14), a 6.9 per cent increase. The Calgary Zone reported the highest total number of new cases with 1,454 (an average of 208 new cases per day). Three of five zones reported an increase in the number of new cases this reporting period, compared to the previous week as you can see in the table below.

Zone	New Cases (March 15-21)	New Cases (March 8-14)	Percent Change
Calgary	1,454	1,190	+22.2%
Edmonton	1,120	1,043	+7.4%
North	297	388	-23.5%
Central	417	488	-14.5%
South	353	317	+11.4%
Unknown	25	6	+316.7%
Total	3,666	3,432	+6.8%

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. Also note Alberta Health has stopped reporting the number of active COVID-19 cases.

Hospitalizations

On March 21, 900 individuals were in non-ICU hospital beds for COVID-19, compared to 955 on March 14, a 5.8 per cent decrease.

Variants of Concern

Alberta Precision Laboratories (APL) continues to closely monitor SARS-CoV-2 variants. From March 15-21, an average of 73 per cent of positive samples were strain-typed. Of those, the seven-day rolling average was 61 per cent Omicron BA.2 lineage, 38 per cent Omicron BA.1, and the remaining one per cent are presumptive variants. The BA.2 sub-lineage is now the predominant strain. While viral recombinants between Omicron and Delta have been reported in several cases globally, no recombinant SARS-CoV-2 viruses have been detected in Alberta through our ongoing genomic sequencing.

Other notable COVID-19-related information:

- Data from the last seven days indicate that 39.4 per cent of new admissions to non-ICU spaces are due to COVID-19 infection directly, 32.9 per cent had COVID-19 as a contributing cause and 27.7 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 45.0 per cent; 25.0 per cent had COVID-19 as a contributing cause and 30.0 per cent were incidental infections or unclear.

- As of March 21, 4,044 individuals have passed away from COVID-19, including 25 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 March 21, 536,166 cases of COVID-19 have been detected in Alberta and 22,149 individuals have been hospitalized, which amounts to 4.1 individuals for every 100 cases.
- From March 15-21, 17,171 COVID-19 tests were completed, a seven-day average of 2,453 tests per day. During this period, the daily positivity ranged from 18.3 per cent to 27.1 per cent.

Things You Need to Know

Remote Work Expectations

AHS continues to support [remote and hybrid work arrangements](#) for eligible staff. Leaders are asked to continue conversations with staff and confirm all work arrangements by March 31. With the remote work order lifted, staff who have selected hybrid or onsite arrangements have begun to return to working on site and can do so once an agreement is in place and the site is ready and set up for their safe return. For more information, please refer to the [Leader FAQs](#), [Employee FAQs](#). Leaders can also reach out to their senior leader or to their [HRBP advisor](#) for additional support.

AHS continues to negotiate with AUPE-GSS and HSAA for new provisions to address the remote-hybrid strategy in the existing Teleworking Letters of Understanding (LOUs). The implementation of hybrid work arrangements for employees in these bargaining units may only be implemented upon conclusion of bargaining with the respective unions. If an employee on a teleworking LOU has been working remotely, they can continue to do so until an agreement is secured.

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 March 22:

- 93,725 employees (AHS and APL combined) have been tested for COVID-19 and, of those tested, 23,894 (or 25.5 per cent) have tested positive.
- Of the 9,943 employees who have tested positive and whose source of infection has been determined, 771 (or 7.8 per cent) acquired their infection through a workplace exposure. An additional 14,649 employees who have tested positive are still under investigation as to the source of infection.
- 6,553 physicians (AHS and APL combined) have been tested for COVID-19 and, of those tested, 1,118 (or 17.1 per cent) have tested positive.
- Of the 408 physicians who have tested positive and whose source of infection has been determined, 27 (or 6.6 per cent) acquired their infection through a workplace exposure. An additional 726 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](#).

COVID-19 Immunization Update

Novavax allocation, eligibility criteria being determined

Following Health Canada's approval of the Novavax COVID-19 vaccine last month, Alberta Health continues to work to determine vaccine allocation and eligibility criteria within the province. The vaccine product is expected to become available in Alberta in the coming weeks. To learn more about the vaccine review process, the vaccines currently approved for use in Canada, and the status of vaccines currently under review, visit [Vaccines and treatments for COVID-19: Progress](#)

Reminder about physical distancing

We ask all staff, physicians, volunteers, designated family/support persons and visitors to continue to maintain physical distancing while at an AHS, APL or Covenant site. This includes both patient care areas and common spaces, including the cafeteria, staff rooms, in waiting areas, and when meeting with colleagues.

We encourage our staff to continue to meet virtually whenever possible. If meeting in person at a site is the only option, in addition to maintaining two metres between attendees, we ask that all individuals mask continuously, perform hand hygiene and follow fit for work screening when attending a site.

Reminder about Continuous Masking, Other Guidance

As we navigate the next phase of the pandemic, AHS must continue to ensure those seeking, receiving or providing care in all AHS facilities can continue to do so in a safe manner. Patients seeking or receiving care — including those accessing community sites, such as laboratories — are more vulnerable to severe outcomes from COVID-19 than the general population. Masking is an additional safeguard to protect both patients and healthcare workers.

All designated family/support persons and visitors are still required to wear a mask while attending an AHS, APL or Covenant Health facility. In some settings — including APL, ambulatory care or the emergency department — patients will also be asked to mask to ensure their safety, as well as the safety of others around them. Patients admitted to acute care units are asked to mask when they are outside of their rooms.

In addition to masking, all AHS and Covenant sites will continue to require visitors to perform hand hygiene and symptom screening upon entry, and maintain physical distance while onsite.

Verna's Weekly Video Message — A Conversation with Jitendra Prasad

One of AHS' greatest strengths is our people. From those working behind the scenes to those on the front lines, everyone contributes toward our goal of providing safe, quality care to all Albertans.

Jitendra Prasad (or JP, as most call him), our Chief Program Officer for Contracting, Procurement and Supply Management, is one of those people. The work of JP and his team has led to AHS developing one of the top health supply chain management programs in the world. This has been instrumental during the pandemic, most especially when it comes to procuring the PPE that keeps our people safe.

After more than 35 years in healthcare, JP is leaving us for a well-deserved retirement, or as he calls it, a fresh start, next month. With that in mind, I (Verna) invited him on the vlog to [talk about his career in CPSM and what might lie ahead for the industry](#).



Join the President's Speaker Series Next Month

You're invited to join an online discussion on COVID-19's impact on the economy at the next [President's Speaker Series](#), scheduled for April 4 from noon to 1 p.m.

COVID-19 has caused a significant drain on government and business revenues, and there will likely be lasting implications on public sector finances in Alberta and Canada, and the global economy. Healthcare is not immune to these implications, and we must consider the future impact.

Our keynote speaker is [Pedro Antunes](#), Chief Economist and primary spokesperson at The Conference Board of Canada. In his presentation, Antunes will discuss the lasting impacts of the pandemic on Alberta's healthcare system, both in terms of demand for services and how COVID-19 has affected the province's healthcare workforce.

- [Register here](#)

Questions? Email PSS@ahs.ca.

Be Well - Be Kind

Sharing the Love ... for Virtual Health

During the pandemic, AHS has been remarkably nimble and adaptive in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We're delivering care in new ways, including through the expansion of virtual health. In appropriate cases, virtual health delivers outstanding patient outcomes and experiences, and improves access to care for more Albertans, especially those living in rural and remote communities.

We'd like to share an excerpt of a letter we received from Marlene Walchuk, a Cold Lake resident who has had Parkinson's disease for the past eight years. She uses Zoom to access two programs led by her physiotherapist Rosanna Clark, who works in Grande Prairie, more than 680 kilometres away. We share this as a pat on the back for all of you who deliver care, or support the delivery of care, through virtual means.

"I wish to share my gratitude for being able to participate in these specialized and accessible services in my smaller community," writes Marlene. "Here, at home, I thrive with (Rosanna's) expertise. In contrast, Cold Lake offers general exercise programs but the trip to town can be physically taxing, especially in winter. I am so fortunate to be able to take part in Rosanna's program in my home.

"Rosanna's programming covers more than physical needs. She very skilfully delivers cognitive challenges.... Also, she integrates daily life challenges into our exercises, always explaining the tendencies (people with Parkinson's) have, and what we need to do to conquer those tendencies. The targeted programming strengthens and empowers me.

"I am grateful for the support I am receiving in pushing back at this disease that eats away at my mobility, and can leave me anxious, apathetic, and disconnected. I am stronger and healthier because of taking part in Rosanna's programs. I have Parkinson's but Parkinson's does not have me."

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. This week, we wanted to share some recent messages of gratitude from our student nurses. You can see more messages on our [Sharing the Love webpage](#).

Thank you for showing kindness to us students whenever we're on the unit. We really appreciate it.
—Desmond Wang

I want to thank you for being patient with me as a student nurse. You're knowledgeable and take the time to teach me what you know and check-in to ask if I have any questions. The way you solve problems and think critically is something that I admire and look up to and I want to take that into my own practice.
— Anonymous

Thank you for being an awesome educator and charge nurse.
— Anonymous

Thank you for your compassion and patience with teaching us students. You are so greatly appreciated.
— Anonymous

Wrapping Up

As you've seen, the number of new COVID-19 cases increased in three of our five zones over the past week. Please [remain vigilant](#) and exercise caution when in public places. At work, [continuous masking](#) remains in place and [continuous eye protection](#) must be maintained in AHS settings where frequent or unanticipated exposures to COVID-19 may occur. And please stay home if you are experiencing any COVID-19 symptoms. We thank all of you for following this guidance, for everything you do to keep patients, families, yourself and your colleagues safe, and for continuing to provide high-quality, compassionate care — or supporting the delivery of that care — during these stressful, difficult times. And finally, thank you for welcoming Ukrainian evacuees as they start arriving in Alberta in greater numbers and accessing our services.

With enduring gratitude and appreciation,

Dr. Verna Yiu
AHS President & CEO

Dr. Laura McDougall
Senior Medical Officer of Health

