

February 19, 2021

This week:

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- COVID-19 Testing for Healthcare Workers — the Latest Numbers **Update**
- COVID-19 Immunization **Update**
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- PPE Question of the Week **New**
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- Additional Resources for Physicians

COVID-19 Case Status in Alberta

In positive news again this week, many of the COVID-19 case numbers have decreased, however, Alberta does continue to see spread of variants of concern.

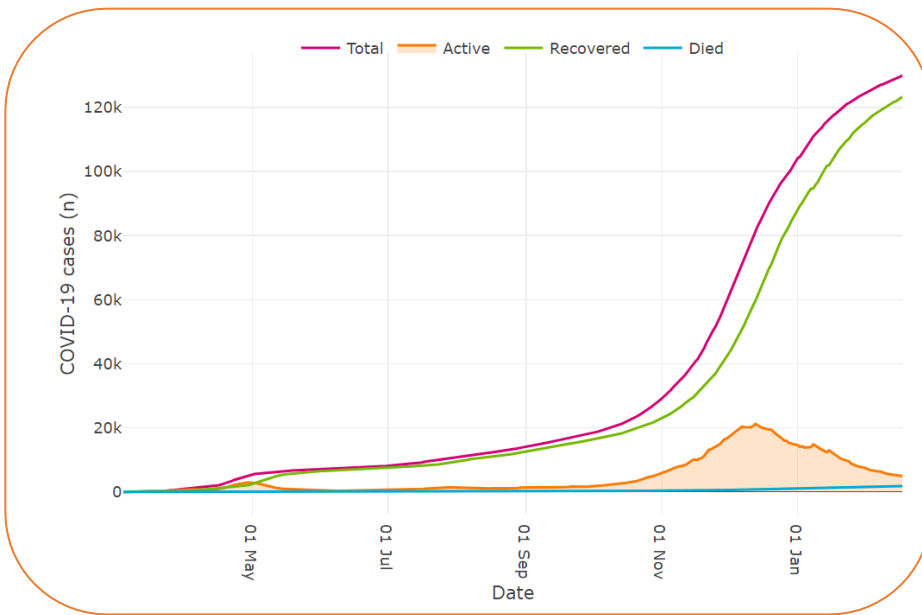
The average number of daily new cases for the past week is 305 cases (as of Feb. 17), compared to 329 cases the previous week (Feb. 4 to 10), a 7.3 per cent decrease.

This week, there are 4,887 active cases in the province, the lowest number since the end of October and a decrease of 614 active cases (-11.2 per cent) from last week, when Alberta Health reported 5,501 active cases. While the Calgary and Edmonton zones each experienced decreases in their number of active cases over the past week, cases in the North, Central and South zones increased.

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

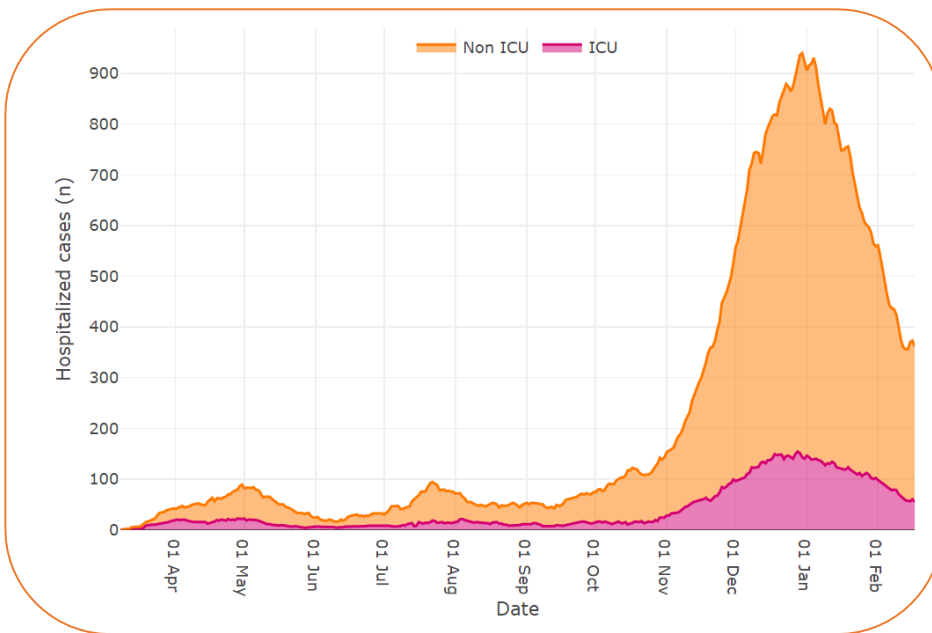
	Active Cases (as of Feb. 17)	Active Cases (as of Feb. 10)	Per cent Change
Calgary	1,734	2,202	-21.3%
Edmonton	1,287	1,616	-20.4%
North	799	703	+13.7%
Central	729	679	+7.4%
South	333	292	+14.0%
Unknown	5	9	-44.4%

For the week ending Feb. 17, there were 1,105 cases among individuals aged 20 to 49 years, which is about 52 per cent of new cases during that time period. However, cases continue to occur in every age group: this week, 383 new cases were reported among school-aged children (5 to 19 years) and 253 new cases were reported among older adults (aged 60 years and older).



Hospitalizations and admissions

For the seventh week in a row, there has been a week-to-week decline in the total number of individuals being treated for COVID-19 in Alberta's hospitals.



On Feb. 17, there were 362 individuals in hospitals across the province compared to 400 hospitalizations on Feb. 10, a 9.5 per cent decrease. Of those individuals in hospital, 55 individuals were in intensive care units (ICUs) on Feb. 17 compared to 70 on Feb. 10, a 21.4 per cent decrease.

The breakdown of hospitalizations by zone as of Feb. 17 is below:

- 130 hospitalizations with 25 of those in ICUs in the Calgary Zone,
- 116 hospitalizations with 16 of those in ICUs in the Edmonton Zone,
- 51 hospitalizations with 0 of those in ICUs in the North Zone,
- 35 hospitalizations with 8 of those in ICUs in the South Zone, and

- 30 hospitalizations with 6 of those in ICUs in the Central Zone.

Variants of Concern

We have now detected 239 variant cases of COVID-19 in the province. 232 of these are B.1.1.7 variant (UK variant) and seven are the B.1.351 variant (South African variant). One week earlier on Feb. 10, 156 variant cases had been detected. As of Feb. 17, variant cases have only been detected in the Calgary, Edmonton and Central zones.

Other notable COVID-19-related information:

- As of Feb. 17, a total of 130,030 cases of COVID-19 have been detected in Alberta and a total of 5,745 individuals have ever been hospitalized, which amounts to 4.4 individuals for every 100 cases. In all, 123,338 Albertans have recovered from COVID-19.
- As of Feb. 17, 1,805 individuals have passed away from COVID-19 including 61 over the past seven days (Feb. 11 to Feb. 17). 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 Feb. 11 to Feb. 17, 52,837 COVID-19 tests were completed, an average of 7,548 tests per day. (Testing was lower over the Family Day long weekend than has been typical.) During this period, the daily positivity ranged from 3.67 per cent to 5.07 per cent. As of Feb. 17, a total of 3,331,372 tests have been conducted and 1,797,352 individuals have ever been tested.
- The R value, also known as the reproduction number, describes the ability of a disease to spread. It tells us the average number of people that someone with COVID-19 will infect. An R value of 1 means an infected person will infect one other person on average. Values below 1 mean transmission is decreasing; above 1, transmission is increasing. The provincewide R value from Feb. 8 to 14 was 0.85.
- So far in the winter school term, AHS has confirmed 1,228 individuals with COVID-19 were present at schools while infectious or acquired the disease in the school setting. A total of 489 out of 2,415 schools in the province have had an individual attend 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 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.

New this week, the main testing summary charts now display total tests performed over time, which capture multiple tests performed on any individual. Previously, these charts displayed only one test result per individual. The new charts show a significant increase in the number of negative test results, as well as a slight increase in the number of positive test results, however, this does not change the overall positivity rate on an individual basis.

As of February 17:

- 76,928 employees (AHS, APL, and Covenant combined) have been tested for COVID-19 and, of those tested, 4,610 (or 5.99 per cent) have tested positive.
- Of the 1,593 employees who have tested positive and whose source of infection has been determined, 489 (or 30.7 per cent) acquired their infection through a workplace exposure. An additional 3,017 employees who have tested positive are still under investigation as to the source of infection.
- 4,951 physicians (AHS, APL, and Covenant combined) have been tested for COVID-19 and, of those tested, 193 (or 3.90 per cent) have tested positive.

- Of the 62 physicians who have tested positive and whose source of infection has been determined, 9 (or 14.5 per cent) acquired their infection through a workplace exposure. An additional 131 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 Updates

By the Numbers

As of 11 a.m. on Feb. 19, more than 159,300 total doses of COVID-19 vaccine have been administered in Alberta, including:

- 59,400+ doses to healthcare workers
- 54,500+ doses to long-term care (LTC) and designated supportive living (DSL) residents
- 43,400+ doses to LTC/DSL staff

In total, 61,784 Albertans have received both dose 1 and dose 2, and 35,828 have received dose 1 only.

Rebooked Appointments for Healthcare Worker

To align with an increase in vaccine supply in Alberta, healthcare workers in [phase 1](#) who had their first and second dose postponed due to the national vaccine shortage were contacted this week through an email invitation to re-book these appointments.

All eligible healthcare workers in [phase 1](#) who have received an email invitation are now able to book appointments for the vaccine, including those who previously received their invitation, but did not book an appointment. We encourage everyone who has received an email invitation, but has not yet scheduled an appointment, to please book your COVID-19 immunizations as soon as possible.

If you are unable to find the booking link you were sent, please call Health Link at 1-888-851-1919.

We thank everyone for their support of the AHS COVID-19 immunization program, as we work together to ensure we keep each other, and all Albertans, safe and healthy in the months to come. Visit the [Online Booking Tool FAQ](#) for questions about the online booking process.

Long-term Care and Designated Supportive Living Update

As we continue the fight against COVID-19, the vaccine has provided many Albertans with a #ShotofHope.

As of Jan. 19, all eligible seniors in long-term care (LTC), and designated supportive living (DSL) facilities provincewide who consented to receive the COVID-19 vaccine have now been given their second doses, with co-mingled sites set to be complete in early March.

On Dec. 29, 2020, immunization began for eligible seniors - the first members of the public – with immunizations taking place across the zones since then.

Many teams across AHS have made extraordinary efforts to provide vaccine to eligible seniors in LTC and DSL sites across the province, with over 29,000 residents being immunized.

We would like to congratulate all the LTC/DSL staff and our public health teams on this outstanding achievement and thank you for your dedication to protecting our residents in continuing care. The #ShotofHope provides an added layer of protection to our most vulnerable population.

In the meantime, we are doing all we can to keep our residents safe at every continuing care site, and will continue to push hard to roll out vaccine as it is available.

Congregate Care

AHS, in conjunction with Alberta Health, is expanding to additional eligible groups as part of the phase 1B COVID-19 vaccine rollout, and will now include all residents in seniors' congregate living sites.

Starting today, AHS is working to roll out approximately 22,000 doses of the COVID-19 vaccine to Albertans living in retirement centres, lodges, and other congregate living facilities, with residents 75 years of age and older. At these sites, where eligible seniors interact with residents younger than 75, all residents will be able to receive their immunization, regardless of age. The second dose of the vaccine will be provided in these facilities within the 38 to 42 day window.

Residents living in these facilities will be contacted directly through site leadership regarding when the vaccine will be provided onsite. Residents of these facilities do not need to book their own appointment, or call Health Link to make these arrangements. AHS public health teams will work directly with site leadership and the care teams at each facility to arrange vaccine rollout.

It is anticipated it will take two weeks to immunize all seniors at these facilities with their first dose of vaccine, provincewide.

All Albertans 75 and Over

As announced by Alberta Health today, starting Feb. 24, any Albertan living in the community who was born in 1946 or earlier will be eligible to book an appointment for a COVID-19 vaccine, regardless of where they live. Appointment availability will be based on vaccine supply. Seniors will be able to book their immunization appointment through Alberta Health Services using an online and telephone booking system.

Details on how to book – by phone or online – will be released on Feb. 24 and links will be posted on the [COVID-19 vaccine webpage](#). Information about [supports for isolated seniors and those with mobility challenges will be also be posted](#).

Phase 2 Vaccinations

In addition to the plans for Phase 1 of the vaccine rollout, the [Government of Alberta announced today](#) that Phase 2 vaccinations will be offered in a staged approach starting this spring. Once completed, Phase 2 will mean that anyone aged 50 to 74 years, anyone with high-risk underlying health conditions, First Nations and Métis people aged 35 and older, residents and staff in congregate living settings, healthcare workers providing direct and acute patient care who have high potential for spread to high-risk individuals and eligible caregivers will have had the opportunity to be vaccinated.

Detailed information on how eligible Albertans will receive the vaccine will be released prior to each step in Phase 2. The timeline for starting each phase is dependent on vaccine supply and availability. Alberta relies on the federal government to distribute vaccine to the province. More information is available from Alberta Health, [here](#).

Vaccine Rollout Planning

Alberta Health is responsible for COVID-19 vaccine policy, including [allocation of vaccine](#). We look forward to working together as we roll out the vaccine to our most vulnerable populations across Alberta.

Resources on COVID-19 vaccine have been developed and are available [here](#). This site is updated as new information becomes available.

We thank everyone involved in the vaccine rollout for your hard work, and ongoing commitment to Albertans.

Border Pilot

Due to the updated travel rules announced by the Government of Canada on January 29, and in an effort to mitigate any potential spread of the COVID-19 variants within Alberta, the Border Pilot Project between the Government of Alberta and the Government of Canada will be suspended at the Calgary International Airport and at the Coutts border crossing as of Feb. 21, 2021.

All international travellers arriving at the Calgary International Airport and Coutts border crossing will be required to follow additional testing and more stringent quarantine requirements for travel to Canada. This includes the requirement that all arriving international travellers must quarantine for at least 14 days and must take a COVID-19 test upon arrival into Canada, as well as toward the end of their 14-day quarantine. Prior to departure to Canada, air travellers will also be required to reserve a three-night stay in a government-authorized hotel. These new measures are in addition to existing mandatory pre-boarding and health requirements for air travellers.

These changes will help ensure individuals potentially infected with the variants of COVID-19 do not spread the virus to others, and remain in quarantine until they receive a negative test result, or are no longer infectious.

For more information on this change, including important information on quarantine requirements that must be followed after international travel, please visit: [COVID-19: Travel, quarantine and borders - Travel.gc.ca](https://www.travel.gc.ca/COVID-19/Travel/quarantine-and-borders)

Case Investigation and Contact Tracing

AHS teams have been working very hard to expand our contact tracing and case investigation capacity. Thanks to these efforts, we are now seeing tremendous improvements.

During the month of January, AHS case investigators and contact tracers closed more than 21,800 investigations - this is the highest number of investigations closed in one month. On Jan. 12, the team closed a record high of 1,003 cases in 24 hours. Since Jan. 9, we've been contacting and investigating all COVID-19 cases received each day and reaching out to cases within 24 hours of receiving confirmation of their positive test result.

Check out this [infographic](#) for a summary of our recent successes. AHS' contact tracing system is well-positioned to meet future demands for contact tracing in Alberta. This is for several reasons:

New COVID-19 Cases Trending Down

New cases have been trending down across the province for the last several weeks. Currently, cases have about five to six close contacts each, compared to November when the average case had about 15 close contacts. With fewer contacts, we are able to identify and break the chains of transmission quickly. Thank you for keeping your social bubbles small.

Aggressive Recruitment Efforts

Our current workforce is about 2,300 case investigators and contact tracers. This is 46 times higher than our original team of 50 contact tracers at the beginning of the pandemic. New hires include both regulated healthcare providers and non-regulated staff. Our team as a whole now has the capacity to investigate about 1,600 cases per day, not including COVID-19 variant cases, which require additional time, resources and expertise to investigate.

Innovative Approaches

AHS teams have developed and adapted several contact tracing tools since the beginning of the pandemic. These tools have drastically reduced turnaround times to notify Albertans of their test results and have freed staff from making notification calls.

Since the spring, negative COVID-19 test results have been available to Albertans over the phone using an autodialer option. Test results through text message were added to our systems in the fall.

Since mid-November, AHS has been using the [COVID-19 Close Contacts Tool](#) to identify and reach out to contacts by text or phone. Since then, the tool has received nearly 97,000 submissions - 18,000 from Albertans and the rest from case investigators and contact tracers using the tool.

The [AHS COVID-19 online assessment and booking tool](#) has been crucial in Alberta's response to COVID-19. Last week, an additional function was added to the tool to include a new field to indicate a person's primary language spoken at home. This enables AHS to match an individual's preferred language with a case investigator who speaks that language. If that's not possible, we can make arrangements for an interpreter to be available. To date, the online assessment and booking tool has been accessed more than nine million times by Albertans.

Partnerships and Engaging Albertans

Another factor which has made it possible for us to keep up with case numbers is AHS' strong community partnerships. Since the first wave, we've been engaging businesses, operators, schools, sports and event organizers to collect and provide contact information for their staff, patrons and students, in the event we need that information for contact tracing purposes.

This has helped our teams a great deal and has sped up the process to identify and contact individuals who may have been exposed to COVID-19. Thank you to our partners and all Albertans for working with us.

AHS COVID-19 Website Update

We continue to see increased demand for accurate, easy-to-understand, credible information on COVID-19. Albertans want to be kept informed of the latest advancements, news, and information on the virus and look to the AHS website as a source of truth for pandemic information.

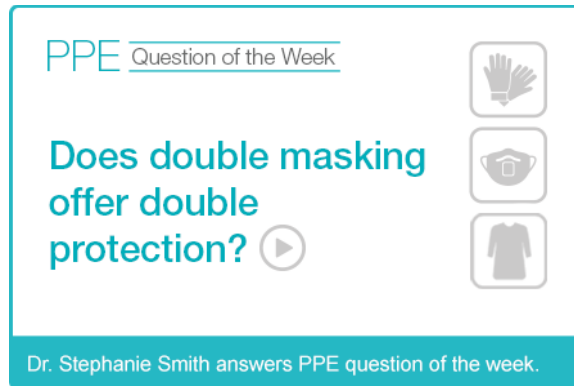
To provide Albertans with organized, easy-to-navigate information, several changes have been made to the [AHS COVID-19 web pages](#):

- Content is now organized by topic so users can easily hone in on specific areas of interest. The webpage is easier to scan while scrolling, making it quicker to find the information you are looking for on both mobile devices and desktop computers.
- Higher visibility has also been provided to the top four most-searched sections. These sections include Booking a Test, Understanding Your Results, Visitation and Information for Health Professionals. These sections will be reviewed and updated to reflect the most popular searches.
- A feedback mechanism has also been added to continue to inform future enhancements and additions.

We welcome all staff, physicians and volunteers to tour the site, and provide feedback using the online feedback option, to let us know what we can do to make the site even better. Log onto www.ahs.ca/covid and tell us what you think of the new design.

PPE Question of the Week

Are two masks better than one? In this week's PPE Question of the Week video, Dr. Stephanie Smith, Director of Infection Prevention and Control at the University of Alberta Hospital [discusses the use of medical grade masks, the protection these masks provide against the variant strains and how double-masking doesn't mean double the protection.](#)



Verna's Weekly Video Message — Pink Shirt Day

The past year has been challenging for all of us in different ways.

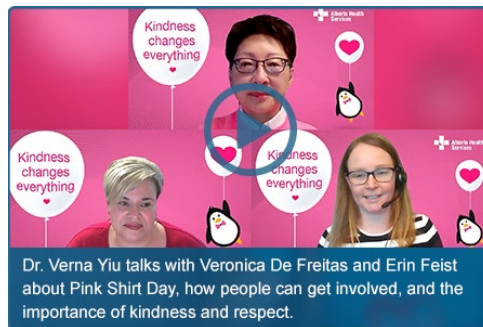
So more than ever, we need to be kind and show compassion, respect, and empathy towards one another—and [Pink Shirt Day](#) is a good reminder of how important it is to practice respectful behavior.

This international anti-bullying campaign was started by students in Nova Scotia and falls on Feb. 24 this year. So next Wednesday, we encourage everyone to wear pink to show your support of kindness and remind everyone that bullying will not be tolerated at AHS.

Joining me (Verna) to [talk about Pink Shirt Day and the importance of kindness](#) are:

- Veronica De Freitas, Program Manager, Respectful Workplaces
- Erin Feist, Senior Advisor, Employee Relations

Veronica and Erin share how Pink Shirt Day got started, what it means to be an ally, and what AHS is doing to prevent disrespectful behavior in the workplace.



Wear a Pink Shirt and Take a Stand Against Bullying

As we've mentioned, Feb. 24 is Pink Shirt Day – an [anti-bullying campaign](#) that supports people in taking respectful actions to stop bullying. You can support Pink Shirt Day and spread the message of kindness by sharing our newly designed *Kindness Changes Everything* [e-card](#).

Here are a few other ideas to get involved and stand up against bullying:

- Order and wear a [Pink Shirt Day button](#) or [AHS branded pink t-shirt](#)
- Wear something pink to show support and post a picture of yourself [on Insite](#)
- Join an upcoming [Worker-to-Worker Behaviour Continuum Webinar](#)
- Use a [pink background for Zoom](#)

- Post and distribute resources found on the [Respectful Workplaces](#) and [Diversity and Inclusion](#) Insite pages

We encourage you to [be an ally](#) and [supportive bystander](#). Please take a stand against bullying. Help us [Change the Conversation](#) on disrespectful behaviour and continue to find ways to spread the message of kindness every day of the year.

Scientific Advisory Group Rapid Review on Awake Prone Positioning

Alberta Health Services (AHS) Scientific Advisory Group (SAG) conducted a review of proning in COVID-19 patients with severe shortness of breath and low oxygen levels who are hospitalized but not in the ICU, a patient group where there is less evidence of benefit and harms for proning.

Prone Positioning (lying on one's stomach) is a potentially life-saving treatment in intubated, mechanically ventilated patients with severe pneumonia, as can be seen in people with COVID-19. This has raised hope that it may improve breathing and reduce the need for intubation and breathing support in people with COVID-19 pneumonia in hospital wards.

In this review, it was noted that having patients who are awake and not intubated take a prone position may temporarily improve oxygen levels, but has not been shown to affect the need for intubation or ICU admission. With respect to the safety of proning, its use has been associated with risks, particularly in patients who are doing poorly and evolving to need ICU care, as monitoring and urgent interventions are more difficult in prone patients.

Current experience reported in over 700 COVID-19 patients exposed to awake prone positioning has shown that this is possible within acute care settings but that it is often poorly tolerated by awake, non-intubated patients, and it is rare to be able to have patients stay prone for the duration of time that has shown benefits in ICU patients.

Given this, the review concluded:

- Prone positioning may be implemented with caution on medical wards in patients who are low-risk for requiring escalating care (ICU or intubation), with appropriate protocols for monitoring in place.
- Prone positioning should not be implemented on medical wards in patients who are high-risk for requiring escalating care (ICU or intubation), as the potential harms associated with delaying intubation could outweigh the possible benefits.

Studies are continuing in this area and recommendations may change in the future. For more information, see the [Rapid Review](#).

Doc of the Week – Dr. Hong Yuan Zhou

Dr. Hong Yuan Zhou is a quiet, unassuming microbiologist working in the background never asking for praise but always reliable, helpful, accessible, knowledgeable, dedicated and a genuinely, nice person. She is the person who gives hope that there might be a light at the end of the tunnel. All of us are thankful for her during this pandemic.

The microbiologists working for Alberta Precision Laboratories - Provlab have all unquestionably worked conscientiously and diligently to reach beyond excellence. They are nimble and flexible to respond to every need and are constantly taking feedback and improving their already-streamlined processes.

We need her and her colleagues.

Thank you, Dr. Zhou, for your dedication to Albertans, and your colleagues.

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.

MD Culture (Previously Physician Wellness)

Check out our newsletter, MD Culture Shift Winter edition, [here](#).

Physician Wellness Zoom Rooms

- **Date:** Tuesday, Feb. 23, 5-6 p.m.
Topic of focus: Anti-bullying
Zoom Link: [Here](#)
- **Date:** Tuesday, March 9, 5-6 p.m.
Topic of focus: Moral Distress
Zoom Link: [Here](#)
- **Date:** Tuesday, March 23, 5-6 p.m.
Topic of focus: The positive effects of poetry and music on wellness during the pandemic
Zoom Link: [Here](#)

Infographics from past Physician Wellness Zoom rooms can be found at www.ahs.ca/mdwellness.

International Women's Day events

- **Date:** Mon. March 8, 7:00PM
Topic: Gender Equity in Medicine presented by Drs. Tara Kiran and Michelle Cohen. Review the data, the root causes, and the current gaps; then join in a discussion on solutions.
Registration Link: [Here](#)
- **Date:** Thurs. March 4, 7:30 PM.
Topic: Celebrating women in honour of IWD 2021! Join us to learn how #YegWiHN member and pediatric surgeon, Dr. Ioana Bratu, de-stresses through encaustic art, followed by network members sharing their own creative outlets to de-stress.
Registration Link: [Here](#)
Find out more about the network and join: [Edmonton Women in Health Network](#)

Influenza Immunization Update

As of Feb. 13, 2021, 1,554,581 doses of influenza vaccine have been administered in Alberta. Immunizations are up by more than 173,000 compared to the same time last year.

For the 15th week in row, there are no reported cases of seasonal influenza in Alberta.

Alberta Precision Laboratories (APL) have tested 95,327 respiratory swabs for influenza from Aug. 23, 2020 to Feb. 13, 2021.

We continue to make exceptional progress this season. Let's continue to protect each other from this vaccine-preventable illness and reduce the strain on our healthcare system.

Check [Insite](#) for options to get your influenza vaccine, [resources](#) to support this year's campaign and guidance on what to do if you experience [symptoms after immunization](#).

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

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



