

CMO Weekly Notice for AHS Medical Staff

December 11, 2020

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COVID-19 Case Status in Alberta

The Government of Alberta announced Tuesday expanded public health measures (see item below) designed to reverse rising numbers of new cases, hospitalizations and ICU admissions — a trend that continued this past week.

Between Dec. 3 and Dec. 9, Alberta recorded more than 1,500 cases each day, with 1,881 reported on Dec. 4, an all-time high. Over this period, there was an average of 1,733 daily new cases, compared to 1,591 the previous week, a nine per cent increase. If there's a sliver of positive news, it's the fact this single-digit increase is preferable to what we've seen over the previous four weeks, when we saw week-to-week increases between 23 percent and 42 per cent.

For the week ending Dec. 9, there were 6,573 cases among individuals aged 20 to 49 years, which is 54 per cent of all new cases. However, cases continue to occur in every age group. This week, 1,833 new cases were reported among school-aged children (5 to 19 years) and 1,891 new cases were reported among older adults (aged 60 years and older).

Alberta surpassed 20,000 active cases for the first time on Dec. 6 and had a record number of active cases on Dec. 7 with 20,388 active cases.

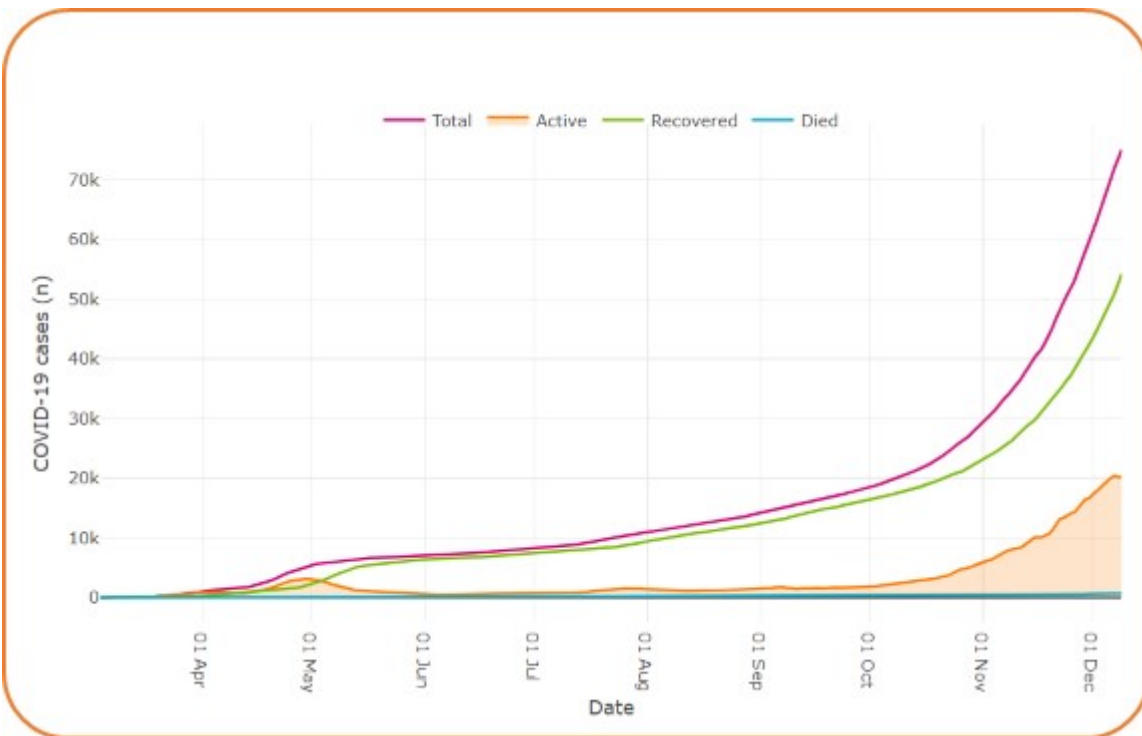


Image source: alberta.ca

As of Dec. 9, there are 20,163 active cases in the province. Edmonton Zone has the most active cases with 9,464, a 14 per cent increase compared to the previous week. North Zone reported a 26 per cent increase compared to the week before, the largest proportional increase among the five zones. For the second consecutive week, the South Zone reported a five per cent decrease in the number of active cases compared to the previous week. The table below shows the number of active cases in each zone for the last two weeks.

	<i>Active Cases Week ending Dec. 9</i>	<i>Active Cases Week ending Dec. 2</i>	<i>Per cent change</i>
<i>Edmonton</i>	9,464	8,331	14%
<i>Calgary</i>	7,304	6,445	13%
<i>Central</i>	1,480	1,251	18%
<i>North</i>	1,247	991	26%
<i>South</i>	601	633	-5%
<i>Unknown</i>	67	92	-27%

Hospitalizations and ICU admissions

As of Dec. 9, there are 682 individuals in Alberta hospitals, with 124 in ICUs. These numbers represent a 34 per cent increase in total hospitalizations from the previous week. The breakdown of hospitalizations by zone as of Dec. 9 is as follows:

- 371 hospitalizations with 72 of those in ICUs in the Edmonton Zone,
- 201 hospitalizations with 40 of those in ICUs in the Calgary Zone,
- 55 hospitalizations with 5 of those in ICUs in the Central Zone,
- 35 hospitalizations with 4 of those in ICUs in the North Zone and
- 20 hospitalizations with 3 of those in ICUs in the South Zone.

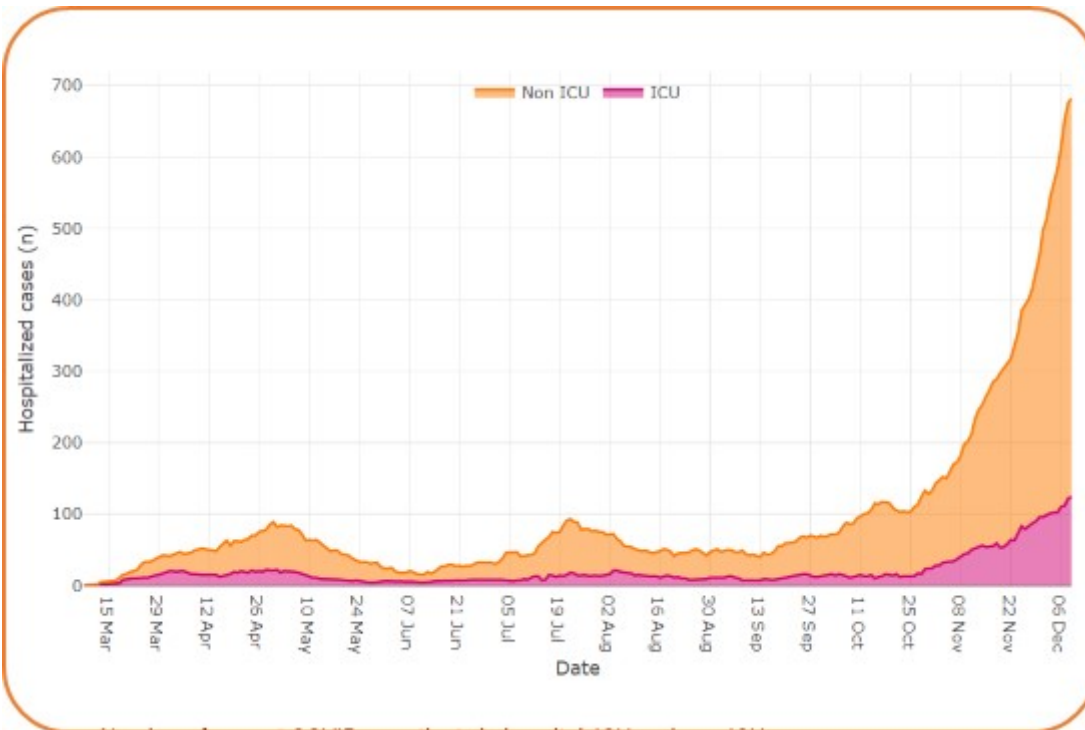


Image source: alberta.ca

Other notable COVID-19-related information:

- As of Dec. 9, a total of 75,054 cases of COVID-19 have occurred in Alberta and of these, a total of 2,465 individuals have been hospitalized, which represents 3.3 individuals for every 100 cases. In all, 54,225 Albertans have recovered from COVID-19.
- Alberta has reported 666 deaths since the start of the pandemic, with 14 per cent (91) of those deaths occurring in this last week alone. We extend our condolences to the families of these individuals, and to all who have lost loved ones from any cause during this time.
- In the past week, 134,902 COVID-19 tests were completed, an average of 19,272 per day. A record 23,463 tests were performed on Dec. 5. The daily positivity rate reached a record of 10.74 per cent on Dec 3. A total of 2,444,373 tests have been conducted as of Dec 9.
- As of Dec 10, AHS has confirmed 3,119 individuals with COVID-19 were present at schools while infectious or acquired the disease in the school setting. Currently, 897 out of 2,415 schools in the province (37.1 per cent) have reported an individual has attended their school while infectious or had in-school transmission.

Update: COVID-19 Testing for Healthcare Workers

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, Covenant Health 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 Dec. 9:

- 69,315 employees (AHS, APL, and Covenant combined) have been tested for COVID-19 and, of those tested, 2,546 (or 3.67 per cent) have tested positive.
- Of the 921 employees who have tested positive and whose source of infection has been determined, 302 (or 32.8 per cent) acquired their infection through a workplace exposure. An additional 1,625 employees who have tested positive are still under investigation as to the source of infection.
- 4,454 physicians (AHS, APL, and Covenant combined) have been tested for COVID-19 and, of those tested, 118 (or 2.65 per cent) have tested positive.
- Of the 44 physicians who have tested positive and whose source of infection has been determined, seven (or 15.9 per cent) acquired their infection through a workplace exposure. An additional 74 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](#).

Announcement of Vaccine Rollout

Health Canada's approval of the first COVID-19 vaccine on December 9 was a huge milestone for our country and province. Bringing this vaccine to AHS employees will play a critical role in protecting our frontline staff from COVID-19.

Announced by [Alberta Health](#) on Wednesday, AHS and the [Government of Alberta](#) are planning for the arrival of 3,900 doses of Pfizer vaccine in Alberta next week.

AHS is working closely with Alberta Health to ensure healthcare workers are included in this phase. Eligibility will begin with workers at the highest risk facilities. As advised by Alberta Health, the first vaccinations will be provided to a relatively small number of healthcare workers who are crucial to supporting the most vulnerable Albertans. This group includes respiratory therapists, ICU staff and physicians and some eligible long term care health care workers.

Staff and physicians included in the preliminary phase will be contacted directly and will travel to designated vaccination sites as Pfizer requires the initial vaccine supply not be delivered from the location where it is stored.

Additional information on the preliminary vaccine rollout is in development and will be shared as soon as possible. A [website](#) has been developed and an [FAQ is now available](#). Please watch for additional information.

After almost a year of living during a pandemic, the arrival of COVID-19 vaccine brings optimism and hope to our fight against the virus. As we move forward, please continue to follow current restrictions.

Remember that it will be many months before the majority of Albertans are immunized. In the meantime, we remain each other's best defence.

Thank you all for your ongoing commitment to Albertans. Please stay safe and healthy.

Verna's Weekly Video Message — Scientific Advisory Group

Using the best possible evidence to make informed decisions is key to our pandemic response, and with the ever-changing nature of this pandemic, we often need that information quickly.

That's where the [Scientific Advisory Group \(SAG\)](#) comes in.

SAG connects with clinicians, operations, researchers and other experts to review, synthesize and interpret emerging evidence and guidance from national and international bodies, regarding various facets of COVID-19.

The focus of these reviews is to proactively support staff and patients during the COVID-19 pandemic, and to support best practices in healthcare settings across Alberta. Topics range from exploring viral transmission in condominiums and apartments, to determining the best strategies for controlling COVID-19 outbreaks.

Joining Verna to tell us more about the SAG are its two co-chairs:

- Dr. Braden Manns, Associate Chief Medical Officer.
- Dr. Lynora Saxinger, Physician and Medical Lead, AHS Antimicrobial Stewardship, North.

Braden and Lynora discuss the work of SAG, how they support our pandemic response, and what the future might have in store for this group.

Watch the video [here](#).

Reminder: Submit Your COVID-19 Redeployment Availability

The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta (CPSA) has relaunched the COVID-19 Physician Registry and has requested licensed physicians enter their current availability to provide care due to COVID-19, and their willingness to be contacted by AHS Medical Affairs for COVID-19 redeployment opportunities if needed.

Please update your information in this registry if your status, or your ability to be contacted has changed.

Data from physicians who agree to participate in the registry will be shared with AHS Medical Affairs regularly to understand the current impact of COVID-19 on the medical workforce by Zone and expedite contacting the most appropriate physicians for specific redeployment.

Thank you again for completing the survey, and for your hard work in supporting the efforts in responding to COVID-19.

For more information, please visit [CPSA's website](#).

Mandatory Work from Home Order

On Tuesday, the [Government of Alberta announced](#) that effective Dec. 13, 2020, working from home is mandatory unless the employer requires a physical presence for operational effectiveness.

AHS continues to ask those who are able to work from home where it's operationally feasible, to do so until further notice. As we continue to combat the spread of COVID-19, we all need to do our part and keep each other safe. The [COVID-19 Relaunch Playbook](#) has resources to support staff who are working remotely.

Leaders are responsible for determining if a physical presence is required at an AHS worksite and for exploring avenues to facilitate remote work. Please reach out to your leader if you have questions or to confirm decisions about remote work.

Launch of Cancer Public Awareness Campaign

With the onset of COVID-19, the number of Albertans diagnosed with cancer from March to October 2020 decreased by 20 per cent compared to the same time period in 2019 across all cancer types, geographies and age groups.

Led by the Cancer SCN in collaboration with Primary Care, an analysis of Alberta data was conducted and it was concluded that a key contributing factor was that patients with cancer symptoms were not seeking medical attention. This trend is not unique to Alberta, and has been identified across Canada and in many other countries.

To help improve diagnosis rates, AHS is asking all primary care physicians, staff and partners to help bring awareness to and remind Albertans about the importance of their health. AHS wants to:

- **Educate** Albertans about listening to their bodies and seeking medical attention if something seems or feels off.
- **Reassure** Albertans that healthcare facilities and primary care clinics remain safe places to seek care, and follow stringent COVID-19 cleaning and safety protocols.
- **Reiterate** that their family physicians and nurse practitioners want to hear from them and help investigate their concerns.
- **Remind** Albertans that having an ongoing relationship with a family doctor or nurse practitioner can help keep them well – during the pandemic and beyond.

We want to remind Albertans about the importance of listening to their bodies and to seek medical attention if they notice any changes.

Physicians can visit, and refer patients to, the Cancer Care Alberta [website](#) for additional information.

We thank you for your continued patience and dedication to Albertans.

Physician Diversity, Wellness and Leadership Development

Physician Wellness Zoom Room

Date: Tuesday, December 15, 5-6 p.m. MST

Topic: We recognize this has been a trying year – what have you been grateful for in 2020?

Co-Moderators: Dr. Debrah Wirtzfeld, Associate Chief Medical Officer, Physician Health, Wellness and Diversity, Dr. Jennine Wismark, Associate Chief Medical Officer, Physician Wellness & Development, Covenant Health

Join: [Here](#).

Note: *Tuesday, December 30 Zoom Room is cancelled for the holidays.*

Doc of the Week – Dr. Adrienne Haponiuk



After a patient presented with vague symptoms to the University of Alberta Emergency Department, Dr. Adrienne Haponiuk used her clinical expertise to identify carbon monoxide toxicity. Dr. Haponiuk immediately called 911 and alerted Edmonton Fire & Rescue services.

Her quick thinking saved **eight additional lives** after a carbon monoxide leak was detected in the patient's multi-family apartment complex.

Our sincere appreciation goes out to Dr. Haponiuk for her ongoing heroic efforts in the emergency department.

Doc of the Week Call for Nominations

Do you know a physician who has gone above and beyond during the pandemic to shape and drive improvements for patients?

Perhaps a physician colleague has gone above and beyond to help support others during a difficult day?

Each week, we would like to take a moment to celebrate and thank the amazing physicians working across the province to provide high-quality care to patients, staff and colleagues across the province.

If you know someone who deserves to be celebrated, please email CMO@ahs.ca with your

Seasonal Celebrations

The holiday season is a time to celebrate, but this year will be different. We can still stay socially connected, even if we stay physically distant. Connecting with your co-workers is important for team building and our mental health and well-being. This year we need to ensure we celebrate each other and the holidays safely.

It is very important that all employees follow the latest [public health restrictions](#) from the Government of Alberta while ensuring quality interactions with colleagues, friends, family and other loved ones. Your actions make a difference and can impact those around you. It's critical that we all do our part to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and stay safe.

In addition to not attending gatherings, staff are reminded to remain vigilant and implement safety measures during [breaks](#). As we continue to see cases rise, there is an extremely high risk for transmission of COVID-19 in small, enclosed spaces, such as break rooms, and other common areas, if appropriate control measures are not followed. This includes completing the [Fit for Work questionnaire online](#) before coming into work as well as staying home when sick, [physically distancing](#) from others, [continuous mask-wearing and eye protection](#), and practicing good [hand hygiene](#).

Although we are not able to accept donated food or to celebrate with potlucks or shared food this year, we encourage you to come up with creative ways to connect safely. You can consider making your celebration virtual, take breaks in different locations, or stagger eating times to ensure all protocols are being followed. [Here are a few more safe ideas](#) to consider for this year's celebrations. For other considerations, check out the [seasonal celebrations information sheet](#).

We're all in this together and we'll need each other to get through this together. Have a safe and healthy Holiday Season.

AHS Secret Santa Holiday Card Exchange



We know the pandemic prevents us from getting together in person as we normally would to celebrate the season with our coworkers. We hope you'll join in the fourth annual [AHS Secret Santa Holiday Card Exchange](#) as a way to share well wishes and gratitude with one another.

This year, in honour of all of the ways we've learned to connect virtually, we're adding an e-Card option to go alongside our traditional print card option. We have a variety of [e-Cards](#) you can choose from. Don't forget to include a personal message with your card.

Post a photo of your card on social media using the hashtag **#AHSSecretSanta** and make sure you tag **@AHS_media**.

Connect Care Change in Timing

Given the current situation across AHS related to managing COVID-19 and the pressure this has placed on our system, AHS' Executive Leadership Team has made the decision to change the timing and scope of our upcoming Connect Care launches.

Wave 3 of Connect Care will launch in two parts: the portion planned for North Zone will launch April 10, 2021, while the Calgary Zone portion of Wave 3 will be further reviewed in consultation with zone leaders and teams. We are currently assessing the situation in order to determine our new wave rollout plan and sequencing for other waves. Our commitment is to keep the full implementation within the

originally-planned timeframe. Dates for future launches will be discussed and communicated once we know more.

Connect Care remains one of our highest organizational priorities. Even with this change, some Connect Care work will still continue, to support the needs of the organization and prepare for the next launches.

We are thankful for all the work done to successfully launch Wave 2 in late October and we want to recognize the preparations undertaken for our next launches by teams across the organization. Your work is very valuable and will support our next waves when we are ready. In the meantime, our immediate priority is to support Alberta's COVID-19 response.

Thank you for your understanding as we work together to respond to the urgent needs of Albertans and the healthcare system.

Protect yourself and others. Be fit for work.

Physicians and staff who are reporting to a non-continuing care facility with a unit, area or site on outbreak, will need to complete the [outbreak fit for work screening questionnaire](#) that includes the secondary symptom list.

The Online Fit for Work Screening Tool can be found here: ahs.ca/fitforwork. Information related to screening for people visiting residents and patients is available at www.ahs.ca/visitation. Options for fit for work screening are available through our [COVID-19 Daily Fit for Work Screening Protocol](#).

We have a shared responsibility in creating and maintaining a safe and healthy workplace so we can provide quality and safe patient care. Our actions have a direct impact on our colleagues and patients. We must be diligent in modelling safe practices that reduce the spread of COVID-19. This includes [continuous masking](#), [physically distancing](#), and staying home when you are sick. If you are unsure if your symptoms should require you to stay home, talk to your leader.

Please remember to continue to check for the latest updates on COVID-19 Daily Fit for Work Screening by visiting ahs.ca/fitforwork.

Thank you for your ongoing support and commitment.

Updated Guidance for Designated Supports in all Acute Care Facilities Starting Dec. 14

Due to the rising COVID-19 numbers, rates of community transmission and feedback received from staff, patients and families, AHS has made the difficult decision to limit onsite designated support in **all** acute care facilities including ambulatory care, urgent care/emergency department and maternity settings.

Effective Monday, Dec. 14, access for designated support persons and visitors in AHS acute care facilities includes the following:

- One designated support person for each patient in ambulatory, emergency, urgent care, maternity/postpartum and other inpatient areas.
- Up to two designated support persons for each patient in critical care, pediatrics and NICU.
- For exceptions from the above in pediatrics and maternity, for dependent-adults, and for supporting patients at end-of-life please go to ahs.ca/visitation.

- There are also [federal and provincial compassionate exemptions](#) and [Chief Medical Officer of Health exemptions](#) for end-of-life and critical illness when in quarantine and isolation.

The [updated guidance](#) includes specific responsibilities for designated support persons and clinical services to follow. The above restrictions will be maintained during the holiday season. Please review our patient and family [holiday season FAQ](#) for information on support over the holidays.

These changes are to increase the safety of everyone at our sites and for easier implementation and a more consistent application of the guidance across the province. Also, this will help us to balance the need for patients to get the support from their loved ones over the holidays and into the new year, while we continue to deal with the challenges posed by the spread of COVID-19 in our communities.

APL Launches Clinical Pilots of Rapid Point-of-Care Testing for COVID-19

Alberta Precision Laboratories (APL) launched clinical pilots of rapid point-of-care testing for COVID-19 at several sites across the province this week.

The hospital lab in Bonnyville, along with assessment centres in Calgary, Edmonton, St. Paul and Slave Lake have begun using the Abbott IDNow and PanBio testing kits that were approved by Health Canada and provided to provinces and territories by the Public Health Agency of Canada. The tests will only be used on patients who are within the first seven days of showing symptoms, reducing the need for patient samples to be transported to centralized public laboratories for processing. Rapid tests that allow AHS to identify positive cases within hours instead of days, helping to slow the spread of the virus in our communities.

APL's work in validating the accuracy of the IDNow and PanBio systems is being used by other provinces to plan their implementations. The clinical pilots will be expanded to other locations where rapid point-of-care can be of the greatest value for public health authorities to manage COVID-19, such as homeless shelters, long-term care facilities.

Influenza Immunization Update

Over 1.3 million doses of influenza vaccine have been administered in Alberta, which is close to 30,000 more vaccines administered than around this same time last year.

For the seventh week in row, there are no reported cases of seasonal influenza in Alberta. The weekly influenza data report is available at ahs.ca/influenza.

The low case count for influenza can be attributed to multiple factors, including the cross-protective impact of COVID-19 restrictions and public health guidelines currently in place, encouraging enhanced respiratory etiquette, hand hygiene and physical distancing.

We often look to influenza and influenza-like illness (ILI) activity in Australia and the Southern Hemisphere as indicative of seasonal expectations for North America. In both these areas, influenza activity has been lower than average across all systems for this time of year.

This all said, influenza season is still here. Sign up to get your influenza immunization.

For staff, check [Insite](#) for options to get the flu shot, [resources](#) to support this year's campaign and guidance on what to do if you experience [influenza-like symptoms after immunization](#).

[Click here](#) for more on the clinics for the public, including your families. And, if you got your flu shot at a [public health clinic](#), pharmacy or doctor's office, please complete the [Got My Flu Shot Form](#).

In addition to influenza immunization, public health measures such as [physical distancing](#), [masking](#), [limiting your social bubble](#) and maintaining [hand hygiene](#) continue to be critical to our fight against COVID-19 and other cold and flu-like illnesses, including influenza.

Let's work together to protect each other from a vaccine-preventable illness and reduce the strain on our healthcare system.

24/7 On-call Assistance Available for Ethical Concerns

Since April, AHS has regularly updated family support and visitation guidelines, adjusting them to reflect current evidence and COVID-19 transmission in Alberta. Decisions to limit the interactions between patients, residents, families and visitors, to ensure their safety and the safety of those providing care, have not been taken lightly. We understand it has been difficult for all involved.

To help our staff during this time, the AHS 24/7 rapid response ethics consultation service is available to respond to questions and issues relating to family presence and visitation guidelines, in addition to other COVID-19 related questions by calling 403-689-3548.

For other clinical ethics inquiries, please email clinicaethics@ahs.ca or call 1-855-943-2821. The AHS Clinical Ethics Service is available for any care provider seeking support and assistance in resolving difficult or ethically challenging situations.

Additional Resources for Physicians:

- [AHS Virtual Health](#)
- [COVID-19 FAQ for Clinicians](#)
- [COVID-19 Testing and Self-Isolation Criteria](#)
- [Acute Care Outbreak Prevention & Management Task Force](#)
- [CPSA's physician portal](#)
- [Cumming School of Medicine Continuing Medical Education \(CME\) Resources](#)
- [How to Access AHS Insite and Email](#)
- [How to do a Nasopharyngeal \(NP\) Swab](#) (New England Journal of Medicine)
- [IPC Emerging Issues](#)
- [Online Healthcare Worker Self-Assessment Tool](#)
- [Physician & Family Support Program](#) - 1-877-SOS-4MDS (767-4637)
- [Spectrum](#) – A mobile app customized to deliver local antimicrobial stewardship guidelines, resistance data, dosing information, and AHS COVID-19 related content.
- [Physician Wellness Educational Resources: Well Doc Alberta](#)
- COVID-19 Questions? Contact your local Zone Emergency Operations Centre (ZEOC):
 - ZEOC.South@ahs.ca
 - ZEOC.Calgary@ahs.ca
 - ZEOC.Central@ahs.ca
 - ZEOC.Edmonton@ahs.ca
 - PCH.ZEOCNorth@ahs.ca

For more information

- Visit the [COVID-19 Healthcare Professional information page](#) on the AHS website for more information or contact AHS.ECC@ahs.ca.
- Additional updates and information are being shared through the [College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta \(CPSA\)](#).
- AHS Medical Staff can also view the daily update from the AHS CEO and Senior Medical Officer of Health (SMOH) by accessing their AHS email inbox.

This update, provided every Friday, is intended to provide a summary of the key action items, information and decisions for AHS Medical Staff in relation to clinical policies and practices, and for the COVID-19 pandemic response. It is forwarded to physicians' preferred email inbox.

Do you have COVID-19 questions, information, or a physician or team who have gone above and beyond during the pandemic, that you would like to see covered in an upcoming edition of the COVID-19 CMO update? Let us know at CMO@ahs.ca.

Sincerely,

Dr. Dr. Francois Belanger

Vice President, Quality, and Chief Medical Officer