



Message from  
Mauro Chies &  
Dr. Laura McDougall

## *AHS Update: Preparations continue for Connect Care Launch 4, surgical wait list down from last month, new cases of COVID-19 decrease across zones*

*Please print and share with your teams as needed*

Dear staff, physicians and volunteers,

### Today's Update

- Our Priorities
- Supports When You Need Them
- COVID-19 Cases in Alberta
- Interim CEO Video Message — Alberta Surgical Initiative
- Be Heard through Our People Pulse Survey
- COVID-19 Immunization Update
- New Guidance for COVID-19 Rapid Antigen Testing
- PPE Question of the Week — When Do I Have to Wear Eye Protection?
- Complex Care Hub among AHS Initiatives Recognized by HQCA
- Clean Your Hands Day – Puzzle Fun
- Kudos for Publication of Paper on Ideal Shared Care Model
- Mental Wellness Moment — How Can I Help Someone Who I Think Might Be Struggling?
- 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.

## Our Priorities

---

We are expanding the scope of our weekly AHS Update message. We will continue to provide the latest information on our COVID-19 response and we'll balance that with updates on the progress AHS is making in several priority areas. We have much to accomplish together in these areas, so we want to make sure our teams have the most current information on the work underway and on the work ahead.

**Priority: Digital Health Evolution and Innovation**

This work involves the ongoing rollout of Connect Care; continued expansion of virtual health to support more community- and home-based care, programs and services; the rollout of the PRIHS digital health program, and continued work with provincial and federal governments and industry on bringing new health innovations to market.

*Connect Care Launch 4 three weeks away*

Connect Care teams are busy with final preparations for Launch 4 of Connect Care, which is now three weeks away — on May 28.

This week, the Clinical Operational Readiness (COrE) Day took place. There are several COrE days for each launch, and they provide operational leaders (zone, provincial programs and site leadership, as well as implementation teams, managers, directors, and physician leads) the tools they need to prepare their site and staff for Connect Care. This week's COrE Day included an overview of the Connect Care Launch Incident Management Branch, which is a team of experts who support every site during launch. The audience was also provided with examples of what a day in the life of launch looks like for multiple roles.

We also want to wish our colleagues at the Pre-Admission Clinic at Peter Lougheed Centre in Calgary a successful early launch on May 9.

The full Connect Care Implementation Timeline is available on [Insite](#).

*Virtual Health launches new quarterly newsletter*

The AHS Virtual Health (VH) Program is dedicated to supporting healthcare providers and clinical programs with the integration of innovation and technology for clinically appropriate, effective virtual care — improving access and reducing barriers to patient care across Alberta.

The program has recently launched a new, quarterly newsletter that offers the latest news, tools and tips to help improve your experience in delivering virtual care. To sign up, navigate to the '[What's New](#)' section on VH's Insite page, open the newsletter, and click 'Subscribe' in the top left corner.

**Priority: Pandemic Response and Recovery**

AHS will continue to provide access to vaccines and treatments, expand and enhance supports for long-COVID conditions, increase intensive care capacity, and return other services to pre-pandemic levels.

*Rapid tests now accepted for Paxlovid eligibility*

In some circumstances, rapid antigen tests are now being accepted to confirm COVID-19 in patients who qualify to receive Paxlovid, the oral medication that can prevent the disease from progressing in at-risk patients.

Physicians, nurse practitioners and some pharmacists in Alberta can now prescribe Paxlovid to eligible patients who can receive the treatment within five days of symptom onset. Patients without a family physician, or those whose family physician isn't prescribing Paxlovid yet, can still call 1-844-343-0971 to be assessed. Patients who don't qualify for Paxlovid will need to go through the centralized program to determine if they qualify for other outpatient treatments.

AHS is working with primary care physicians to transition the prescribing of Paxlovid to primary care. Access will increase as more family physicians assess and treat COVID-19 patients.

Eligibility criteria can be found at [ahs.ca/covidopt](https://ahs.ca/covidopt).

### **Priority: Rural Initiatives and Engagement**

This work is designed to strengthen partnerships with rural communities, to enhance and better support the rural healthcare workforce and to better meet the unique needs of Albertans living in non-urban communities.

#### *North Zone leadership meets with Indigenous leaders*

North Zone executive leaders Stacy Greening and Dr. Brian Muir met with Indigenous leaders from the zone for a virtual community leaders session.

The purpose of the meeting was to give a brief overview of AHS North Zone, and to hear from communities on shared concerns, so AHS can better partner with Indigenous communities and leaders and better meet the needs of the communities we serve.

Several concerns were shared with AHS leaders during the session, including:

- Recruitment and retention challenges with physicians (specifically referencing Cold Lake and Sucker Creek).
- Mental health services and supports.
- Racism in the healthcare system, and the need for continuous and meaningful dialogue between AHS and the community.

A follow-up meeting to further address mental health services and supports for Indigenous communities is being scheduled with Indigenous leaders and AHS leadership.

#### *North Zone HACs to meet next week*

Albertans in the North Zone are invited to join the [Peace Health Advisory Council](#) at 6 p.m. on May 10. In addition to engaging in a conversation with local AHS decision-makers, participants will see a presentation from the Alberta Healthy Living Program. The Lakeland Communities Health Advisory Council will host an engagement event on May 11 between 5 and 8 p.m. Participants will hear a presentation on understanding grief and loss. Anyone interested in the event can contact [community.engagement@ahs.ca](mailto:community.engagement@ahs.ca) to register.

### **Priority: Alberta Surgical Initiative (ASI)**

AHS is dedicated to ensuring Albertans have access to high-quality and safe care. Timely access to surgeries is important to Albertans. No one should have to wait longer than clinically recommended for their surgery. In partnership with Alberta Health, AHS developed the Alberta Surgical Initiative (ASI), a plan to improve surgery in Alberta by shaping demand, managing capacity, and improving the patient's journey to receiving surgery.

#### *Current surgical status*

We continue to work diligently to recover to pre-pandemic surgical status. Over the past four weeks, the average of weekly volumes for surgical activity is 91 per cent of our pre-pandemic surgical volumes. Our total surgical wait list for adults sits at approximately 72,900, compared to approximately 74,300 at the beginning of April. In February 2020, before the pandemic, our total wait list was 68,000.

Please watch [The AHS Vlog this week](#) for more information on ASI.

## Supports When You Need Them

---

### **Supports Available to Navigate Daily Challenges**

This week is both [Mental Health Week](#) and [Health and Safety Week](#), and we want to make sure you're aware of supports available to navigate day-to-day challenges all year long.

If you are feeling overwhelmed, watch the [Mental Wellness Moment videos](#), see the [Resilience, Wellness and Mental Health Resource Guide](#), or read the resource on [compassion](#). More resources can be found on the [My Mental Health Insite page](#).

Additional supports include [Life Smart Coaching](#), which offers expert support and resources in areas such as parenting, elder care, relationships, shift work and more. Call the [Employee and Family Assistance Program \(EFAP\)](#) intake line at 1-877-273-3134 to connect with an expert. Physicians can contact the [AMA Physician and Family Support Program](#) at 1-877-SOS-4MDS. This support line is confidential and available 24/7.

Questions? Contact [wellness@ahs.ca](mailto:wellness@ahs.ca).

### **Many Learning Opportunities Open to You**

As a learning organization, AHS recognizes the importance of education to help you feel valued, engaged and informed. While we learn new things every day from interactions with patients and each other, AHS has many learning opportunities to support your personal growth and professional development.

[Your Learning. Your Way. \(LYW\) Portal](#) is a new online learning initiative that enables you to explore and learn through topic specific information, including a list of courses, relevant resources and group discussions to engage every learner at the level of learning that is right for you. Or you can check out the [Learning Navigator](#), which has a search tool that enables you to tailor your learning experience by filtering courses by keyword, type of learning delivery, [AHS Competencies](#) area of focus, or [LEADS domain](#).

Take control of your learning. Visit the [Learning homepage](#) to find other educational opportunities that may interest you. Questions? Email [Learning@ahs.ca](mailto:Learning@ahs.ca) for more support.

## COVID-19 Status

---

### **ICU Update**

As of 10 a.m. today (May 6), provincial ICU capacity (including additional surge beds) is at 85 per cent. Without the additional surge spaces, provincial ICU capacity would be at 94 per cent.

### **Hospitalizations**

On May 2, 1,221 individuals were in non-ICU hospital beds with COVID-19, compared to 1,242 individuals on April 25, a 1.7 per cent decrease.

### **Variants of Concern**

Alberta Precision Laboratories (APL) continues to closely monitor SARS-CoV-2 variants. From April 26-May 2, an average of 72 per cent of positive samples were strain-typed. Of those, the seven-day rolling average was 97 per cent Omicron BA.2 lineage, three per cent Omicron BA.1, and Delta was not detected during this period.

Recombinant SARS-CoV-2 strains have been detected and are circulating in Alberta, as well as across Canada and the world at low levels. The recombinants detected in Alberta are recombinants within the Omicron lineage and are not thought to be of any increased biological concern compared with the predominant BA.2 strain.

Recombinants occur as part of the evolution of SARS-CoV-2, and are being monitored as we remain in frequent communication with our provincial and national public health partners.

## New Cases

For the seven-day period ending on May 2, there was an average of 819 new cases of COVID-19 per day, compared to 946 cases per day the previous reporting period (April 19 to April 25), a 13.4 per cent decrease. The Calgary Zone reported the highest total number of new cases with 2,420 (an average of 346 new cases per day). All five zones reported a decrease 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 (April 26-May 2)	New Cases (April 19-25)	Percent Change
Calgary	2,420	2,750	-12.0%
Edmonton	1,880	2,353	-20.1%
North	415	445	-6.7%
Central	595	614	-3.1%
South	403	454	-11.2%
Unknown	22	3	+633.3%
Total	5,735	6,619	-13.4%

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

## Wastewater Surveillance

Wastewater can provide an early indication of infection trends in a community. For wastewater surveillance comparing weekly averages:

- South Zone (Brooks, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Taber): Brooks was the only location to significantly increase in the amount of COVID-19 RNA in its wastewater but more data are needed to know if this is a sustained trend. The other three locations decreased by more than 25 per cent.
- Calgary Zone (Airdrie, Banff, Calgary, Canmore, High River, Okotoks, Strathmore): All seven locations either remained stable or decreased.
- Central Zone (Red Deer, Lacombe, Drumheller): All three locations increased by more than 25 per cent. Lacombe, in particular, reached the highest levels ever recorded at that location but the last readings show it has decreased sharply since then.
- Edmonton Zone (Edmonton, Fort Saskatchewan): The City of Edmonton remained stable while the Fort Saskatchewan region decreased.
- North Zone (Cold Lake, Edson, Fort McMurray and Grande Prairie): All four locations recorded decreases ranging from 39 to 68 per cent.

Frequency of reporting updates vary by sampling site. The above interpretations were made from available data as of May 2 at noon. The Alberta Wastewater Surveillance Program is a collaboration between the University of Calgary, University of Alberta, APL and Alberta Health. Wastewater can provide an early indication of infection trends in a community.

## Other notable COVID-19-related information:

- Data from the last seven days indicate that 32.1 per cent of new admissions to non-ICU spaces are due to COVID-19 infection directly, 29.0 per cent had COVID-19 as a contributing cause and 38.9 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 26.1

per cent; 60.9 per cent had COVID-19 as a contributing cause and 13.0 per cent were incidental infections or unclear.

- As of May 2, 4,321 individuals have passed away from COVID-19, including 69 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 May 2, 570,806 cases of COVID-19 have been detected in Alberta and 25,278 individuals have been hospitalized, which amounts to 4.4 individuals for every 100 cases.
- From April 26 to May 2, 25,568 COVID-19 tests were completed, a seven-day average of 3,653 tests per day. During this period, the daily positivity ranged from 21.0 per cent to 27.3 per cent.

## Things You Need to Know

---

### Interim CEO Video Message — Alberta Surgical Initiative

Timely access to surgeries is important to Albertans, and no one should have to wait longer than clinically recommended for their surgery. AHS, in partnership with Alberta Health, developed the Alberta Surgical Initiative to ensure all Albertans will receive their scheduled surgeries within clinically appropriate targets.

We're focusing on improving the patients' surgical journey, from the time patients seek advice from their family doctor, to when they are referred to a specialist, to their surgery and their rehabilitation. We'll accomplish this through a five-step plan that will manage capacity and improve the patients' journey to receiving surgery.

Joining [the AHS Vlog to talk about this five-step plan](#) and the recent announcement from the Government of Alberta about new contracts with ophthalmology chartered surgical facilities in Edmonton and Calgary zones, are:

- Dr. Francois Belanger, Vice President, Quality and Chief Medical Officer
- Stacey Litvinchuk, Senior Provincial Director, Provincial Surgery Utilization, Alberta Surgical Initiative



### Be Heard through Our People Pulse Survey

Take a few minutes to complete the five-question Our People Pulse Survey and let us know how you are doing and what you need to feel supported. Teams will discuss their own results and choose actions to improve.



Check your inbox for an email invitation from Gallup Inc., then click on your personalized survey link to begin. If you haven't received your email invitation yet, please check your junk email folder.

The survey closes at midnight Monday, May 23. Questions? [Visit Insite](#).

## **COVID-19 Immunization Update**

### *AstraZeneca no longer available in Canada*

The AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine is no longer available in Canada. Several other vaccine products are available, including Moderna and Pfizer (mRNA), and Janssen and Novavax (non-mRNA). The Janssen vaccine can only be used for a primary COVID-19 vaccine series; it cannot be used for additional/booster doses. Available products for additional/booster doses are Moderna, Pfizer and Novavax.

In February, Health Canada authorized [Medicago's Covifenz COVID-19 vaccine](#) for the prevention of COVID-19 in adults 18 to 64 years of age. Medicago's vaccine is not currently available in Alberta.

### *Health Canada reviewing Moderna vaccine for children six months to five years*

Health Canada continues to review a submission from Moderna to authorize use of its COVID-19 vaccine in children six months to five years of age. The vaccine will only be authorized for use if the independent scientific review of the submission shows the benefits outweigh potential risks in this age group.

Currently, the Pfizer vaccine is available for children five to 11 years of age, and the Moderna vaccine is available for children six to 11 years of age.

## **New Guidance for COVID-19 Rapid Antigen Testing**

Alberta Health has provided new guidance for COVID-19 rapid antigen testing at home. Emerging evidence on the Omicron variant indicates that taking a sample by swabbing both the mouth and nose is more effective at detecting COVID-19 when using a rapid antigen test.


An instructional video is available on [how to swab both the mouth and nose](#). More information on [how to test](#) is available on the Government of Alberta website.

## **PPE Question of the Week — When Do I Have to Wear Eye Protection, and When Is It Optional?**

To help ensure clarity, consistency of practice and understanding around the use of eye protection, PPE Task Force Chair [Dr. Mark Joffe provides a quick overview of the current guidance in place](#).

PPE Question of the Week



When do I have to wear  
eye protection, and  
when is it optional? 



Dr. Mark Joffe answers PPE question of the week.

### **Complex Care Hub among AHS Initiatives Recognized by HQCA**

The Calgary Zone's Complex Care Hub (CCH) is one of several AHS initiatives being recognized with a [2022 Patient Experience Award](#) from the [Health Quality Council of Alberta \(HQCA\)](#).

The CCH gives some patients the opportunity to remain at home while receiving hospital-level care from a multidisciplinary team, including physicians, nurses and community paramedics. Under the program, some patients who come into Rockyview General Hospital's emergency department for non-urgent treatment are admitted and followed as they would be under a conventional hospital admission. But unlike traditional inpatients, these patients aren't transferred to a unit in the hospital to recover — but instead sleep at home.

Nurse navigators help guide patients through the system and collaborate with doctors to provide and manage care. As well as receiving visits from community paramedics, patients regularly connect with members of their care team through videoconferencing.

Other AHS recipients of HQCA's 2022 Patient Experience Awards will be profiled in future all-staffs.

You can see the work of the CCH in the [video](#) below.





### **Clean Your Hands Day – Puzzle Fun**

Yesterday (May 5) was Clean Your Hands Day. We wanted to recognize the day by giving everyone an elbow bump to thank them for taking the time to clean their hands this year. Your hard work and diligence are making a difference.

Thanks to you, for the past two years, staff hand hygiene compliance continues to exceed AHS' target of 90 per cent. Hand hygiene is the single most effective action to prevent infection, so keep up the good work.

We wanted to show our appreciation by creating [six puzzles](#) that will test your puzzle-solving skills and hand-hygiene knowledge.

### **Kudos for Publication of Paper on Ideal Shared Care Model**

Hats off to the authors of a new research paper that explores the features of an ideal shared care model within addiction and mental health programs in Edmonton. The researchers are from AHS, the University of Alberta and Dalhousie University, including Michele Foster, Julia Weaver, Reham Shalaby, Ejemai Eboime, Kimberly Poong, April Gusnowski, Mark Snaterse, Shireen Surood, Liana Urichuk and Vincent I. O. Agyapong. The paper was published in the international journal Healthcare and is available [online](#).

## Be Well - Be Kind

---

### **Mental Wellness Moment — How Can I Help Someone Who I Think Might Be Struggling?**

It's Mental Health Week in Canada — and in his latest Mental Wellness Moment, Dr. Nick Mitchell, Provincial Medical Director for Addiction and Mental Health for AHS, [shares some thoughts on what to look for and how to help someone who may be struggling with a mental health-related issue, including where to find appropriate supports.](#)



### **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. You can see messages of gratitude on our [Sharing the Love webpage](#).

### **Wrapping Up**

As we mentioned earlier, this is both [Mental Health Week](#) and [Health and Safety Week](#). This is an ideal time to say: please know your well-being and safety are always paramount to AHS, and we all share in the responsibility of creating and maintaining a safe and healthy workplace. You can find Workplace Health and Safety resources and information on [Insite](#), and we also encourage you to seek supports if you need them. Being strong involves asking for help when it's needed. You can find a range of staff mental wellness resources in the Supports When You Need Them items earlier in this message, and you can find further resources on the [AHS Help In Tough Times webpage](#).

Please take the time to check in with yourselves, and take care of yourselves, and if you need help, we're always here for you. Thank you for everything you do every day.

We'd also like to wish all moms a Happy Mother's Day on Sunday.

With enduring gratitude and appreciation,

### **Mauro Chies**

Interim AHS President & CEO

### **Dr. Laura McDougall**

Senior Medical Officer of Health



Healthy Albertans.  
Healthy Communities.  
Together.

