



Message from Dr. Verna Yiu & Dr. Laura McDougall

*AHS Update: Active cases continue to climb in every zone,
Phase 2B booking through AHS begins Monday*

Please print and share with your teams as needed

Today's Update

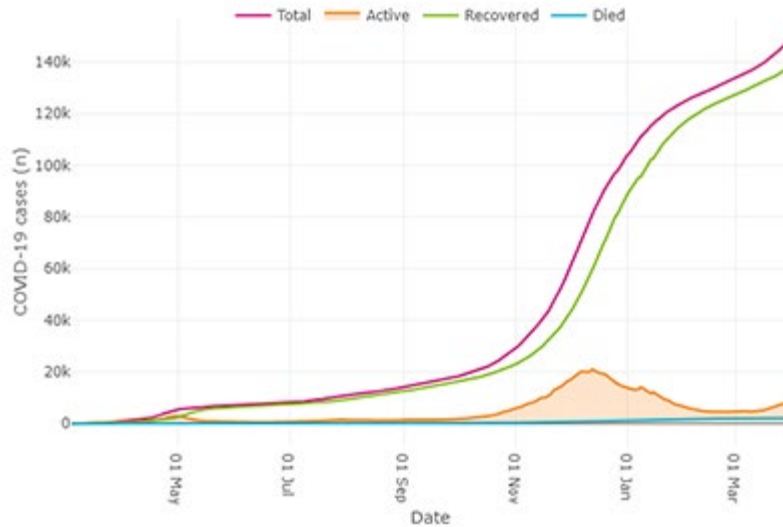
Dear staff, physicians and volunteers,

- **COVID-19 Cases in Alberta**
- **COVID-19 Immunization Update**
- **COVID-19 Testing for Healthcare Workers — The Latest Numbers**
- **Outbreak Control Strategy Introduced**
- **Critical Worker Benefit Update**
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COVID-19 Status

COVID-19 and variants of concern continue to spread throughout the province, as the number of active cases spiked once again this past week, with four of the five AHS zones reporting week-to-week increases of 20 per cent or more.

As of March 30, there were 8,350 active cases in the province compared to 6,835 on March 24, a 22 per cent increase (representing 1,515 additional active cases).



For the 12th consecutive week, the Calgary Zone had the most active cases with 3,923, although all zones reported increases as you can see in the table below.

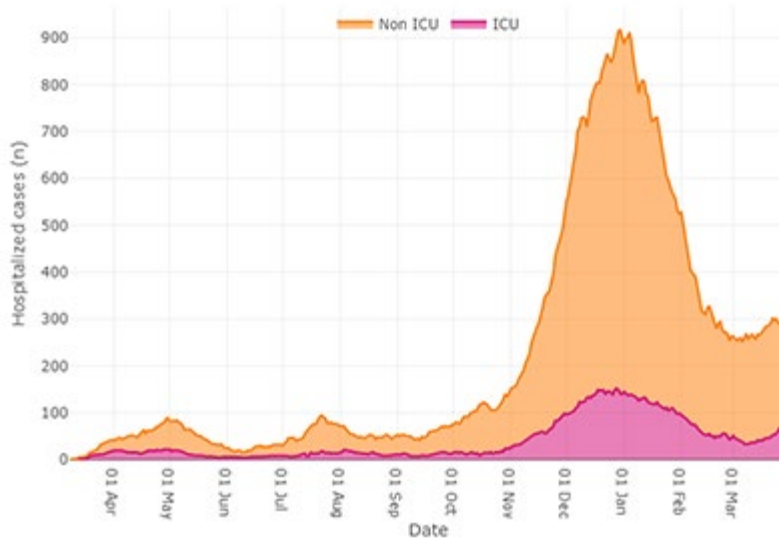
	Active Cases (as of March 30)	Active Cases (as of March 24)	Per cent Change
Calgary	3,923	3,099	+26.6%
Edmonton	1,844	1,512	+22.0%
North	970	798	+21.6%
South	854	790	+8.1%
Central	733	611	+20.0%
Unknown	26	25	+4.0%

There was an average of 685 daily new cases for the six-day period ending on March 30, compared to 593 the previous week (March 18 to March 24), a 15.5 per cent increase.* Over this six-day period, the Calgary Zone had the largest number of new cases with 1,889, which is more than double the number of cases in the Edmonton Zone (915 new cases) during the same time 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 Easter holiday, the average daily new cases for the present update only reflects a six-day period from Thursday, March 25, to Tuesday, March 30.*

Hospitalizations and ICU admissions

Over the past week, the number of individuals requiring an intensive care unit (ICU) stay for COVID-19 increased, although the total number of individuals being treated in Alberta’s hospitals remained the same at 301. On March 30, there were 63 individuals in ICUs compared to 55 in ICUs on March 24, a 14.5 per cent increase.



A total of 238 individuals were in non-ICU hospital beds on March 30 compared to 246 individuals in non-ICU hospital beds on March 24, a 3.3 per cent decrease.

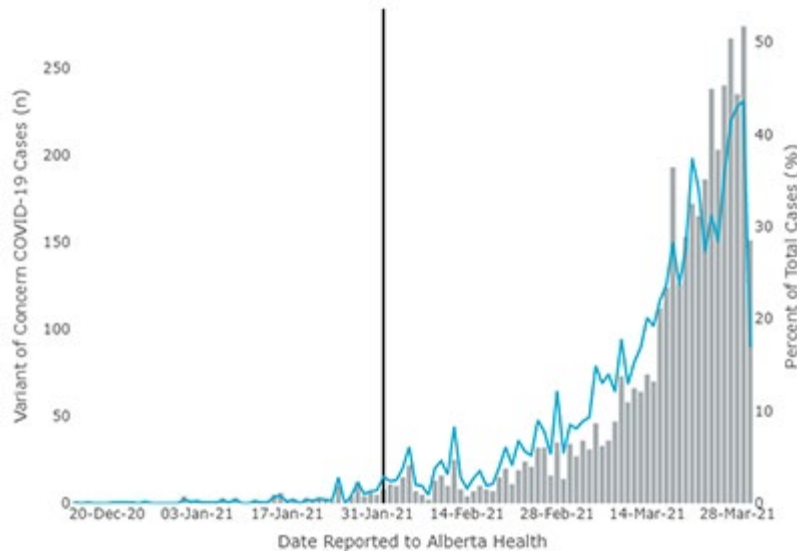
The breakdown of hospitalizations by zone as of March 30 is as follows:

	Hospitalizations	ICUs
Calgary	112	31
Edmonton	96	15
South	33	8
Central	33	4
North	27	5

Variants of concern

Alberta Health has now reported 4,055 cases of COVID-19 variants of concern (VOC): 4,030 are B.1.1.7 variant (U.K. variant), 20 are B.1.351 variant (South African variant) and 5 are P.1 (Brazilian variant). Of the 4,055 VOC cases, 2,660 are active (31.9 per cent of total active cases), 1,372 people have recovered and 23 people have died.

The figure below shows new VOC cases (grey bars) and the percentage of VOC cases identified compared to other cases of COVID-19 (blue line); between March 22 and March 28, the percentage of VOC cases ranged from 27.2 per cent to 43.0 per cent.



Other notable COVID-19-related information

- As of March 30, a total of 148,332 cases of COVID-19 have been detected in Alberta and a total of 6,555 individuals have been hospitalized, which amounts to 4.4 individuals for every 100 cases. In all, 137,992 Albertans have recovered from COVID-19.
- As of March 30, 1,990 individuals have passed away from COVID-19, including 14 deaths over a six-day period (March 25 to March 30). 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 March 25 to March 30, 67,010 COVID-19 tests were completed, an average of 11,168 tests per day. During this period, the daily positivity ranged from 5.46 per cent to 7.71 per cent. As of March 30, a total of 3.7 million tests have been conducted and 1.9 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 March 22 to 28 was 1.09.

Things You Need to Know

COVID-19 Immunization Update

By the numbers

As of 7 a.m. today (April 1), more than 644,400 total doses of COVID-19 vaccine have been administered by AHS. More than 437,500 Albertans have received one dose of COVID-19 vaccine and more than 103,300 have received both Dose 1 and Dose 2.

Temporary pause on use of Covishield / AstraZeneca for people under the age of 55

As of March 29, Alberta is temporarily pausing the use of the Covishield/AstraZeneca vaccine for people under the age of 55. This recommendation is aligned with current [National Advisory Committee on Immunization \(NACI\)](#) recommendations.

This is a precautionary measure being taken across Canada while more investigation happens on vaccine-induced prothrombotic immune thrombocytopenia (VIPIT), a rare blood clot condition following immunization. For people under the age of 55 who have received the AstraZeneca/Covishield vaccine, the risk of experiencing blood clots is very low.

However, as with anyone who receives any medication, including a vaccine, they should monitor their health and seek immediate medical attention if they experience any health concerns. If they experience any of the following [symptoms](#) within four to 20 days after immunization, they should immediately seek medical attention.

There have been no reported cases of these blood clots following immunization in Alberta or anywhere in Canada. There is no evidence of any similar issues linked to the other vaccines used in Alberta. Safety is always our top priority and this pause will enable Health Canada to conduct further assessments and gather more information from around the world.

The AstraZeneca/Covishield vaccine remains a good choice for those who are 55 and over and is highly effective at preventing severe outcomes from COVID-19. For more information, see the [COVID-19 Vaccine FAQ](#).

Phase 2B booking through AHS starts Monday

The next group of eligible Albertans will be able to start booking COVID-19 immunizations through AHS starting April 5 at 8 a.m. as part of Phase 2B. This phase includes Albertans who are 16-64 years of age with any one of a list of eligible chronic conditions. A full list of associated underlying health conditions is available at alberta.ca/covid.

AHS is offering appointments in a staged approach and will start with those born in or before 1963. All eligible Albertans wanting to book their appointment through AHS can do so through the [online booking tool](#) or by calling Health Link at 811. AHS will continue to expand eligibility to include additional birth years in the days to come.

Pharmacies across Alberta will continue to offer immunizations to all Albertans born in or before 1963 with underlying health conditions. Eligible individuals can book their appointment through a [participating pharmacy](#).

During this phase of the vaccine rollout, Alberta will operate on the honour system. A doctor's note or other proof of an underlying condition is not required. Individuals who are pregnant, immunocompromised or with an autoimmune disorder are encouraged to consult their healthcare provider prior to booking their appointment if they have any questions.

Family booking starts April 5

In conjunction with the launch of Phase 2B, AHS has made enhancements to the online booking tool to allow other eligible family members to book vaccines at the same time. Starting on April 5, the tool will provide options for eligible Albertans to book appointments at the same time and at the same clinic for up to three additional family members.

COVID-19 vaccine for homebound Albertans

On March 29, AHS began immunizing eligible homebound Albertans. Homebound individuals are physically unable to leave their home, such as for medical and personal appointments. This population is considered vulnerable and requires immunization to be provided in their homes.

Similar to how the annual influenza vaccine is provided to homebound individuals, the COVID-19 vaccine is administered by AHS public health or home care staff, depending on the zone. Eligible home care clients will be contacted directly by AHS to arrange immunization.

Albertans who think they may be eligible to receive the COVID-19 vaccine at home but are not a home care client are encouraged to contact Health Link at 811. Health Link staff will do an initial screening to check eligibility. The zone teams will then follow up to do a second eligibility check and book their COVID-19 immunization if appropriate.

Only homebound individuals are eligible to be immunized through this program at this time. This will ensure homebound individuals are immunized as quickly as possible, with the resources and vaccine supply available. For more information, see [Immunization - Booking Your Appointment](#).

Thank you

Thank you to all eligible Albertans who have received their COVID-19 vaccines or booked their immunization appointment. We will continue to work to ensure all adult Albertans who want a vaccine will get their first dose by the end of June. For more information, please refer to alberta.ca/covid and AHS' [COVID-19 Vaccine FAQ](#).

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 March 31:

- 79,139 employees (AHS, APL and Covenant combined) have been tested for COVID-19 and, of those tested, 5,012 (or 6.3 per cent) have tested positive.
- Of the 2,867 employees who have tested positive and whose source of infection has been determined, 640 (or 22.3 per cent) acquired their infection

through a workplace exposure. An additional 2,145 employees who have tested positive are still under investigation as to the source of infection.

- 5,096 physicians (AHS, APL and Covenant combined) have been tested for COVID-19 and, of those tested, 207 (or 4.1 per cent) have tested positive.
- Of the 112 physicians who have tested positive and whose source of infection has been determined, 11 (or 9.8 per cent) acquired their infection through a workplace exposure. An additional 95 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](#).

Outbreak Control Strategy Introduced

As part of a provincewide strategy to manage acute care outbreaks, AHS will now offer COVID-19 immunization to healthcare workers when there are two or more concurrent variant of concern (VOC) outbreaks on-site.

As such, and in support of the ongoing outbreaks at the Grey Nuns Community Hospital, as well as at the Royal Alexandra Hospital, involving VOCs on two units, all on-site staff, physicians, residents, students currently doing their clinical placement and contracted service providers are being offered immunization over the coming days.

We are currently working with Alberta Health on future sequencing as quickly and safely as possible. For the full list of phases, please visit the [Government of Alberta's website](#).

Immunization of all healthcare workers — including students who work in acute care facilities — are part of Phase 2C, which is expected to begin later in April.

Critical Worker Benefit Update

This week, unionized staff received an email from Human Resources confirming their eligibility for the [Critical Worker Benefit](#), based on the criteria established by the Government of Alberta (GoA). As of today, GoA has announced they are expanding the criteria for the Critical Worker Benefit. We appreciate your patience as AHS works to understand how these changes in eligibility apply to our staff. More information will be shared in the coming days.

As a government program, the Critical Worker Benefit requires personal information of all employees who meet the eligibility criteria of this benefit to be sent directly to the GoA from AHS through a secure data transfer process. Eligible staff will have an opportunity to object to the transfer of their personal information from AHS to the GoA and opt out of the benefit.

For more information, visit the [Frequently Asked Questions](#). Please note: the FAQs do not yet reflect the expanded criteria or changes to eligibility announced by the GoA today.

Verna's Weekly Video Message — Cancer Awareness During COVID-19

We know many people have not been seeking care for serious health concerns since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. In Alberta, there has been a steady decrease in the number of new cancers being diagnosed — and this trend is happening across Canada and the world.

In response, AHS launched a provincewide public health cancer awareness campaign last winter to remind Albertans to listen to their bodies and book an appointment to see their family physician, even during a pandemic. The healthcare system in Alberta has been and continues to be available to help screen for, diagnose and manage cancer, with steps being taken to ensure we can do so safely.

Dr. Douglas Stewart — Physician of Internal Medicine, Medical Oncology; Provincial Medical Director of the Cancer Strategic Clinical Network; and campaign lead — joins me (Verna) to [talk about the campaign](#) and why it's so important to respond appropriately to any issues people may experience with their health or body, and to stay up to date with routine cancer screening.

Doug shares what trends we are seeing in cancer diagnosis during the pandemic, what important symptoms to look for and when to seek medical help, and how the campaign is helping spread awareness to all Albertans.

Visit ahs.ca/bodytalk to learn more and to see available resources.



Influenza Immunization Update

As of March 27, 1.6 million doses of influenza vaccine have been administered in Alberta. Immunizations are up by more than 191,600 compared to the same time last year.

For the 21st week in row, there are no reported cases of seasonal influenza in Alberta.

Alberta Precision Laboratories (APL) has tested 110,426 respiratory swabs for influenza from Aug. 23, 2020, to March 27, 2021.

Please note: the 2020-2021 Alberta Influenza Immunization program has ended for the general public. March 31 was the last day for members of the general public to receive influenza immunization. Eligible children under the age of nine, who have received one dose of the influenza vaccine prior to March 31, will be offered their second dose until April 30.

If you got your influenza vaccine at a [public health clinic](#), pharmacy or doctor's office, please complete the [Got My Flu Shot Form](#).

Supporting Our Healthcare Teams — Physician Assistant Regulation

The [Government of Alberta announced](#) that, as of today (April 1), physician assistants — academically skilled professionals who function as physician extenders — become a fully regulated health professional in Alberta.

Physician assistants work under the supervision of a physician or group of physicians within a team, and their scope of practice is negotiated by the relationship with the physician(s) and the care setting. Physician assistants collaborate and work alongside physicians, nurse practitioners, registered nurses and licensed practical nurses, blending their individual skills and knowledge to provide optimum patient care.

For more information on physician assistants, visit the [Canadian Association of Physician Assistants website](#) or the [CPSA website](#).

Be Well - Be Kind

Time to Recharge and Boost Your Well-Being

With spring finally here, it's a great time to check-in with yourself and to take stock of your well-being. Managing fatigue and getting good quality sleep are both important ways to maintain your health, wellness and safety. See the [new toolkit](#) for practical tips to manage your fatigue.

There are many other resources to support your mental health and well-being. Check out a few of the resources below:

- [COVID-19 Self-Care Posters](#)
- [Self-Care Tactics](#)

- [Employee and Family Assistance Program](#)
 - [Wellness Check-in](#)
 - [EFAP Resilience App](#)
 - [e-AP](#)
 - [Wellness Seminars and E-Learning](#)
- [Resilience, Wellness and Mental Health Resource Guide](#)

You can also read this [work safe blog](#) to learn more about self-care tips. If you have questions or feedback on the resources above, contact wellness@ahs.ca.

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 transported to (Strathcona Community Hospital) about 11 p.m. and left the next day about 2 p.m., so I had two shifts of doctors and nurses. The staff in emergency are the most genuine, caring people I have ever met. Thank you so much. I felt safe and well cared for. You are amazing.

— Brenda

Thank you for caring for me. I'm on the mend because of you. All of your health team showed compassion, care, and made me feel comfortable. Makes me so grateful for the services we have here in the province, especially during a pandemic, which complicates everything.

— Anonymous

Wrapping Up — Enjoy the Long Weekend, Be Safe

As you likely noticed, this week's all-staff is arriving in your inbox a day early, as the Easter long weekend begins tomorrow. For all of you working over the long weekend, we thank you for your sacrifice — and so do the Albertans who come to us for care and support. However, we hope all of you have an opportunity — if not this long weekend, then over the next several days or weeks — to enjoy some downtime, rest and recharge. We know healthcare workers are always busy, and there's still a lot of pandemic response ahead of us, despite the ongoing rollout of the COVID-19 vaccines. Giving ourselves permission to unplug from work responsibilities, even briefly, represents the sort of self-care that will help all of us maintain our physical and mental well-being.

We also encourage you to follow public health measures to keep yourself and your loved ones safe this long weekend and beyond. If you can, stay close to home. Remember all public and private indoor social gatherings continue to be prohibited. Close contacts are limited to household members only, although people who live alone

can have up to two close contacts. If you wish to celebrate with loved ones and friends from outside of your household, please do so virtually.

We understand and appreciate how hard it is to be separated from those you love, especially as we look ahead to various traditional and religious celebrations. We strongly encourage you to stay physically distant but socially connected. It may be hard but it's what we all need to do to protect ourselves and those we love, especially as the variants of concern continue to spread throughout the province.

Thank you for all you do, each and every day.

With enduring gratitude and appreciation,

Dr. Verna Yiu

AHS President & CEO

Dr. Laura McDougall

Senior Medical Officer of Health

