



Message from Dr. Verna Yiu & Dr. Laura McDougall

AHS Update: COVID-19 units added to vaccine priority list; more vaccine arrives next week; hospitalization, ICU numbers decrease

Please print and share with your teams as needed

Dear staff, physicians and volunteers,

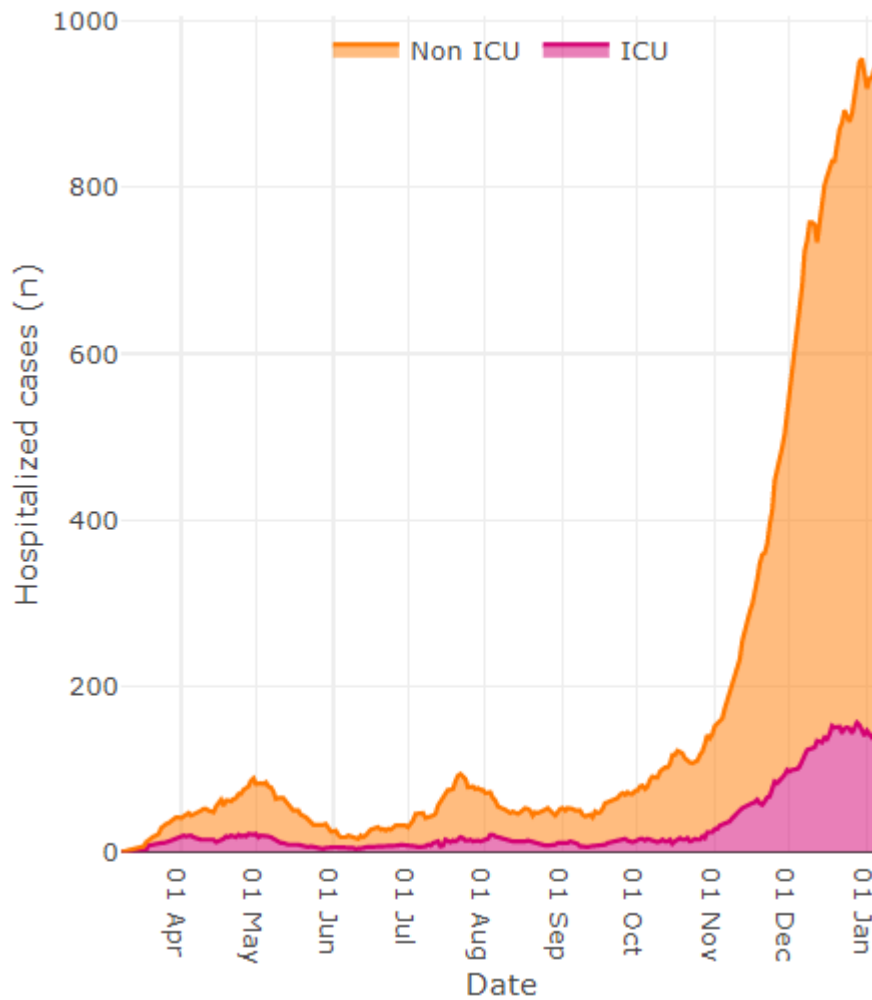
Today's Update

- COVID-19 Cases in Alberta
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COVID-19 Status

This week we lead with our hospitalization numbers. Alberta reported a week-to-week decline in the number of individuals being treated in hospital for COVID-19. On Jan. 6, there were 871 individuals with COVID-19 in hospital compared to 951 hospitalizations on Dec. 30, an eight per cent decrease. Also on Jan. 6, there were 139 individuals in intensive care compared to 145 on Dec. 30, a four per cent decrease. Despite these slight drops, the number of patients in hospital with

COVID-19 continues to put significant strain on our healthcare system. Albertans need to continue to follow public health measures to limit the spread of the virus in the province and continue to reduce pressures on the health system.



The breakdown of hospitalizations by zone as of Jan. 6 is as follows:

	Hospitalizations	Patients in ICU
Edmonton	455	64
Calgary	241	48
Central	92	17
North	64	7
South	19	3

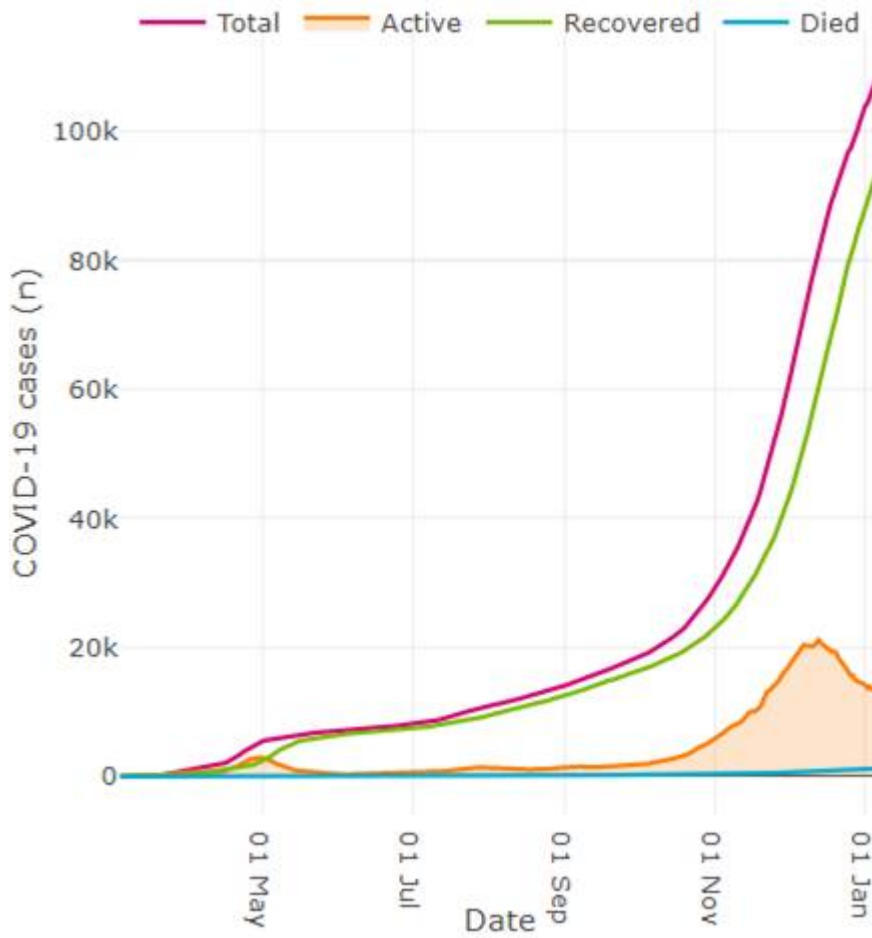
COVID-19 Cases

Alberta’s average number of daily new cases remained relatively stable this week. The average was 978 for the seven-day period ending Jan. 6, compared to 995 the previous week, a two per cent decrease.

For the week ending Jan. 6, the Edmonton Zone had the largest number of new cases at 2,513 (37 per cent of all new cases in the province), an average of 359 new cases per day. The Calgary Zone had almost as many with 2,498 new cases (36 per cent of all new cases in the province), an average of 357 cases per day. On Jan. 6, the Calgary Zone recorded 402 new cases, which was nearly 100 more than the Edmonton Zone recorded at 306 new cases.

From Dec. 31 to Jan. 6, there were 3,431 cases among individuals aged 20 to 49 years, which is half of all new cases during that time period. Over the same period, there were 1,078 new cases reported among school-aged children (5 to 19 years) and 1,173 new cases among older adults (aged 60 years and older).

As of Jan. 6, there are 13,298 active cases in the province whereas, on Dec. 29, there were 14,555 active cases, a decrease of 1,257 active cases — or 8.6 per cent. The Edmonton Zone continues to have the most active cases with 5,465, although this is a 17.5 per cent decrease from Dec. 29. The Calgary, Central and South zones also reported decreases in the numbers of active cases, whereas the North Zone had a 34 per cent increase in the number of active cases since Dec. 29.



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

	Active Cases (as of Jan. 6)	Active Cases (as of Dec. 29*)	Per Cent Change
Edmonton	5,465	6,624	-17.5%
Calgary	4,739	5,129	-7.6%
Central	1,381	1,430	-3.4%
North	1,384	1,031	34.2%
South	252	296	-14.9%
Unknown	77	45	71.1%

**Active cases as of Dec. 29 are provided as the reference since active cases as of Dec. 30 (one week prior to Jan. 6) were not available due to the holiday break.*

Other notable COVID-19-related information:

- As of Jan. 6, a total of 108,469 cases of COVID-19 have occurred in Alberta and a total of 4,443 individuals have been hospitalized, which amounts to 4.1 individuals for every 100 cases. In all, 93,954 Albertans have recovered from COVID-19.
- As of Jan. 6, 1,217 individuals have passed away from COVID-19, including 154 over the past seven days (Dec. 31 to Jan. 6). 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 Dec. 31 to Jan. 6, 90,442 COVID-19 tests were completed, an average of 12,920 per day. During this period, the daily positivity ranged from 5.4 per cent to 9.3 per cent. As of Jan. 6, a total of 2,888,432 tests have been conducted and 1,679,738 individuals have been tested.

Things You Need to Know

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.

As of Jan. 6:

- 73,828 employees (AHS, APL, and Covenant combined) have been tested for COVID-19 and, of those tested, 3,926 (or 5.31 per cent) have tested positive.
- Of the 1,047 employees who have tested positive and whose source of infection has been determined, 333 (or 31.8 per cent) acquired their infection through a workplace exposure. An additional 2,879 employees

who have tested positive are still under investigation as to the source of infection.

- 4,761 physicians (AHS, APL, and Covenant combined) have been tested for COVID-19 and, of those tested, 173 (or 3.63 per cent) have tested positive.
- Of the 48 physicians who have tested positive and whose source of infection has been determined, seven (or 14.6 per cent) acquired their infection through a workplace exposure. An additional 125 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](#).

Healthcare Workers in COVID-19, Medical and Surgical Units Added To Vaccine Priority List

Starting immediately, vaccine appointments will be offered to healthcare workers in medical, surgical and COVID-19 units. This means about 3,300 COVID-19 unit staff and 15,400 medical and surgical unit staff are now eligible for the vaccine as well as roughly 3,300 related physicians.

Emails with links to the AHS online booking tool will be sent out to these groups starting today and over the weekend. Not everyone will receive their email today; please watch your AHS email as the unique links are specific to each individual.

If you are a physician in these groups, please watch for an email in the next 72 hours. If you have not received an email within 72 hours, please contact us at cmo@ahs.ca.

The online booking tool provides identified healthcare workers with options to choose a preferred time, date and location to receive their immunization. The tool also ensures the healthcare worker books a second dose within the allowable date range. After booking your appointment, you may change the appointment time or date within the allowable date range for the second dose.

To further boost the vaccine roll-out effort, Alberta's Chief Medical Officer of Health issued a directive to expand the types of healthcare practitioners that can be used in the COVID-19 immunization program. The directive will support Alberta Health Services to recruit additional health professionals in more settings like LTC/DSL and increase the number of available immunizers.

The full list of current vaccine delivery phases is available on the [Alberta Health website](#).

If you have any questions about the vaccine rollout, contact your supervisor or medical leader or see the [Staff FAQ](#). Additional information can be found on our [external COVID-19 vaccine site](#).

Other COVID-19 Vaccination Updates

As of 12:20 p.m. today (Jan. 8), more than 38,500 Albertans received their first dose of COVID-19 vaccine, including:

- 16,600+ healthcare workers
- 12,600+ long-term care (LTC) and designated supportive living (DSL) staff
- 9,400+ LTC/DSL residents

Vaccine supply

As we announced earlier this week, more than 13,600 additional doses of Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine have arrived in Alberta as of Jan. 6. We expect additional doses of both Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine and Moderna vaccine to arrive next week and those will be distributed across the province as quickly as possible.

Ramping Up Immunizations

To continue increasing the pace of vaccination, this is what we're doing:

A COVID-19 online booking tool launched on Jan. 4 and is accessible to eligible healthcare workers by invitation only. Eligible staff and physicians will receive an email with a unique link to book their appointments. As of Jan. 8, more than 10,500 appointments have been booked. If you choose to receive COVID-19 immunization, please go in and book your appointments as soon as possible. Thousands of staff are waiting to be immunized. We want to ensure all available immunization appointments and vaccine doses are filled and used as quickly as possible. Please honour your appointment. No-shows and cancellations negatively impact our immunization efforts and could mean a coveted vaccination appointment goes unused. Staff who have received emails to book appointments online will also receive a text message, reminding them to go into their email to book their appointments.

- We continue to work closely with our partners in LTC and DSL. We expect to visit 80 per cent of facilities by Jan. 19 and some zones expect to have completed their LTC/DSL sites as early as next week.
- AHS is working across every zone to increase our number of immunization locations. We currently have 45 immunization locations across the province and will expand our locations as more vaccine becomes available.
- AHS and Covenant Health are piloting a program to bring temporary satellite COVID-19 immunization clinics to some emergency departments throughout the province. These satellite clinics will increase opportunities for eligible emergency department staff and physicians to be immunized during this phase of the sequenced COVID-19 immunization rollout.

Quarantine Requirements Still Apply Even if You've Been Immunized

Healthcare workers who meet current COVID-19 exposure criteria (e.g., unprotected close contact with a COVID-19 case, or a recent return to Alberta from international travel) are still required to quarantine. Immunization does not change quarantine requirements.

Many teams across AHS are making every effort to provide access to COVID-19 immunization clinics to eligible staff and physicians. In addition to the online booking tool, Health Link and Public Health staff in the North, Central and South zones have been calling eligible staff and physicians directly.

We understand the frustration of those who want to be immunized and are not yet eligible. Please be patient. We would love to be able to immunize everyone who interacts with patients and families immediately, but the reality is that it's going to take some time. We are doing all we can to push hard to roll out the vaccine as it becomes available according to the direction provided by Alberta Health.

Adhere to Public Health, PPE Guidance Even if You're Immunized

Currently, there is insufficient evidence on the duration of protection and effectiveness of the vaccine in reducing transmission of COVID-19. While the vaccines being delivered have shown very high effectiveness in clinical trials, no vaccines are 100 per cent protective. Immunized healthcare workers are still required to adhere to existing PPE guidance, including continuous masking, continuous eye protection, and IPC recommendations for COVID-19. Healthcare workers who are close contacts of cases of COVID-19 will still need to isolate for 14 days. Learn more [here](#).

Our Condolences: We Grieve Together

We are deeply saddened about the recent loss of three healthcare workers who had tested positive for COVID-19.

We've experienced grief over the deaths of Albertans throughout the pandemic, and we recognize that the fear of a loss of our colleagues has been a concern for all of us. Losing a colleague, a member of our family, impacts us all greatly.

Our hearts go out to their families, loved ones and colleagues. We grieve with them.

There will be many emotions that arise over the coming days. We encourage you to access support if you need it during this time. Your Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP) is here for you. EFAP services are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Call EFAP (1-877-273-3134) to get started.

There are also confidential support services available for physicians:

- [Physician and Family Support Program](#) (PFSP) by the Alberta Medical Association. The support line at 1-877-SOS-4MDS (767-4637) is available 24/7.
- AHS Physician Wellness, Diversity and Leadership page, ahs.ca/mdwellness, physicians can find wellness zoom rooms, and tips and guides to cope with stress.

Healthcare workers across the province have been working tirelessly to take care of Albertans, and we are so grateful for their commitment and their dedication. We will continue to do all that we can to protect healthcare workers by keeping their work environments safe and ensuring that all precautions, such as personal protective equipment education and training, are taken.

Please reach out if you need support over the coming days, and always.

Rapid Testing for COVID-19 Continues to Expand

Kudos and thanks to the staff at Alberta Precision Laboratories who continued working diligently over the holidays processing thousands of COVID-19 tests every day and moving ahead with the expansion of rapid point-of-care testing across the province.

The launch of clinical pilots of rapid point-of-care testing at assessment centres, hospitals, continuing care facilities and homeless shelters before Christmas set the stage for the broader implementation of rapid testing that is now underway in all AHS zones. The rapid point-of-care testing systems provided by the federal government will form an important new pillar of the provincial COVID-19 testing program.

By the end of this month, rapid point-of-care testing is expected to be in place at 48 assessment centres, 27 hospital labs and four homeless shelters in Calgary and Edmonton. The addition of mobile testing teams for long-term care and designated supportive living facilities are also a great example of the innovative approach Alberta is taking to protect populations that are most vulnerable to outbreaks. These mobile teams are currently operating in Edmonton and Central Zone, and will be expanded to other communities in the coming weeks.

We have received more than one million rapid point-of-care tests so far, and APL's independent validation work has provided valuable information about the sensitivity and effectiveness of these systems compared to our lab-based polymerase chain reaction method, which remains the gold standard for large-scale testing programs. Rapid point-of-care testing is most effective when used on patients who are within the first week of showing symptoms of COVID-19, helping us to more quickly identify and manage positive cases in the community, especially in more rural and remote locations.

Testing continues to be a critical piece of Alberta's COVID-19 response, and our combined APL/AHS teams have now completed more than 2.8 million tests on almost 1.7 million people since the beginning of the pandemic.

Enhanced Public Health Measures Extended Until At Least Jan. 21

The Government of Alberta announced yesterday that the [enhanced public health measures](#), implemented a month ago, will remain in place provincewide until at least Jan. 21.

Health officials continue to actively evaluate the situation and will adjust measures if required.

Businesses, organizations and service providers will be given at least one week's notice prior to changes to the current health measures that may affect them.

The government also announced students will return to in-person learning, as planned, on Monday. [Public health measures](#) remain in place to support the health and safety of students, teachers and staff.

Verna's Weekly Video Message — Role of Workforce Resource Groups

Feeling connected is something we really value at AHS, which is one reason why we launched workforce resource groups a few years ago.

These voluntary groups bring together members of our workforce who share common identities, characteristics, bonds and backgrounds. They help ensure those who may be marginalized or experiencing barriers have the support and resources they need to feel connected and grow.

Members can network, address common issues and concerns, and receive support from others in the organization with similar backgrounds, experiences or interests. Now 900 members strong and growing, these groups help improve our sense of belonging, inclusion and engagement for all.

Joining me (Verna) to [tell us more are the co-chairs of our three current workforce resource groups](#):

- Jenny Vannistelrooy, Manager Contract Strategy and Performance, EMS, and co-chair of the EMS Women Leaders workforce resource group.
- Andrew McCloskey, Senior Organizational Change Management Specialist, Technology Services, IT, and co-chair of the Proud Together LGBTQ2S workforce resource group.
- Randal Bell, Senior Advisor - Indigenous Populations, Provincial Planning & Capacity Management, and co-chair of the Ethnic Minority workforce resource group.



Jenny, Andrew and Randall discuss the idea behind the workforce resource groups and provide updates on their group activities.

Straight Talk from You — ‘It Makes Me Feel Emotional Because It’s Scary’

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 videos every week 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 Natasha Fusco, a registered nurse in the intensive care unit of the Royal Alexandra Hospital.



“I’ve had people in my family who have passed away from COVID. It’s something that needs to be taken seriously,” says Fusco. “The patients that are coming in here are really, really sick. Not all of them have a lot of comorbidities. Not all of them have a lot of past medical history. Most of these patients are around my parents’ age. It makes me feel emotional because it’s scary.”

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

Photo of the Week

Every week, we highlight a 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.



Shauna May holds her two-year-old daughter Izzy as she gets a COVID-19 swab from registered nurse Amaka Ashiofu.

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

Influenza Immunization Update

More than 1.47 million doses of influenza vaccine have been administered in Alberta. This is an increase of more than 26,000 doses from the last influenza update provided before the holiday break.

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

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

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

Be Well - Be Kind

Kickstart Your Wellness

Start the New Year off by getting the support you need to stay healthy and well. Whether you're looking to improve your health, help someone through a

challenging time or need topic-specific advice, your [Employee and Family Assistance Program](#) (EFAP) is here for you. EFAP services are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Call EFAP (1-877-273-3134) to get started.

Other supports include:

- [New EFAP Resilience App](#)
- [EFAP Life Smart Coaching](#)
- [EFAP Counselling services](#)

[Wellness seminars](#) are available for 2021. Register through [MyLearningLink](#):

- COVID-19: Working from Home
- COVID-19: Strategies for Managing Stress
- COVID-19: Building Resilience

Additional supports:

- [Feeling Overwhelmed?](#)
- [Self-care Tactics](#)
- [How do I support someone who may be struggling?](#)

Look through our [Resilience, Wellness and Mental Health Resource Guide](#) for additional resources. If you have questions, connect with us at wellness@ahs.ca.

Gratitude for Feed the Frontline campaign

We want to offer our sincere gratitude to the Calgary Health Foundation and its donors for the recently launched Feed the Frontline campaign.

Last month, the Calgary Health Foundation invited all Calgary Zone staff and physicians to receive a complimentary meal from Sunterra Market, delivered to their home. The foundation's goal with the campaign was to show appreciation for local AHS staff who have worked tirelessly throughout this pandemic.

For those of you who have received a meal or will be receiving one, we hope it offers welcome respite and reprieve during these challenging times. We know all of you are working long hours and making many sacrifices to help keep Albertans healthy and safe. As we continue to face difficult days, often spending time away from our loved ones, we hope you know that we appreciate and value everything that all of you do.

Sharing the Love — Coin Highlights Value of Mental Wellness

I just want to say how proud and honoured I feel being a part of this wonderful and vital institution known as Alberta Health Services. I am fortunate to work with amazing people in the ICU. During this stressful time dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, staff in our department have shown resilience, fortitude and compassion caring for the very sick. My healthcare aide colleagues have been side-by-side with nurses caring for patients. I've started a little program to make sure that we are there for each other in this stressful time. At Christmas, I handed out to all full-time healthcare aides a challenge coin to let them know that if they are feeling stressed out

or overwhelmed that the team has their back and are here to listen if they need to talk. This step has given our team a sense of security knowing that they can approach a team member if they have to talk. Here are photos of our team with their challenge coins. Hopefully others will find what we are doing is a positive step dealing with mental health.

-Alfred Schmidtke, healthcare aide, Foothills Medical Centre, Calgary



Clockwise from top left: Carmina Caddauan, Michael Aspinall and Jomi Roy B Cabali.



Clockwise from top left: Melanie De Leon, Carolina Boucher and Wesley Roberts.



Clockwise from left: Kristine-Ono Castillo, Jenny Gutin and Edith Yorga.

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](#).



I was recently intubated in your ICU for almost two weeks due to COVID-19. I want to let all of your front-line workers — from the cleaning and kitchen staff, porters, nurses, doctors, specialists, and everyone else — know that I'm alive because of you. I was able to return home to my husband and son because of your expert care. The compassion shown to my family and myself was like nothing I've ever experienced. I just can't say enough good things about you all and I hope you all stay healthy through this. We will mask, distance, and wash our hands faithfully in honour of the work you do. The photo attached is the day I got to go home with my family after a very long 19 days.

-Michelle

We have been living every family's nightmare, with a cancer diagnosis in the middle of this pandemic. You have stood beside us, provided us with not only the necessary medical needs but resources as well, and offered hope. I wish we could give each of you a hug but know there is a circle of outstretched arms of Albertans reaching out in a virtual hug for all of you.

-the Stuart Family

Thank you to all our healthcare workers for sacrificing so much to be with our loved ones, especially when we can't. Our family was very lucky to have such a caring medical team to care for our mom during her final months. She left us in June at her care facility. I am grateful for everyone who we met during this journey. I can never repay your kindness but I wanted you to know that your actions do make a difference. You truly are angels. I will continue to stay home to honour you.

-Bonnie

Wrapping Up — A New Year and a Renewed Commitment to Public Health Measures

A new year is typically a time of new beginnings. But because of COVID-19, the start of 2021 feels a lot like the end of 2020. Sadly, there has been more sickness and more deaths, including a physician and two other healthcare workers. They may not have been all staff at AHS but, as healthcare workers, they were members of the AHS family nonetheless — and our condolences go out to their loved ones, patients and colleagues. But as the new year dawns, we do have new hope thanks to the ongoing vaccine rollout. We know provincial immunization will consume this year and beyond. Nevertheless, let us hold onto this hope and buoy ourselves with the knowledge there will be an end to this pandemic. Let us also remind ourselves that we have the ability to protect one another as healthcare workers and other Albertans get immunized over the course of this new year. Quite simply, we protect ourselves and others by following the public health measures of Dr. Deena Hinshaw, the province’s Chief Medical Officer of Health — and, although we cannot control the actions of others, we can all make the individual choice to do the right thing and encourage the people we know to do the same. We’d like to leave you this week with a [video of the One Voice Children’s Choir singing the Alicia Keys song Good Job](#), a tribute to all COVID-19 heroes including all of you.



As the song says: “You're doing a good job/ Don't get too down / The world needs you now / Know that you matter.” We couldn’t agree more with that sentiment.

With enduring gratitude and appreciation,

Dr. Verna Yiu
AHS President & CEO

Dr. Laura McDougall
Senior Medical Officer of Health