



Message from
Mauro Chies &
Dr. Laura McDougall

AHS Update: COVID-19 Booster Dose Available for Albertans aged 5 – 11, Reducing Wait Times for Cancer Surgeries, Family Support and Resources are Available

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**
- **COVID-19 Booster Dose Available for Albertans aged 5 - 11**
- **Interim CEO Video Message — Following up on Our People Pulse Survey**
- **Gratitude from Albertans**
- **Wrapping Up — the Importance of Wellness**

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

The AHS Update message includes the latest information on our COVID-19 response, as well as updates on the progress AHS is making on its 10 priority areas. Each edition will include updates on specific initiatives connected to some of the 10 priorities. 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: Alberta Surgical Initiative (ASI)

The ASI will improve timely access to surgical care in Alberta. The goal of ASI is to ensure adult and pediatric patients receive scheduled surgeries within clinically appropriate timeframes.

Surgical wait list status update

We continue to work diligently to recover to pre-pandemic surgical status. Over the past four weeks, the average weekly volume for surgical activity is 87 per cent of our pre-pandemic surgical volumes. It is important to note that AHS is now using summer weekly baselines, which are lower than standard baselines. This is typically done over the summer months to account for summer vacation schedules.

Our total surgical wait list for adults sits at approximately 72,600, compared to approximately 72,860 at the beginning of May. In February 2020, before the pandemic, our total wait list was 68,000.

Approximately 87,600 surgeries have been completed in the 2022/23 fiscal year.

AHS continues to reduce wait times for cancer surgeries

The Government of Alberta [announced](#) Alberta's cancer surgery program is operating at nearly 115 per cent of pre-pandemic surgical volumes, with a larger proportion completed within a clinically appropriate timeframe.

Through the strategies under the ASI, AHS continues to increase surgical activity in the province to get Albertans the surgical care they need within clinically recommended wait times.

As part of the ASI, prioritization of patients such as Edmonton-based AHS Patient Advisor, Susan Ruddick, was a strategy implemented during the pandemic to ensure those most acute received their surgery when they needed it.

"This was at the height of the pandemic and I was worried about surgery cancellations," she says. "I started looking elsewhere just in case my surgery was cancelled but the delays were happening across the country. My surgery was delayed by a week but I still got in at the end of September."

You can read Susan's story on the [AHS website](#).

For more information and updates on the ASI, please visit ahs.ca/asi.

Supports When You Need Them

Finding Family Support and Resources

As summer is coming to an end and a new routine and school year is about to begin for many families, you may need some additional support.

Check out [Childcare and Parenting](#) for guidance, whether you are looking for additional coaching and support, or any child-related resources.

To access childcare and parenting supports, call the [Employee Family and Assistance Program](#) (EFAP) intake line. You will be asked some questions to determine the best options for your situation, and a childcare specialist will walk you through the supports you can access.

If you feel overwhelmed about any issue, call the intake line any time at 1-877-273-3134. Physicians can contact the [AMA Physician and Family Support Program](#), a confidential 24/7 support line at 1-877-SOS-4MDS for options and support.

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

Hospitalizations & ICU Update

As of August 23:

- 838 individuals were in non-ICU hospital beds with COVID-19, compared to 762 on August 9, a 10 per cent increase.
- 32 individuals were in ICU hospital beds with COVID-19, compared to 30 on August 9, a 6.7 per cent increase.

Variants of Concern

Alberta Precision Laboratories continues to closely monitor SARS-CoV-2 variants. From August 16 - 22, an average of 67 per cent of positive samples were strain-typed. Of those, the seven-day rolling average was 2 per cent Omicron BA.2 lineage, 6 per cent Omicron BA.4 lineage, and 92 per cent Omicron BA.5 lineage.

As global data is updated, sub-lineage designations are refined which may affect lineage calls in Alberta. We continue to monitor our data and adjust as information becomes available. While BA.4 and BA.5 appear to transmit more readily than BA.2 due to their ability to evade immunity from immunization or prior infection, there is no evidence that they cause more severe disease than other Omicron lineages.

Recombinant SARS-CoV-2 strains have been detected and are circulating in Alberta, as well as across Canada and the world at very 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.

Wastewater Surveillance

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

- Six sites increased by more than 25 per cent compared to the weekly average two weeks ago. These sites were Medicine Hat, Brooks, High River, Red Deer & Area, City of Edmonton and Fort McMurray. The other 14 sites decreased or had no significant changes. These observations were from Aug. 22 at noon.

Frequency of reporting updates varies by sampling site. The Alberta Wastewater Surveillance Program is a collaboration between the University of Calgary, University of Alberta, APL and Alberta Health.

Other notable COVID-19-related information:

- As of Aug 23, 4,748 individuals have passed away from COVID-19, including 54 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 Aug 23, a total of 29,322 individuals have been hospitalized with COVID-19 in Alberta.
- From August 9 to August 23, 22,962 COVID-19 tests were completed, a 14-day average of 1,640 tests per day. During this period, the daily positivity ranged from 16.49 per cent to 26.01 per cent.

Things You Need to Know

COVID-19 Booster Dose Available for Albertans aged 5 – 11 as of August 29

Starting Monday, August 29, all Albertans 5 – 11 years of age can book a booster dose of Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine at least five months after receiving their previous dose. First appointments will roll out on Wednesday, August 31.

Appointments for booster doses can be booked through the [Alberta vaccine booking system](#), Health Link at 811, at [participating pharmacies](#) or a participating physicians' office.

You can [register your child online](#) in advance of appointment availability.

Children five to 11 years of age who live in First Nations communities can access a booster dose through public health clinics or nursing stations.

An [AHS webpage](#) is available to help parents, guardians and families make the best decision about the COVID-19 vaccine for their children. It features videos that provide advice from top pediatric specialists as well as resources to help fearful children cope with needles. The site provides credible information to Albertans as we plan our vaccine roll out to this important population.

If you have questions about getting your children immunized or about the booster dose, we encourage you to visit our [website](#), talk to your pediatrician or family physician, or speak with a registered nurse by calling Health Link at 811.

Interim CEO Video Message: Following up on Our People Pulse Survey

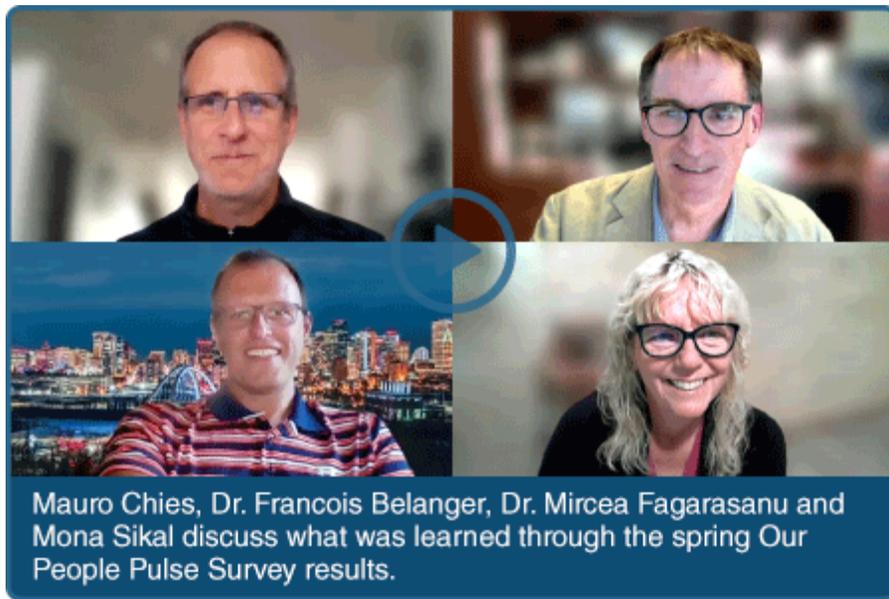
We are extremely proud of the quality care you provide to Albertans every day and night, but know the past two and a half years haven't been easy. Many of you are feeling the impacts - we can see this in the Pulse Survey results from the spring.

You told us there's an ongoing need to provide you and your teams support as we continue to recover from the pandemic. The results also show that while you are often satisfied in your work, there are opportunities to support workload concerns. This comes as no surprise, given the demands that responding to COVID-19 has had on everyone.

We want to help find meaningful solutions and support you and your teams to focus on your mental health and wellbeing as we move beyond pandemic response.

[Joining me on the vlog \(Mauro\) to discuss this further](#) are:

- Dr. Francois Belanger, Vice President, Quality and Chief Medical Officer
- Dr. Mircea Fagarasanu, Senior Program Officer, Workplace Health and Safety
- Mona Sikal, Executive Director, Employee Relations



Be Well - Be Kind

Gratitude from Albertans

Everything you and your colleagues do every day to provide safe quality care to Albertans is being noticed. Messages of gratitude keep coming in from across the province and beyond during the COVID-19 pandemic. You can read a recent message of gratitude below — and you can see more on our [Sharing the Love webpage](#).

I want to thank you for all your unconditional support. You all go above and beyond for patients and make us feel like fun people and not just patients. Your jokes brighten our days and your friendliness is very much appreciated. Thank you for life advice and helping us get through the day.

Wrapping Up – the Importance of Wellness

We'd like to reflect on something our guests said on the vlog this week. The pandemic has been a difficult time for all of us. That's why it's so important that we check in on ourselves and others to see if we're doing okay. Reach out to others if you need to and try to offer support to colleagues, friends and family when they need it. We're all in this together and we will support you the best we can.

With enduring gratitude and appreciation,

Mauro Chies

Interim AHS President & CEO

Dr. Laura McDougall

Senior Medical Officer of Health

