

AHS Update: Active cases down in all five zones, vaccine rollout continues provincewide

Please print and share with your teams as needed

Dear staff, physicians and volunteers,

Today's Update

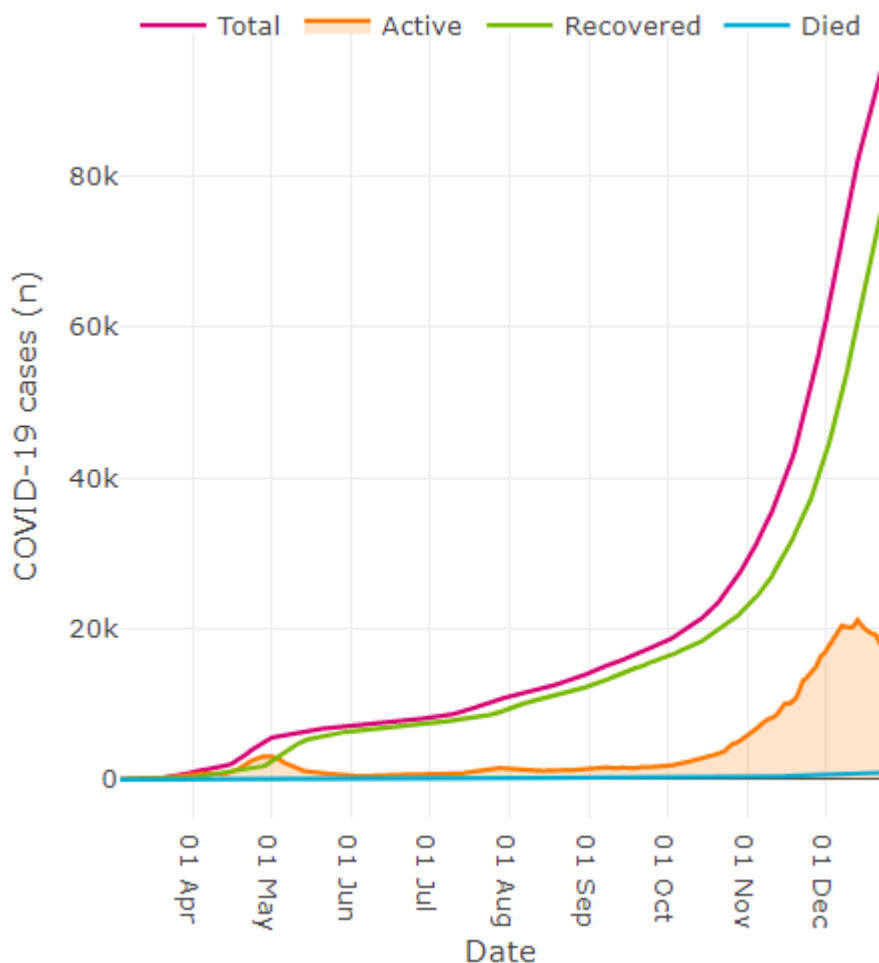
- **COVID-19 Cases in Alberta**
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COVID-19 Status

For the second consecutive week, the average number of daily new cases has decreased. There was an average of 1,273 daily new cases for the six-day period ending Dec. 22*, compared to 1,587 cases the previous week (Dec. 10 to 16), a 20 per cent decrease. There were still more than 1,000 daily new cases during this six-day period.

*[* **Note:** Usually, the average number of daily new cases captures a seven-day period from Thursday of the previous week to Wednesday of the present week. However, due to the holiday season, the average daily new cases for the present update only reflects a six-day period from Thursday, Dec. 17, to Tuesday, Dec. 22.]*

The total number of active cases in the province also decreased each day over the past week, and every zone reported a drop of active cases. As of Dec. 22, there are 17,821 active cases in the province, down from 19,607 on Dec. 17.



Edmonton Zone has the most active cases with 8,427 cases. The table below shows the number of active cases in each zone for the past two weeks.

	Active Cases (week ending Dec. 22)*	Active Cases (week ending Dec. 16)	Per Cent Change
Edmonton	8,427	9,525	-11.5%
Calgary	6,470	7,043	-8.1%
Central	1,391	1,462	-4.9%
North	1,092	1,214	-10.0%
South	390	541	-27.9%
Unknown	51	80	-36.3%

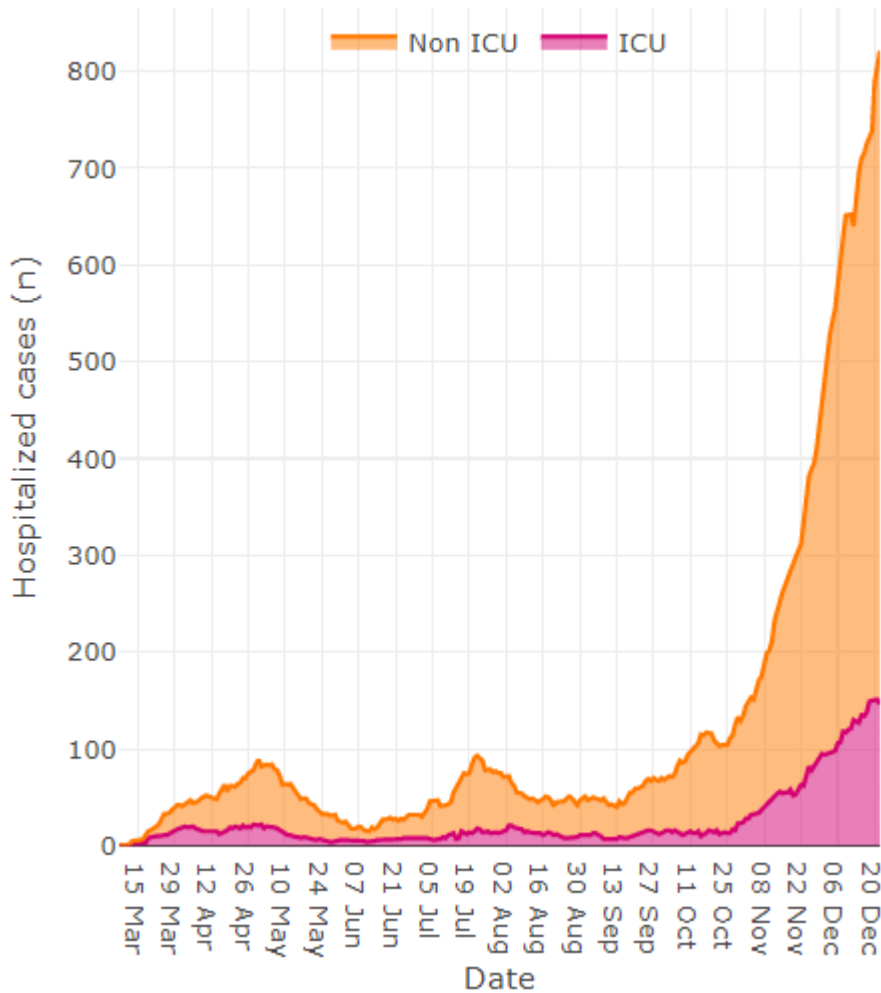
From Dec. 16 to Dec. 22, there were 4,681 cases among individuals ages 20 to 49 years (about half of all new cases during that time period), with 1,330 new cases

reported among school-aged children (five to 19 years) and 1,760 new cases among adults ages 60 years and older.

Alberta reported 100 deaths over the past six days, bringing the total number of COVID-19-related deaths in the province to 890. We extend our condolences to the families of these individuals, and to all who have lost loved ones from any cause during this time.

Hospitalizations and ICU admissions

The number of individuals being treated for COVID-19 in Alberta hospitals continues to rise. On Dec. 22, there were a record 821 individuals being treated for COVID-19 in Alberta hospitals, compared to 710 on Dec. 15, a 15 per cent increase. On Dec. 22, there were 146 individuals in intensive care, five fewer than the record of 151 set the previous day but up from 135 on Dec. 15.



The breakdown of hospitalizations by zone as of Dec. 22 is as follows:

Hospitalizations	Patients in ICU
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Edmonton	475	83
Calgary	214	47
Central	79	10
North	39	4
South	14	2

Other notable COVID-19-related information:

- As of Dec. 22, a total of 93,781 cases of COVID-19 have occurred in Alberta and a total of 3,207 individuals have been hospitalized, which amounts to 3.4 individuals for every 100 cases. In all, 75,070 Albertans have recovered from COVID-19.
- From Dec. 17 to 22, 107,819 COVID-19 tests were completed, an average of 17,970 per day. During this period, the daily positivity ranged from 6.81 per cent to 7.49 per cent. As of Dec. 22, a total of 2,690,432 tests have been conducted and 1,626,216 individuals have been tested.
- As of Dec. 23, AHS has confirmed 3,730 individuals with COVID-19 were present at schools while infectious or acquired the disease in the school setting. Currently, about two of five schools (41 per cent) in the province have reported an individual who attended their school while infectious or had in-school transmission.

Things You Need to Know

COVID-19 Testing for Healthcare Workers, Influenza Updates Paused

Due to the holidays, our COVID-19 healthcare worker testing [dashboard](#) and influenza updates have been paused until the new year.

Our annual influenza immunization campaign continues.

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](#).

More on clinics for the public, including your families, is available on the [Alberta Health Services \(AHS\) website](#).

If you got your flu shot at [a public health clinic](#), pharmacy or doctor's office, please remember to complete the [Got My Flu Shot Form](#). This online form can be submitted with just the click of a button.

Vaccine Rolls Out in All Five Zones

Healthcare workers across the province continue to roll up their sleeves as Alberta Health Services (AHS) rolls out 25,350 doses of COVID-19 vaccine to all zones.

Fourteen dedicated COVID-19 immunization centres have been set up across the province and are distributing vaccines as efficiently and quickly as possible.

In addition to Calgary and Edmonton, immunization locations have been set up in all zones, including Central Zone (Red Deer, Drumheller and Camrose); South Zone (Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Brooks and Pincher Creek); and North Zone (Grande Prairie, St. Paul, Edson and Fort McMurray).

AHS is distributing vaccine within the parameters outlined by Alberta Health. The current high level sequencing of healthcare worker vaccination is:

- Early Phase 1: Respiratory therapists, ICU workforce and healthcare workers in highest risk LTC and DSL sites
- Phase 1A: All of Phase 1, plus ED workforce and additional LTC and DSL and homecare workforce
- Phase 1B: All of Phase 1 and 1a, plus healthcare workers in medical, surgical, COVID-19 units and operating rooms
- Phase 2: Details are still being determined

Danielle Berube, a respiratory therapist at Medicine Hat Regional Hospital, says she feels excited to be among the first front-line workers to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. “It’s a step in the right direction,” she says. “I’m happy to show that healthcare workers are excited about having a vaccine and that we are able to get it. There’s an anticipation, an excitement to be a part of a moment in history.”

Georgina Hartman, a recreation therapy assistant working in long-term care in Tofield, is one of the first healthcare workers in the Central Zone to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. “A vaccine means I can keep my family safe, I can keep the people who I work with safe, and I can care for my residents and patients and not be scared of giving them (the virus),” she says.

To ensure AHS is distributing vaccine within the parameters outlined by Alberta Health, AHS will continue to directly contact all staff and physicians who are eligible to receive the vaccine in this initial phase to set up an appointment to receive the vaccine. Only those identified to receive the vaccine during Early Phase 1 and Phase 1A will receive a call. If you do not receive a call to book your appointment, please do not call Health Link. Health Link is not responsible for determining vaccine allocation. If you believe you are part of the high-priority groups and have not been contacted, please follow up with your supervisor/manager. There is currently no ability to change appointments. This will change when the online booking tool is introduced in the new year. Please do your best to honour your appointments to ensure every dose of the current, limited vaccine supply is used.

AHS has established a provincewide COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force with representation from all zones, as well as a variety of groups, including Indigenous health leaders and physicians, to ensure transparency and provincial alignment with eligibility decisions, and to address concerns with vaccination rollout. This committee is working to ensure all staff and physician lists for vaccine eligibility are

consistent across the province as we move forward with our vaccine distribution planning.

A [COVID-19 vaccination website](#) has been developed and will be updated as information becomes available.

We appreciate the hard work and dedication of the many staff involved in COVID-19 immunization planning as we continue through our pandemic journey together. Please remember to be kind to one another. We are all in this together.

New COVID-19 Temporary Lodging Program

AHS continues to look for innovative ways to support our staff and physicians, and their safety, during our COVID-19 response.

In response to ongoing staffing pressures related to COVID-19, a temporary lodging program has been developed to support staff and physicians in circumstances such as:

- Where critical front-line staff or physicians are willing to pick up additional shifts or extra hours related to COVID-19 response efforts.
- Where overtime is required for critical front-line staff or physicians in order to support COVID-19 response efforts, and where travel back and forth from the individual's residence would not be safe or would limit critical availability.
- Where temporary lodging will support a staff member or physician who may have other concerns related to returning to their residence after a shift.

The [COVID-19 Temporary Lodging Guidelines](#) provide further details about the program, including how to access the program, approvals, reimbursement and coding.

By providing staff and physicians with the option to use nearby lodging, we hope they feel supported in making the best decision for themselves and their safety. The program may also increase available hours where long commutes would not be safe or would limit critical availability.

The temporary lodging program is voluntary for those staff and physicians who qualify and wish to partake with required approval. The program is not intended to be used by staff or physicians for isolation or redeployment purposes. Provisions for redeployed staff are outlined in the applicable collective agreements and all other [AHS Travel Policy](#) provisions continue to apply.

Genetic Sequencing of Coronavirus

Alberta Precision Laboratories is continuously monitoring the genetic code of the coronavirus in Alberta to understand how it is evolving in our population and to detect whether new strains are arriving from outside the province.

The virus that causes COVID-19 is constantly evolving, with an estimated two to three genetic mutations occurring each month. By monitoring its genetic code, and sharing this information with national and international health authorities, we are able to identify and track variations of the virus that may pose new challenges for diagnosing and treating the disease in our community.

We are closely watching for the new variant that was recently identified in the United Kingdom and has spread to other countries, but has not been detected in Canada at this time. Work is underway by the international scientific and public health communities to better understand the biological significance of this particular variant.

Our genetic testing includes analysis of positive cases from individuals entering Alberta from other countries, including attendees of the World Junior Hockey Tournament in Edmonton, as well as the international traveller testing pilot program underway at the Calgary International Airport and the U.S. border crossing at Coutts.

We will continue to collaborate with international health authorities who are studying the U.K. variant to determine how it differs from the existing strains in Alberta, and whether we need to adjust any of our public health measures to identify its arrival and prevent its spread.

Verna's Weekly Video Message — Have a Safe Holiday

With the holiday season upon us, we'd like to offer warm wishes for you and your loved ones, as well as hopes for happiness and good health.

This has been a difficult year for all of us and a tragic year for many. There have been many long days and nights, and we know there's still a long road ahead of us. Yet this can still be a season for hope and renewal.

I (Verna) will find joy this holiday season by thinking about all the positive things I've seen from you throughout the year. I've seen your strength, resourcefulness and resilience in the face of crisis. These things continue to inspire me every day.

In [this week's vlog](#), some special guests and I would like to offer our sincere thanks for everything you do and share some holiday wishes.



Note: some interviews were held prior to the introduction of the current COVID-19 public health measures.

Straight Talk from You — ‘I’m Straight Out Very Worried About This’

Straight Talk is a video series in which healthcare workers talk from the heart about what they’re seeing and experiencing at work and in their communities as COVID-19 spreads across the province. AHS is posting a new Straight Talk video every day on YouTube and sharing it through our AHS accounts on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Please feel free to share these with your networks and on your social platforms as you see appropriate.

This week, we highlight a video featuring Dr. Brank Braam, Section Chief, Nephrology, AHS Edmonton Zone.



“I’m straight out very worried about this,” Dr. Braam says of rising hospitalization numbers. “If this keeps going, we won’t be able to actually treat all the patients, and we’ll get to the situations that people have seen on television earlier this year. It’s very frightening. Stay home. Stay away from each other...There is a horizon to this problem, so just sit it out.”

You can see all of the [Straight Talk videos](#), and new ones daily, on the AHS website.

Photos of the Week

Every week, we usually highlight one photo in this space that illustrates your efforts, compassion and achievements as we respond to the pandemic and support Albertans who come to us for care. But this week, we wanted to show you two photos; both featuring Santa Claus.



A special visitor dropped by the Stollery Children’s Hospital in Edmonton with a helicopter full of toys. Santa arrived on a Royal Canadian Air Force CH-146 Griffon helicopter, from Canadian Forces Base Edmonton, thanks to 408 Tactical Helicopter Squadron. Patients and their families followed the journey via live stream.



Santa and his reindeer arrived at Alberta Children's Hospital and visited children in a safe way. Here, seven-year-old Jack Wilson waves to Santa from inside the hospital while Jolly Ol' St. Nick and his reindeer enjoy some holiday sunshine outdoors.

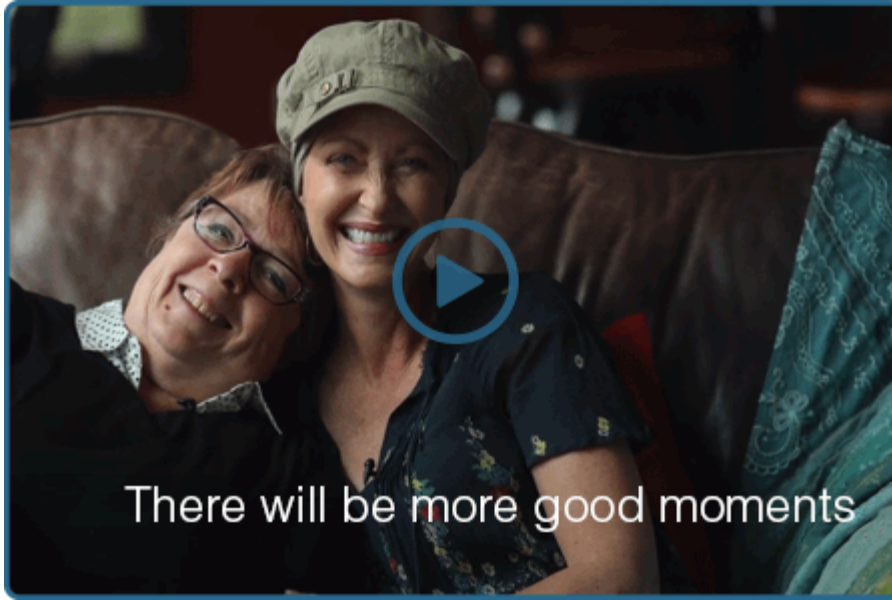
To see all our AHS photos, visit our [Instagram Gallery](#) on the AHS website.

Be Well - Be Kind

There Will Be More Good Moments

We know it's been a difficult year and we're all tired of COVID-19. We don't want to miss any more moments that matter. But there will be more.

In this new video, [AHS encourages you — and all Albertans — to hold on. Hang in. Get through.](#)



Struggling?

Call the Mental Health Helpline: 1-877-303-2642. And you can find additional supports at ahs.ca/helpintoughtimes

Grade 2 Students Create Holiday Cards for Healthcare Workers

This week we received a lovely email from Remina Chen, a Grade 2 teacher in the Edmonton public school system. Her students drew holiday cards and notes of appreciation for everyone who works in healthcare, and Remina sent them to us so we could share with all of you.

We'd like to thank Remina and her students for their kind thoughts, and for their [colourful and artistic cards](#). They have really made our spirit bright this holiday season, and we hope they put a smile on your faces, too! Here are some of the cards:



View all the cards on our [Sharing the Love webpage](#) ▶

Gratitude from Albertans

Everything you and your colleagues do every day to provide safe quality care to all Albertans is being noticed. Messages of gratitude keep pouring in from across the province and beyond during the COVID-19 pandemic. We want to share a few recent messages of thanks with you — and you can see others on our [Sharing the Love webpage](#).

“Thank you” are just two words; simple, ordinary words said and heard multiple times in a day. Mundane, everyday words. Yet exquisitely meaningful words if one really stops to truly understand the depth of these words. A lot of the times, just saying these words is all one can do to show sincere appreciation, gratitude and overwhelming gratefulness. So I utter these two words and join the thousands of people who do and feel the same. To our heroes, our overworked, at times completely drained yet so determined, amazing individuals who are fighting this battle day in and day out with at times no end in sight, I say thank you. Thank you to you, your families, your sense of humanity and incredible sense of dedication as you suit up to help save our lives. Thank you to your families who are fighting their own battle as they bid you farewell when you go to work, perhaps not seeing you for days on end. Please know that although we may not say it, show it, there are tons of us who are so grateful for all that you do, big or small. You suit up despite your own utter exhaustion — that itself is so admirable and heroic. And so I humbly conclude by saying thank you for everything.

— Kiran

This is a message to all of you difference-makers. It’s not to one person, in particular. I was in the Rockyview hospital in early October due to an accident. I was scared. I was in pain. The attention and care I received made all the difference. In the middle of the night, when I didn’t know what the

future would look like, or during the day when I had to try to move or do something completely new, not knowing whether my body would cooperate, you cheered me on. You made me feel confident and safe. I can imagine that the days are long and that you are tired. I hope that on the days when you don't feel like going in, knowing that your smile, your expertise and your care will make a difference for someone who needs your help is the reminder that what you do matters.

— Diana

Wrapping Up – You Are A Gift

A lot of work goes into this weekly message, so it might seem odd for us to say: we hope many of you aren't reading it — at least on this Christmas Eve. Rather, we hope many of you are taking a clean break from work, resting and recharging, and enjoying the season with people in your household and perhaps even connecting with others virtually. Of course, we all know healthcare never takes a day off. For all of you working over the holidays and taking vacation at another time, we wish to thank you and your families for your continuing sacrifice and dedication. Please keep in mind: for Albertans who need care during this time, and for all their loved ones, among their most precious gifts this holiday season ... is you.



We'll be back next Thursday with the final all-staff email of 2020. Till then, on behalf of Laura, myself (Verna) and the Executive Leadership Team, I wish you all the best this holiday season.

With enduring gratitude and appreciation,

Dr. Verna Yiu

AHS President & CEO

Dr. Laura McDougall

Senior Medical Officer of Health