

CMO SMOH Weekly Notice for AHS Medical Staff

February 26, 2021

This week:

- Government, AMA, Reach Tentative Agreement for Physicians **New**
- COVID-19 Case Status in Alberta **Update**
- COVID-19 Immunization **Update**
- Improved Access to 811 for COVID-19 Immunization Appointments **New**
- COVID-19 Testing for Healthcare Workers — the Latest Numbers **Update**
- One-stop Resource for Community Physicians **New**
- COVID-19 Vaccination in Pregnancy Factsheet for Practitioners **New**
- Counselling of Immunocompromised Individuals on the use of COVID-19 Vaccines **New**
- PPE Safety Coach Program Update **New**
- Doc of the Week **New**
- MD Culture **New**
- Influenza Immunization **Update**
- University of Calgary COVID Corner: Vaccines vs. Variants **New**
- AMA's COVID-19 Talks for Docs **New**
- Rehabilitation Advice Line Reminder **New**
- Post-COVID-19 Clinics **New**
- Additional Resources for Physicians

Government, AMA Reach Tentative Agreement for Physicians

Alberta Health Minister Tyler Shandro and Dr. Paul Boucher, President of the Alberta Medical Association (AMA), announced today a tentative new provincial agreement for physicians. Agreement details were not released.

Minister Shandro said the tentative agreement allows for fiscal sustainability into the future, while maintaining a strong focus on patient care and fairness and equity for physicians. Dr. Boucher said the tentative agreement addresses needs such as new models for delivering care and strategies to improve quality of care for patients.

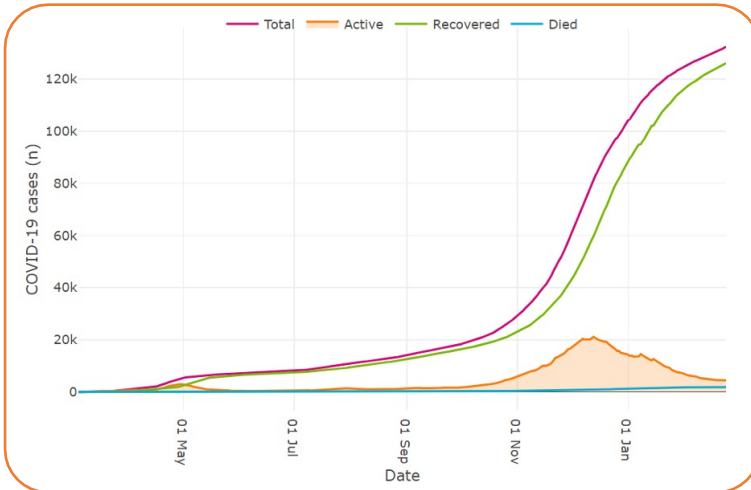
A special meeting of the AMA's governing body will be held in the coming week via Zoom. The governing body will consider the tentative agreement and provide advice to the board of directors. On that advice, the AMA board will determine whether the agreement will proceed to a ratification vote by our approximately 11,000 members. The AMA is prepared to open voting immediately for a three-week period.

COVID-19 Case Status in Alberta

After 10 consecutive weeks of declines, the average number of daily new COVID-19 cases in Alberta climbed this past week — a week also marked with encouraging news: the start of large-group public COVID-19 immunizations.

There was an average of 348 new cases per day for the week ending Feb. 24, compared to 303 the previous week, a 14.9 per cent increase. The Calgary Zone had the most new cases this week at 817 — a third of all new cases in the province. Of concern, the North Zone, with a much smaller population, had the second-highest number of new cases this week, with 607.

Overall, the number of active cases in the province continues to drop. As of Feb. 24, there were 4,484 active cases, a decrease of 403 (or 11.2 per cent) from the previous week.



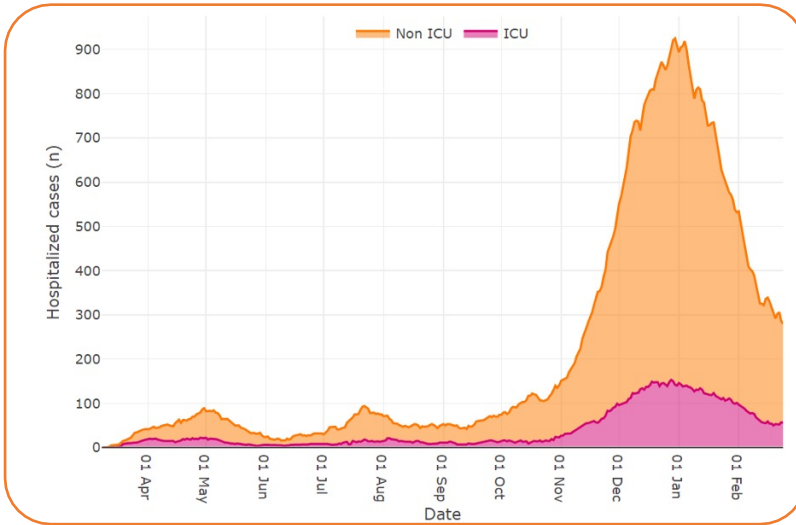
However, this decrease in active cases is not distributed equally between the AHS zones. The Edmonton Zone reported a 30 per cent reduction in its number of active cases, whereas the North Zone reported an increase of about 27 per cent. For the seventh consecutive week, the Calgary Zone has the most active cases at 1,510, though this a decrease of nearly 13 per cent from the previous week.

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

	Active Cases (as of Feb. 24)	Active Cases (as of Feb. 17)	Per cent Change
Calgary	1,510	1,734	-12.9%
North	1,016	799	+27.2%
Edmonton	897	1,287	-30.3%
Central	737	729	+1.1%
South	319	333	-4.2%
Unknown	5	5	0%

Hospitalizations and admissions

For the eighth consecutive week, Alberta reports another week-to-week decline in the total number of individuals being treated in hospital for COVID-19. On Feb. 24, there were 280 individuals in hospitals compared to 330 on Feb. 17, a 15.2 per cent decrease. However, the number of individuals in intensive care units (ICUs) has climbed slightly over the past week with 56 in ICUs on Feb. 24 compared to 54 on Feb. 17.



The breakdown of hospitalizations by zone as of Feb. 24 is as follows:

	Hospitalizations	ICUs
Calgary	100	15
Edmonton	82	18
North	40	3
Central	32	10
South	26	10

Update on variants of concern

Alberta Health has now reported 323 cases of COVID-19 variants of concern (VOC): 316 are B.1.1.7 variant (U.K. variant) and seven are the B.1.351 variant (South African variant). This represents a 35.1 per cent increase since Feb. 17, when 239 VOC cases had been detected. VOCs have been detected in the Calgary, Edmonton and Central zones and, this past week, the North Zone identified its first VOC case.

Other notable COVID-19-related information:

- As of Feb. 24, a total of 132,432 cases of COVID-19 have been detected in Alberta and a total of 5,844 individuals have been hospitalized, which amounts to 4.4 individuals for every 100 cases. In all, 126,074 Albertans have recovered from COVID-19.
- As of Feb. 24, 1,874 individuals have passed away from COVID-19, including 69 deaths over the past seven days (Feb. 18 to Feb. 24). 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. 18 to Feb. 24, 56,390 COVID-19 tests were completed, an average of 8,056 tests per day. During this period, the daily positivity ranged from 3.66 per cent to 4.67 per cent. As of Feb. 24, about 3.4 million tests have been conducted and 1.8 million individuals have 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. 15 to 21 was 1.03, compared to 0.85 for the week ending Feb. 14.
- For the winter school term, as of Feb. 24, AHS has confirmed 1,375 individuals with COVID-19 were present at schools while infectious or acquired the disease in the school setting. A

total of 532 out of 2,415 schools (or 22 per cent) in the province have reported an individual has attended their school while infectious or had in-school transmission.

COVID-19 Immunization Updates

By the Numbers

As of 11 a.m. on Feb. 26, more than 207,600 total doses of COVID-19 vaccine have been administered in Alberta, including:

- 79,600+ doses to healthcare workers
- 55,000+ doses to long-term care (LTC) and designated supportive living (DSL) residents
- 51,500+ doses to LTC/DSL staff

In total, 82,944 Albertans have received both Dose 1 and Dose 2, and 41,722 have received Dose 1 only.

Immunization for Albertans born in 1946 or earlier

On Feb. 24 at 8 a.m., AHS began large-group public COVID-19 immunizations with Albertans aged 75 years and older. Appointments continue to be available, as we work towards immunizing all seniors 75+ in the community by April, pending vaccine supply.

We acknowledge there have been some issues with the vaccine rollout, and we apologize to anyone who was delayed in booking an appointment, or who waited in a long line to get their vaccination.

But we think it's also extremely important to acknowledge that we are leading the country in terms of getting our seniors immunized.

In just two days, we have successfully booked more than 130,000 people to get the COVID-19 vaccine within the next few weeks. That's more than 130,000 people – at high risk of serious illness from the virus – who are now on their way to being protected against COVID-19. That's a massive achievement.

And we have already immunized 45,927 Albertans ages 75 and over, including those who live in congregate living settings.

As a society, we are one step closer to getting back to some semblance of normal life. The more people immunized, the less community transmission we will see.

Yesterday, we saw that some individuals are arriving at appointments 30 to 60 minutes in advance; as a result, wait lines are forming outside some of the facilities.

We have added additional staff and signage at sites to encourage people with appointments to wait in their vehicles until their appointment times – people shouldn't have to wait in long lines.

Each appointment is booked in 10-minute increments. This helps ensure we can maintain social distancing at all immunization clinics.

We understand their desire to be on-time – for many people, getting their first dose is an exciting day – but this is why we have an appointment system. We have added “greeters” at our busiest sites to explain the process when they pull into the parking lot, and to encourage them to stay in their cars until five minutes before their appointment.

We are looking at opening more sites, particularly in Edmonton. This will also help add physical distance between people.

COVID-19 immunization milestone

On Feb. 25, 11,513 doses of COVID-19 vaccine were administered. For the first time in AHS' COVID-19 immunization campaign, we exceeded 10,000 doses of vaccine administered in one day. Thank you to all the teams who made this possible!

Important to sign up for immunization in sequence

When staff and physicians are invited to sign up for immunization as the vaccine rolls out, it is important to follow the appropriate immunization phased sequencing. It is important to follow the appropriate sequencing for immunization.

Staff and physicians will receive a direct phone call or email/text to sign up and will be reminded that their registration details are confidential and only intended for their own use. They should be aware of the [current sequencing eligibility](#) and should report any potential errors in sequencing to their leader.

Any staff member or physician who tries to book an immunization if not eligible would be in breach of the [Appropriate Prioritization of Access to Health Services Policy](#). Where incidents are brought to our attention, a thorough review will be conducted and appropriate action taken where the investigation deems access to be out of sequence.

Resources

Some of our website links have changed:

- [COVID-19 Vaccine FAQ](#) for staff and public
- [Healthcare Worker Immunization Online Booking Tool FAQ](#)
- COVID-19 Immunization Booking Tool for Seniors 75+ can be accessed here: ahs.ca/covidvaccine
- [FAQ](#) specific to immunization for seniors 75+
- [Poster](#) with current information for seniors on vaccine eligibility and how to book their appointments

Complete your Got My COVID-19 Immunization Form

Staff and physicians who have received their COVID-19 immunization are asked to complete the Got My COVID-19 Immunization Form on [Insite](#). It's important employees and physicians report their immunization status after receiving their second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. This information will be used by AHS to appropriately plan, manage and allocate resources in the event of a COVID-19 outbreak to protect our patients, families and healthcare workers.

Improved Access to 811 for COVID-19 Immunization Appointments

AHS has improved access to 811. Albertans calling 811 now have a choice to route their calls to book a COVID-19 immunization appointment or to reach a registered nurse for medical concerns. The two options will help refer callers more quickly to the resource they need. A holding queue for callers requesting the immunization appointment option has also been created. This holding queue allows 350 individuals to wait for a Health Link team member to book their vaccine appointment.

Albertans can book a COVID-19 immunization by booking online at ahs.ca/covidvaccine or calling 811. Combined, the system can take approximately 5,000 bookings an hour. Additional Health Link team members have been made available to answer both types of calls.

We continue to anticipate there will be a wait time to get on the online booking tool and through to Health Link in the coming days. We are asking Albertans to please be patient if they are waiting to book their vaccine appointment. The AHS online immunization booking tool and Health Link are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Albertans can also book a COVID-19 immunization through some local pharmacies. Alberta Blue Cross is hosting that information [here](#).

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, an additional dashboard page has been added that summarizes the sources of infections acquired through a workplace exposure.

As of Feb. 24:

- 77,256 employees (AHS, APL, and Covenant combined) have been tested for COVID-19 and, of those tested, 4,656 (or 6.03 per cent) have tested positive.
- Of the 1,718 employees who have tested positive and whose source of infection has been determined, 428 (or 24.9 per cent) acquired their infection through a workplace exposure. An additional 2,938 employees who have tested positive are still under investigation as to the source of infection.
- 4,968 physicians (AHS, APL, and Covenant combined) have been tested for COVID-19 and, of those tested, 193 (or 3.88 per cent) have tested positive.
- Of the 64 physicians who have tested positive and whose source of infection has been determined, 9 (or 14.1 per cent) acquired their infection through a workplace exposure. An additional 129 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](#).

One-stop Resource for Community Physicians

AHS' [Information for Community Physicians webpage](#) is a one-stop resource on the COVID-19 response for specialists and primary care providers working in the community. This webpage is regularly updated with the latest news and resources specific to community physicians. The page includes guidance, pathways and FAQs related to immunization, patient care and more. AHS receives input on the page from partners including Primary Care Networks as well as the AMA, ACFP and CPSA.

COVID-19 Vaccination in Pregnancy Factsheet for Practitioners

Please see the new information resource from the Maternal Newborn Child & Youth (MNCY) SCN – [Alberta COVID-19 Vaccination in Pregnancy Factsheet for Practitioners](#). This new resource document was prepared with consultation from the MNCY SCN Maternal Newborn COVID-19 Working Group.

Counselling of Immunocompromised Individuals on the use of COVID-19 Vaccines

Please see this [guidance](#) developed to provide information about counselling of immunocompromised individuals on the use of mRNA COVID-19 vaccines. This document is intended for healthcare providers and is a brief summary of considerations to inform pre-immunization assessment.

PPE Safety Coach Program Update

The Provincial PPE Safety Coach Program was developed by Infection Prevention & Control and endorsed by Workplace Health & Safety, and aims to increase the proper selection and use of PPE in front-line settings to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and other respiratory viruses, such as influenza.

As of Feb. 12, more than 650 staff and physicians have been fully trained as PPE Safety Coaches. Individuals interested in participating can do so at any time. AHS site leadership and unit management work with staff and physicians to identify coaches and are encouraged to identify at least two coaches per unit or program area for coaching training.

Visit ahs.ca/ppesafetycoach for more information.

Doc of the Week – Dr. Rick Ward



Dr. Ward is a community Family Practitioner at Crowfoot Village Family Practice and the Medical Director for Primary Care, AHS. He is heavily involved in the AHS PCN partnership both at a governance and zonal operations level.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Dr. Ward has been an innovative leader in the development of the Calgary Zone COVID-19 paediatric and adult care pathways for community patients – aimed at keeping patients safe in the community and out of acute care, emergency rooms and urgent care clinics – and these pathways have spread across the province for use.

He has worked tirelessly with our seven Calgary Zone PCNs to host COVID-19 Webinars highlighting the newest science and processes for Family Practice to help providers in the community stay safe, and stay open, during the pandemic. A key piece of this work is a continuation of the work Dr. Ward has always championed – improving integration of Mental Health Care delivery in the Medical Home – with each webinar featuring a Mental Health moment.

Primary Care, and the patients they serve, are very lucky to have Dr. Ward as an advocate and we thank him for his enthusiasm, wisdom and energy.

MD Culture (Previously Physician Wellness)

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

Physician Wellness Zoom Rooms

- **Date:** Tues. March 9, 5-6 p.m.
Topic of focus: Moral Distress
Zoom Link: [Here](#)
- **Date:** Tues. 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 – open to all physicians regardless of gender. Please register early as space is limited.

- **Date:** Thurs. March 4, 7:30 p.m.
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](#)
- **Date:** Mon. March 8, 7 p.m.
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](#)

Find out more about the network and join: [Edmonton Women in Health Network](#).

Influenza Immunization Update

As of Feb. 20, 2021, 1,556,799 doses of influenza vaccine have been administered in Alberta. Immunizations are up by more than 171,000 compared to the same time last year. For the 16th week in row, there are no reported cases of seasonal influenza in Alberta.

Alberta Precision Laboratories (APL) have tested 97,714 respiratory swabs for influenza from Aug. 23, 2020 to Feb. 20, 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](#).

University of Calgary COVID Corner: Vaccines vs. Variants

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 March 10, will cover the following objectives:

- Describe the prevalence and potential impact of SARS-CoV-2 variants, including the likelihood of future waves of COVID-19
- Examine the efficacy of vaccines in preventing COVID-19 and virus transmission in the community, including potential efficacy against variants
- Demonstrate the impact of non-pharmaceutical interventions and identify the public health measures most likely to prevent future waves of COVID-19
- Recognize the economic impact of COVID-19 and how economic recovery can be influenced by public health strategies related to relaxing restrictions

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

Register: [Here](#)

AMA's COVID-19 Talks for Docs

The Alberta Medical Association (AMA) hosts a bi-weekly series on the care and management of COVID-19 patients in the community. This fifth webinar in the series has been designed to assist physicians in promoting self-care in a rapidly changing environment.

Changing expectations in personal and professional lives related to COVID-19 have increased stress, depression and anxiety across the population. Physicians are experiencing these same stressors and feelings. This session will focus on recognizing the impact of these stressors on physicians, some suggestions in maintaining resiliency and offering support to colleagues.

Date: March 3

Time: 12-1 p.m.

Registration information: [Here](#)

Rehabilitation Advice Line Reminder

The Rehabilitation Advice Line (RAL), 1-833-379-0563, is a service through Health Link that provides individualized self-management advice, education, resources and way-finding for callers recovering from COVID-19 and other rehabilitation concerns.

The line is staffed with occupational therapists and physiotherapists who provide evidence-based resources and education on strategies to manage day to day activities, exercises and connecting callers to available rehabilitation services and community based organizations across the province.

Albertans can access the Rehabilitation Advice Line directly at 1-833-379-0563 Monday to Friday from 9-5 p.m. or through Health Link 811 during non-business hours to receive a call back from a rehabilitation provider.

Please call 1-833-379-0563 or visit www.ahs.ca/ral for more information.

Post-COVID-19 Clinics

There are three post-COVID-19 outpatient clinics now available in Edmonton and Calgary.

- University of Alberta Kaye Edmonton Clinic – led by Dr. Giovanni Ferrara
- Peter Lougheed Centre – led by Dr. Jason Weatherald
- Rockyview General Hospital – led by Drs. Kate Skolnik and Kristin Fraser

These clinics assess and follow post-COVID-19 patients discharged from the hospitals or referred from the community, to detect and treat post-COVID-19 respiratory complications as early as possible.

Edmonton

- For patients discharged from the UAH or other ConnectCare facilities: Please send electronic referral in ConnectCare, Pulmonology, provider: Giovanni Ferrara or Ronald Damant, reason: COVID follow up or post-COVID specialist evaluation.
- For external referrals (community or hospitals/facilities not yet on ConnectCare): Please send referral via fax, 780-492-4483, pulmonary consultation, provider Giovanni Ferrara or Ronald Damant, reason: COVID follow up or Post-COVID specialist evaluation.

Calgary

- Please refer patients through the Alberta Referral Directory for the Pulmonary clinics:
 - [Peter Lougheed Centre](#)
 - [Rockyview General Hospital](#)

Additional Resources for Physicians:

- [Acute Care Outbreak Prevention & Management Task Force](#)
- [AHS Immunization Information](#)
- [AHS Virtual Health](#)
- [COVID-19 FAQ for Clinicians](#)
- [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

