

CMO SMOH Weekly Notice for AHS Medical Staff

January 29, 2021

This week:

- COVID-19 Case Status in Alberta **Update**
- COVID-19 Testing for healthcare workers — the latest numbers **Update**
- COVID-19 Immunization Update - Update on Second-Dose Appointment Rebooking **New**
- COVID-19 Vaccine Sequencing for Healthcare Workers, Answers to Common Questions **New**
- COVID-19 Variants **New**
- International Travel Advisories **New**
- University of Calgary COVID Corner: The Shadow Pandemic (Part 2) **New**
- Doc of the Week **New**
- Physician Wellness **New**
- Verna's Weekly Video Message — Spotlight on Environmental Public Health **New**
- Basic Life Support: Grace period extended **New**
- Refresh your Resiliency: Health Professions Strategy & Practice Annual Conference **New**
- Influenza Immunization **Update**
- Additional Resources for Physicians

COVID-19 Case Status in Alberta

This week, the downward trend in most of our COVID-19 numbers continued, as the number of active cases decreased in all five zones of Alberta Health Services (AHS) over a seven-day period ending Jan. 28.

As of Jan. 27, there were 8,041 active cases in the province, the lowest number since Nov. 9, and 2,391 fewer active cases than on Jan. 20, a 22.9 per cent decrease.

The table below shows the number of active cases in each zone for the last two weeks.

	Active Cases (as of Jan. 27)	Active Cases (as of Jan. 20)	Per cent Change
Calgary	3,202	3,962	-19.2%
Edmonton	2,764	3,561	-22.4%
North	1,010	1,383	-27.0%
Central	710	931	-23.7%
South	336	405	-17.0%
Unknown	19	14	35.7%

There was an average of 480 daily new cases for the week ending Jan. 28, compared to 644 the previous week, a 25.5 per cent decrease. From Jan. 21 to Jan. 27, there were 1,613 cases among individuals aged 20 to 49 years, which is 48 per cent of all new cases during that time period. Also this week, 660 new cases were reported among school-aged children (5 to 19 years) and 539 new cases among older adults (ages 60 and older).

Hospitalizations and ICU admissions

Alberta reported another week-to-week decline in the number of individuals being treated in hospital for COVID-19. On Jan. 27, there were 591 individuals with COVID-19 in hospitals across the province, compared to 739 on Jan. 20, a 20 per cent decrease. Also on Jan. 27, there were 112 individuals in intensive care compared to 118 on Jan. 20, a 5.1 per cent decrease. While this decrease is positive, we must remember that the overall number of cases still continues to be a strain on the health system.

The current numbers only return us to the levels of cases seen in early December, prior to the latest restrictions being put in place. The improvement is very welcome, but we must remain vigilant to maintain a decreasing trend.

The breakdown of hospitalizations by zone as of Jan. 27 is as follows:

	Hospitalizations	ICUs
Edmonton	255	42
Calgary	191	46
North	68	8
Central	46	7
South	31	9

Other notable COVID-19-related information

- As of Jan. 27, a total of 122,821 cases of COVID-19 have occurred in Alberta and a total of 5,326 individuals have been hospitalized, which amounts to 4.3 individuals for every 100 cases. In all, 113,174 Albertans have recovered from COVID-19.
- As of Jan. 27, 1,606 individuals have passed away from COVID-19, including 106 over the past seven days (Jan 21 to Jan. 27). We extend our condolences to the families of these individuals, and to all who have lost loved ones from any cause during this time.
- From Jan. 21 to Jan. 27, 74,851 COVID-19 tests were completed, an average of 10,693 tests per day. During this period, the daily positivity ranged from 3.67 per cent to 5.34 per cent. As of Jan. 28, a total of 3,142,545 tests have been conducted and 1,746,915 individuals have been tested, which is two out of every five Albertans.
- For the winter school term, as of Jan. 28, AHS has confirmed 603 individuals with COVID-19 were present at schools while infectious or acquired the disease in the school setting. A total of 310 of 2,415 schools (or 12.8 per cent) in the province have reported an individual has attended their school while infectious or had in-school transmission.

COVID-19 testing for healthcare workers — the latest numbers

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 (CH) 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 Jan. 27:

- 75,621 employees (AHS, APL, and CH combined) have been tested for COVID-19 and, of those tested, 4,395 (or 5.81 per cent) have tested positive.
- Of the 1,421 employees who have tested positive and whose source of infection has been determined, 432 (or 30.4 per cent) acquired their infection through a workplace exposure. An additional 2,974 employees who have tested positive are still under investigation as to the source of infection.
- 4,876 physicians (AHS, APL, and CH combined) have been tested for COVID-19 and, of those tested, 191 (or 3.92 per cent) have tested positive.
- Of the 57 physicians who have tested positive and whose source of infection has been determined, 8 (or 14.0 per cent) acquired their infection through a workplace exposure. An additional 134 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](#).

COVID-19 Immunization Update – Update on Second-Dose Appointment Rebooking

More than 40,000 notifications went out this past week to healthcare workers across the province informing them their second dose immunization appointments are being rescheduled. This is a result of depleted vaccine supply.

If you booked your appointment through the online booking tool, you need to rebook by going to your COVID-19 immunization confirmation email from *AHS Booking* and clicking on the link at the bottom of the email to **modify** your booking, or visit ahs.ca/updatebooking. You will still see your current appointment in the online booking tool but it will not be accommodated. It needs to be rescheduled to a later date.

Those who were booked in the early phase and were not booked through the online tool are being contacted by **text and automated phone call**, not email. You will be asked to contact Health Link or local public health directly using a special phone number provided, to arrange second dose appointment rebooking.

We appreciate your patience as these messages continue to be sent out over the weekend.

COVID-19 Vaccine Sequencing for Healthcare Workers, Answers to Common Questions

Since the rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine began, we've been receiving questions from staff, physicians, partners and the public on immunization sequencing: who will be immunized when, in what order, and why some groups are chosen to go before others.

To help answer these questions, we've developed the following resources:

- [Vaccine Sequencing for Healthcare Workers webpage](#) outlines sequencing considerations and the role of the COVID-19 Vaccine Sequencing for Healthcare Workers Committee.
- The [pdf version](#), which can be printed and shared with your teams, includes more information on sequencing rationale, where we are now and where we are heading.
- [Top COVID-19 vaccine sequencing questions](#) document addressed questions staff and physicians may have about sequencing and eligibility.

COVID-19 Variants

COVID-19 is a virus, and like most viruses it mutates as it reproduces inside the cells of an infected person. The changed virus can then be spread to others and may continue to mutate as it moves from person to person. COVID-19 viruses that have changed or mutated are called variants.

Recently, new variant COVID-19 strains were identified in the United Kingdom, South Africa and Brazil. These strains are Variants of Concern because they appear to spread more easily than other strains. They have since also been identified in many other countries around the world.

Work is underway by the international scientific and public health communities to better understand the biological significance of these variant strains, including how the current vaccines may help protect against them.

So far, evidence suggests the UK and SA Variants of Concern transmit more easily than the original strain, meaning they are more contagious. While early research is not clear whether these new variants don't tend to cause more severe illness in an individual, there is concern about the impact on our communities if such a COVID-19 variant virus became common. The increased spread of COVID-19 would result in more illness, hospitalizations and deaths.

Symptoms are the same as the usual COVID-19, including cough, fever, shortness of breath, runny nose, sore throat, or other symptoms. Please visit [here](#) for a full list of symptoms.

While the new COVID-19 Variants of Concern seem to spread more easily, they are believed to spread in the same way as the usual virus. This means that the same types of preventive strategies will be effective. However, the new variants can more easily take advantage of any relaxation of those preventive measures.

Learn more [here](#).

International Travel Advisories

Today, the Government of Canada announced further restrictions to non-essential international travel, including an agreement with airlines not to fly to some vacation destinations. The restrictions also outline mandatory quarantines and testing required if you have travelled outside the country, which airports in Canada are designated for specific international flights and the personal expenses associated with the restrictions related to international travel. More information is available [here](#).

AHS continues to strongly discourage all non-essential international travel while emergency measures and travel advisories from the Governments of [Canada](#) and [Alberta](#) are in place. As healthcare workers, it is our responsibility to set a positive example in following current travel advisories.

Recent agreements with all of our unions highlight that AHS and the unions strongly discourage healthcare workers from non-essential international travel. As well, all employees should ensure requests for time off incorporate any required quarantine periods and that appropriate arrangements are made in advance for remote work, if possible. Managers should confirm if employees will need to quarantine after their requested time off and consider operational impacts when approving or denying time-off requests.

If you have any questions or concerns, please reach out to your medical leader.

University of Calgary COVID Corner: The Shadow Pandemic (Part 2)

COVID Corner, hosted by the University of Calgary, offers updates on various topics and aspects related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The next session in the series, held on February 10, will cover the following objectives:

- Outline the wide-ranging impact of the pandemic on children, youth and their families including family functioning, medical conditions and mental health.
- Describe the consequences of the pandemic on the frail elderly, including those with dementia, living in the community and continuing care.
- Identify potential strategies to minimize the impact of COVID-19 and public health restrictions on pediatric, adolescent and elderly populations.

Date: Wednesday, Feb. 10, 7-9 p.m. MST

Register: [Here](#)

Doc of the Week – Dr. Richard Hibbard

Dr. Hibbard retired from psychiatric practice a number of years ago. He has a particular interest and expertise in emotion dysregulation, borderline personality disorder, suicidality, and Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT).

He decided to come out of retirement part time to help further develop DBT and DBT informed programs for patients with emotional dysregulation, including borderline personality disorder. He is an integral part of our DBT team, as a co-facilitator in our DBT group (Dialectical Behavioral Therapy) and as a mentor.

In March 2020, when COVID-19 hit, he continued to work as a group facilitator as we transitioned to an online platform. Our team transitioned to the Edmonton Hope and Wellness Centre and he has been providing mentorship and teaching on DBT to our new team members, in order to grow capacity to serve this underserved population.

He has been an enthusiastic teacher, spending his unpaid time to develop teaching materials and helping plan new therapy groups. His encouragement has helped our team grow as clinicians. He is also becoming involved in other efforts to improve the quality of services and integrate program offerings into a stepped care pathway.

These programs are especially needed given the burden COVID-19 has placed on the system, with respect to increased demand and reduced clinical service capacity.

Thank you, Dr. Hibbard, for your dedication and support to your colleagues and patients. We appreciate you.

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 suggestion, and a brief description of why.

Physician Wellness

Physician Wellness Zoom Room

Date: Tuesday, Feb. 9, 5-6 p.m.

Topic of focus: What does support look like to you?

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

Zoom Link: [Here](#)

Reminder: Community Bulletin Board

Well Doc Alberta recently launched a [Community Bulletin Board](#) to share information about physician wellness related events, or research and quality insurance initiatives. They invite you to submit postings to this. You can access this Community Bulletin Board [here](#).

They also are offering [Physician Peer Support Training](#) for physician groups who want to develop a formalized peer support team.

Verna's Weekly Video Message — Spotlight on Environmental Public Health

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the work of Environmental Public Health has grown exponentially and the role the team plays is vast and vital. We know, for many, the current COVID-19 restrictions can be difficult and this is a stressful time – mentally, emotionally and financially. Sometimes this leads to heated emotions.

In recent weeks, there have been instances in which our public health inspectors have been mistreated, verbally abused and disrespected while carrying out their duties. This is why we launched a public kindness campaign, reminding Albertans all of us are here for them but harassment is never OK.

Joining Verna to talk more about the great work of Environmental Public Health and the challenges they face are:

- Dr. Kathryn Koliaska, Lead Medical Officer of Health for the North Zone and Safe Healthy Environments.
- Mark Fehr, Executive Director, Safe Healthy Environments.

Kathryn and Mark share how the pandemic has changed Environmental Public Health's role and how public health inspectors work with police and municipal partners.

Watch the vlog [here](#).

Basic Life Support (BLS): Grace period extended

COVID-19 continues to shape how in-person education is delivered in AHS, including Basic Life Support (BLS) training. We recognize this has been frustrating for those who are experiencing delays and barriers to renewing their certificates.

AHS staff and physicians are now permitted to work with expired BLS certificates until March 31, 2022. This direction takes precedence over Heart and Stroke certificate renewals. BLS courses continue to be offered, with staff providing direct patient care a priority for renewal.

Over the next year, AHS will also begin exploring how BLS can be improved to safely and sustainably meet staff needs during and beyond the pandemic.

Visit [Insite](#) for updates on this work or contact BLS@ahs.ca.

Refresh your Resiliency: Health Professions Strategy & Practice (HPSP) Annual Conference

Taking a moment to refresh our resiliency throughout our COVID-19 response can help us continue to navigate challenges and be there for those who need us most—patients and families and each other.

We've had an overwhelming response from healthcare providers to attend the HPSP annual conference. Live virtual sessions are now full, so we've added more spaces to register for access to the recordings-only option

Don't miss out on your chance to hear from our amazing lineup of speakers who will challenge your thinking, get you laughing and leave you feeling the power of your own resiliency.

To register for access to the recordings, select the Waitlist – Online Sessions option on the event [page](#). Note: If you are already registered for the live sessions, you will already have access to the recordings.

Influenza Immunization Update

As of Jan. 23, 2021, 1,524,230 doses of influenza vaccine have been administered in Alberta. Immunizations are up by 189,052 compared to the same time last year.

For the 12th week in row, there are no reported cases of seasonal influenza in Alberta. The weekly influenza data report is available at ahs.ca/influenza.

Alberta Precision Laboratories (APL) has tested 89,196 respiratory swabs for influenza, from Aug. 23, 2020, to Jan. 28, 2021.

The weekly influenza data report is available at ahs.ca/influenza.

Additional Resources for Physicians:

- [Acute Care Outbreak Prevention & Management Task Force](#)
- [AHS Immunization Information](#)
- [AHS Virtual Health](#)
- [COVID-19 FAQ for Clinicians](#): Includes immunization updates
- [COVID-19 Resources for Community Physicians](#)
- [COVID-19 Testing and Self-Isolation Criteria](#)
- [CPSA's physician portal](#)
- [Cumming School of Medicine Continuing Medical Education \(CME\) Resources](#)
- [Government of Alberta Vaccination Updates](#)
- [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)
- [Physician Wellness Educational Resources: Well Doc Alberta](#)
- [Spectrum](#) – A mobile app customized to deliver local antimicrobial stewardship guidelines, resistance data, dosing information, and AHS COVID-19 related content.
- 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 \(CPSA\)](#).

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. Francois Belanger

Chief Medical Officer and VP, Quality

Dr. Laura McDougall

Senior Medical Officer of Health



**Alberta Health
Services**

Physical
distancing
works