



## Message from Dr. Verna Yiu & Dr. Laura McDougall

### *AHS Update: Dr. Yiu shares thoughts on the week, deadline approaches to submit proof of immunization*

*Please print and share with your teams as needed*

Dear staff, physicians and volunteers,

#### **Today's Update**

- One-on-One Interview with Dr. Verna Yiu
- Mental Health Supports When You Need Them
- Mandatory Vaccination — An Ethics Perspective
- Update on Janssen Vaccine
- Deadline Approaches to Submit Your Proof of Immunization for COVID-19
- Updated Designated Support Person Access in Maternity Implemented by Monday
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- PPE Question of the Week — Have We Learned Anything New About COVID-19 Transmission?
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- Wrapping Up

We would like to recognize that our work takes place on historical and contemporary Indigenous lands, including the territories of Treaties 6, 7 & 8, and the homeland of the Métis. We also acknowledge the many Indigenous communities that have been forged in urban centres across Alberta.



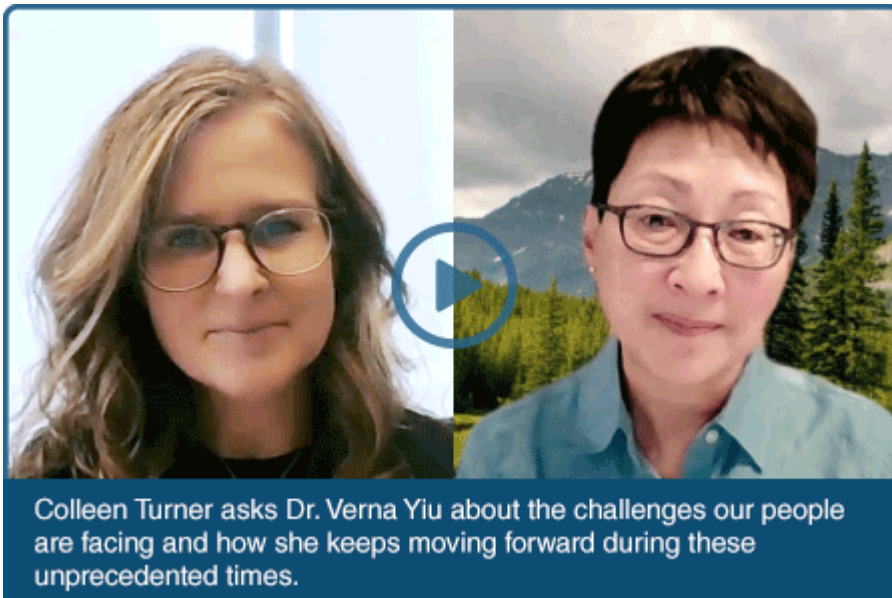
**Deadline:** You Must Submit Your COVID-19 Immunization Status by **October 16**

## One-on-One Interview with Dr. Verna Yiu

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As we continue to push through the fourth wave of this pandemic, there is increased pressure on our health system and our people. COVID-19 fatigue is real, and many of us are feeling it now, more than ever – especially with all the pandemic coverage in traditional and social media.

I (Verna) am no exception. This week, Colleen Turner, Vice President of Community Engagement and Communications, (virtually) [sits down with me for a one-on-one interview](#). I speak to the challenges our people are facing, how I’m handling the polarizing discussions on public health measures and immunization, and how I keep moving forward during these unprecedented times.



## Supports When You Need Them

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**Mental Health Supports When You Need Them**

Services to support leaders and teams during COVID-19 are available through the Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP). If you or someone you know is struggling, there are many ways you can find support:

- If you need immediate support, call [Employee Family and Assistance Program](#) (EFAP) at 1-877-273-3134. If you are in crisis, dial 1 and be connected to a senior clinician for immediate intervention and crisis management.
- Use the [COVID-19 EFAP Support Menu](#) for a quick reference on resources for stress and burnout, immediate support and self-care.
- Use [EFAP counselling services](#), which are offered over the phone, through video or online.
- Download the [EFAP Resilience App](#), which offers custom lessons and content to build your mental health. Read more about how to use the app [here](#).
- Use [i-Volve](#), a web-based solution to treat employees struggling with mild depression and/or anxiety.
- Join a [wellness seminar](#) on a variety of health and wellness topics. Register on MyLearningLink by searching 'WHS Wellness Seminar Series' or 'wellness'. [Schedule available here](#).

See the [Resilience, Wellness and Mental Health Resource Guide](#) for a comprehensive list of health and wellness supports. For questions and more information, contact [wellness@ahs.ca](mailto:wellness@ahs.ca).

## COVID-19 Status

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### ICU Capacity Update

As of today (Oct. 1), we have 374 ICU beds open in Alberta, including 201 additional spaces (a 116 per cent increase over our baseline of 173).

Critical care triage has not been implemented, and our hope is that we will not have to implement it. It will only be implemented if all efforts to increase ICU capacity are exhausted – that has not happened yet. AHS has opened 13 ICU surge spaces in the past seven days. Any patient who requires mechanical ventilation is currently able to receive it.

As of midday today, there were 316 patients in ICU, 263 of whom were COVID-19 positive. More than 90 per cent of all COVID-19-positive patients in our ICUs are either unvaccinated or partially vaccinated (with only the first of the two-dose series administered).

Provincially, ICU capacity (including additional surge beds) is currently at 84 per cent. Without the additional surge spaces, provincial ICU capacity would be 183 per cent.

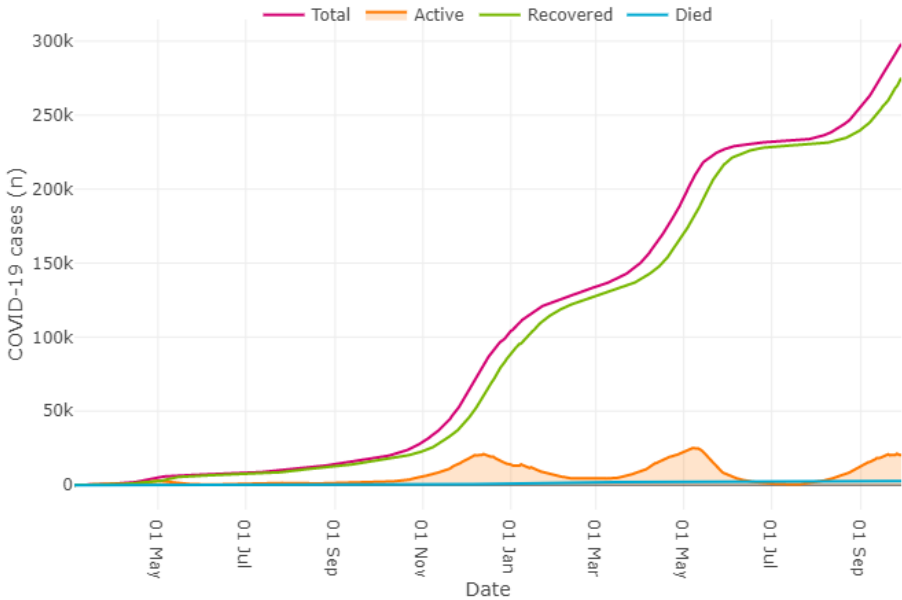
The number of patients in ICU has increased by 3.9 per cent in the past seven days. This increase would be much higher if not for the sobering reality that many ICU patients have passed away. Over the past five days, 109 Albertans with COVID-19 have died, including 34 on Sept. 29 alone, among the highest announced in a single

day in the province. We extend our condolences to the families of these individuals, and to all who have lost loved ones from any cause during this time.

**New and Active Cases**

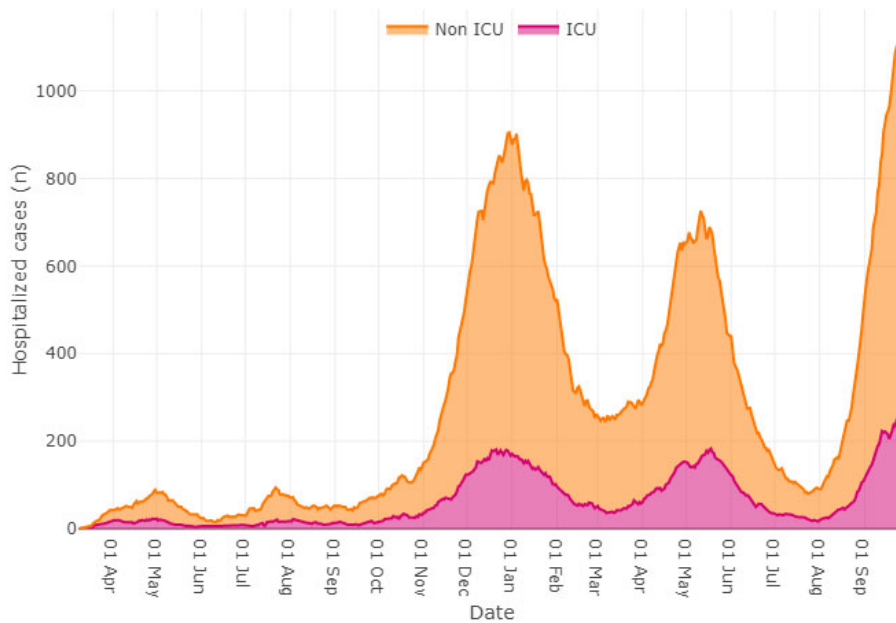
There are currently 20,215 active cases of COVID-19 in Alberta, an increase of less than one per cent compared to Sept. 24 when there were 20,040 active cases.

For the seven-day period ending Sept. 29, there was an average of 1,656 new daily cases of COVID-19, compared to 1,592 for the previous week (Sept. 16-22), a 4.0 per cent increase. New case numbers varied from zone to zone. South Zone reported a 10.3 per cent decrease in new cases compared to last week, whereas North Zone reported an 18.5 per cent increase. Edmonton Zone reported the highest number of new cases over the past week, with 2,814.



**Hospitalizations**

A total of 820 individuals were in non-ICU hospital beds with COVID-19 on Sept. 29 compared to 850 on Sept. 22, a one-week decrease of 3.5 per cent. However, a new record high number of individuals in non-ICU hospital beds with COVID-19 was set on Sept. 27 with 865. The previous record was 736 on Jan. 4, 2021.



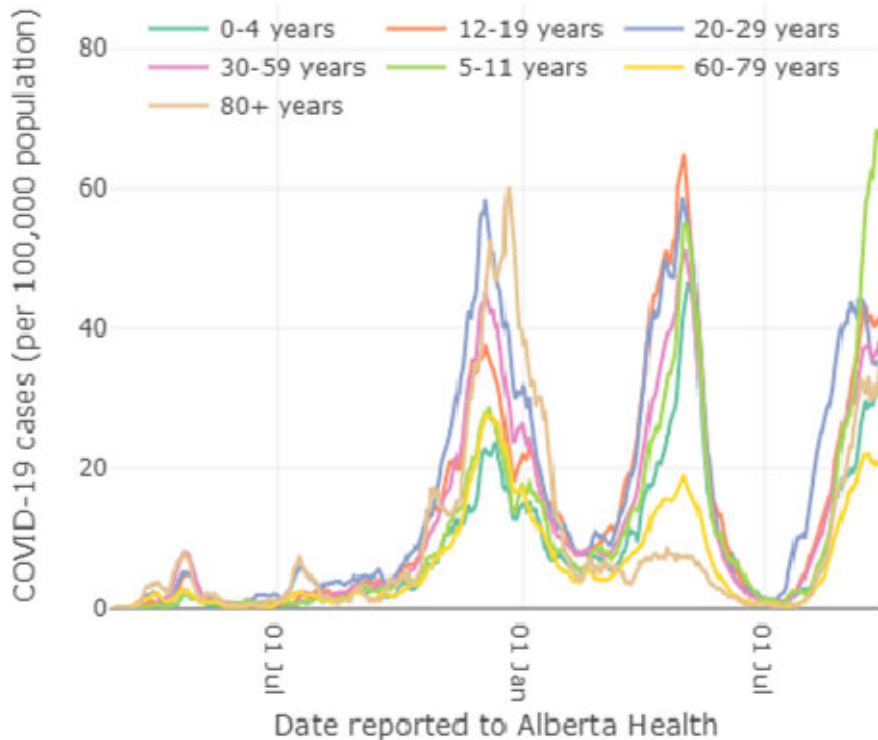
### Cases by age group

As of Sept. 26, children ages five to 11 — who are currently ineligible to receive a COVID-19 vaccine — had the highest seven-day rolling average of new daily COVID-19 cases, with 67.9 cases per 100,000 children. Albertans ages 12 to 19 had the second-highest rate with 40.6 cases per 100,000 people. The more transmissible Delta variant is spreading more easily than previous variants of concern, and it is impacting younger people at higher rates.

To make it easier for eligible children and teenagers to get immunized, we are supporting schools to provide immunizations at temporary in-school clinics. This is open to eligible students in Grades 7 to 12, as well as teachers and staff.

Clinics are running during and after school hours at schools across the province, and we're strongly advising parents to take advantage of this program.

Trends in COVID-19 cases by age group can be seen in the figure below.



### Variants of Concern

With the increase in cases of COVID-19, the lab has moved back to targeted screening of positive samples for strain-typing. From Sept. 21 to Sept. 27, the average percent of positive samples that were strain-typed was 35 per cent. Of those strain-typed, the rolling average was 99.4 per cent Delta variant. Strain-typing takes a number of days and these numbers may change as lab data becomes available.

### Other notable COVID-19-related information:

- As of Sept. 29, a total of 298,172 cases of COVID-19 have been detected in Alberta and a total of 12,739 individuals have been hospitalized, which amounts to 4.3 individuals for every 100 cases. In all, 275,200 Albertans have recovered from COVID-19.
- From Sept. 23 to Sept. 29, 106,525 COVID-19 tests were completed, an average of 15,218 tests per day. During this period, the daily positivity ranged from 9.9 per cent to 12.0 per cent. As of Sept. 29, 5.5 million tests have been conducted and 2.4 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 R value is updated every two weeks. From Sept. 13 to Sept. 19, the provincewide R value was 1.04 and the previously reported value was 1.12. The R value for Edmonton and Calgary was 0.97 and 0.94, respectively, while the rest of the province had an R value of 1.15.
- Alberta Health has not resumed school reporting.

## Things You Need to Know

## **Deadline Approaches to Submit Your Proof of Immunization for COVID-19**

The [Immunization of Workers for COVID-19 Policy](#) requires all employees, medical and midwifery staff, students, volunteers and contracted healthcare providers to be fully immunized for COVID-19 by Oct. 31, 2021. Workers must receive the final dose of their vaccine no later than Oct. 16, 2021, to be considered fully immunized by Oct. 31, 2021.

Healthcare workers have an [ethical and professional responsibility](#) to protect others. Immunization helps us meet this standard.

Submit your immunization as soon as you can. See the [Got My COVID-19 Immunization Form](#) for instructions on how to submit your record.

**NOTE: If you submitted the form before the policy was announced on Sept. 14,** you will have to **re-submit** using the new form issued the day the policy came into effect.

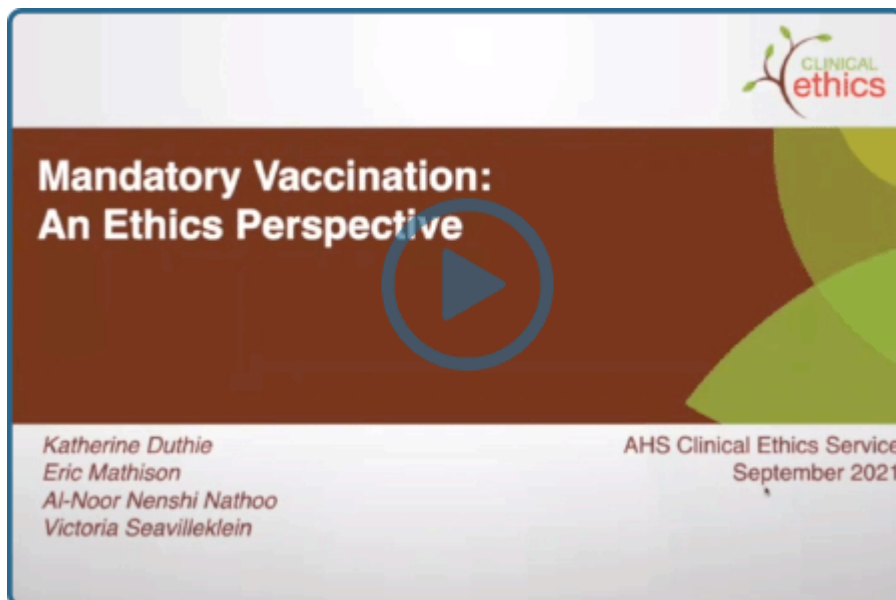
Except where a [workplace accommodation](#) is approved, those employees who are not fully immunized by Oct. 31, 2021, will be placed on an unpaid leave of absence. Please see our [staff FAQ](#) for more information. Additional supports and resources can be found on [Insite](#). For more information, contact [AHSVaccineTaskForce@ahs.ca](mailto:AHSVaccineTaskForce@ahs.ca).

## **Mandatory Vaccination — An Ethics Perspective**

Changes in practice and policy are happening across AHS in response to the pandemic, resulting in many ethical questions for all of us who work in the health system. Last week, our Clinical Ethics Service hosted a lunch and learn on the ethics of mandatory vaccination. They highlighted how healthcare workers have additional obligations, how there will be times when prevention of harm to others can justify curtailing individual liberties, and how those liberties should be curtailed as little as possible when trying to achieve public health goals.

Due to the popularity of this lunch and learn, a recording has been posted on the [AHS website](#) for all interested staff and physicians. The Clinical Ethics Service also authored a guide to help us [navigate ethical challenges in the COVID-19 pandemic](#).





### **Update on Janssen Vaccine**

Some staff are inquiring about the availability of the Janssen (aka Johnson & Johnson) vaccine in Alberta. Earlier this year, Canada received a shipment of Janssen vaccines that were later determined to be developed at a location that did not pass FDA inspection. Alberta is currently in discussions with the National Operations Centre about potentially requesting a small shipment of doses of Janssen vaccine, when safely available.

### **Updated Designated Support Person Access in Maternity Implemented by Monday**

To manage the escalating impact of COVID-19 at our hospitals, AHS has made the difficult decision to reduce designated support person access in maternity units.

Being implemented across the province by Monday, one designated support person can be on-site with a patient in the maternity unit. Prior to this change, two designated support persons were allowed to be on-site at a time with a patient in the maternity unit. One additional designated support person (for the infant) will be considered in cases of adoption or surrogacy if physical distancing permits.

Exceptional circumstances and requests by patients for two designated support persons will be considered by site command posts on a case-by-case basis. We are asking patients to discuss this option with their healthcare teams directly.

We know the importance of designated support during this time, and we understand how difficult this decision is for all involved. This decision was not made lightly. We continue to encourage patients to stay connected with loved ones virtually or by phone, whenever possible.

Learn more at [ahs.ca/visitation](https://ahs.ca/visitation).

### **Changes Made to Protect Access to Hospitals**

The Government of Alberta announced this week that hospitals and other facilities that provide health services are now subject to the same protection that railways, highways and pipelines have under the Critical Infrastructure Defence Act.



This law carries punishments for trespassing, interfering with operations and construction, and causing damage. This step was made to help ensure staff, patients and families all have safe, quick access to the facilities and services they need without added stress and fear over disruption or intimidation by on-site protests. More information and the full announcement is available on the [Alberta Health website](#)

## **COVID-19 Immunization Update**

### *Protective effects of COVID-19 immunization*

Vaccines remain one of our most powerful tools in the fight against COVID-19. They are safe, effective and they save lives. Representatives from AHS, the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta, the Alberta Medical Association, and the University of Alberta and the University of Calgary have penned an [editorial and paper](#) — shared with media today — laying out the facts about vaccine effectiveness and safety. We encourage you to read it and share it, especially with those who may be reluctant to receive the vaccine.

The data below compiled by [Alberta Health](#) on vaccine outcomes shows that immunization will protect most people from getting sick, having to go to the hospital or dying if they get infected with COVID-19. We hope this data can help inform and support your conversations with patients, clients, family members, friends, loved ones and networks, about the importance and effectiveness of COVID-19 immunization.

### *Reminder: book your second dose as soon as possible*

If you received your first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine 28 days ago or longer, you are eligible to book your second dose. Two doses are required for optimal immunity to COVID-19 and to protect against the Delta variant, the dominant strain of COVID-19 in Alberta.

We need to ensure as many Albertans as possible are fully immunized against COVID-19. Please encourage your families, friends, loved ones and networks to book their second dose as soon as they are eligible. Widespread immunization will help us all return to a more normal way of life, sooner.

If you receive your first or second dose between Sept. 3 and Oct. 14, you may be eligible to receive a \$100 debit card. Learn more about vaccine incentives at [alberta.ca/vaccine](https://alberta.ca/vaccine).

You can book your immunization appointment [online](#) at an AHS clinic or pharmacy, attend a [walk-in clinic](#), contact a [doctor's office](#), or call Health Link 811.

### *Expansion of criteria for third doses*

Last week, the Government of Alberta expanded eligibility for an additional dose of COVID-19 vaccine to more immunocompromised Albertans to align with [recent recommendations made by the National Advisory Committee on Immunization](#).

Individuals with advanced HIV infection and additional patients receiving medications that impact their immune systems are among those now able to get an additional dose of COVID-19 vaccine.

A full list of immunocompromising conditions that qualify for an additional dose at least eight weeks after a second dose is available on the [Alberta Health website](#).

Third doses of COVID-19 vaccine are also available for seniors living in congregate care. These individuals are at the highest risk of severe outcomes and potential spread within congregate living sites.

Additional mRNA doses are available to Albertans who are travelling to a jurisdiction that does not accept visitors who have been vaccinated with Covishield/AstraZeneca or mixed doses.

Eligible Albertans can book an immunization appointment [online](#) at an AHS clinic or pharmacy, attend a [walk-in clinic](#), contact a [doctor's office](#), or call Health Link 811.

### **COVID-19 immunization during pregnancy**

Since Sept. 9, eight more pregnant Albertans have been admitted to ICU due to COVID-19. The situation remains serious in Alberta hospitals. From July 15 to Sept. 28, 14 pregnant individuals have been admitted to ICU due to COVID-19. All were unimmunized.

AHS continues to strongly urge those who are pregnant, trying to become pregnant, or have recently delivered, to get both doses of the COVID-19 vaccine as soon as possible. Vaccines are safe and effective, and they are the best way to protect mother and baby from COVID-19.

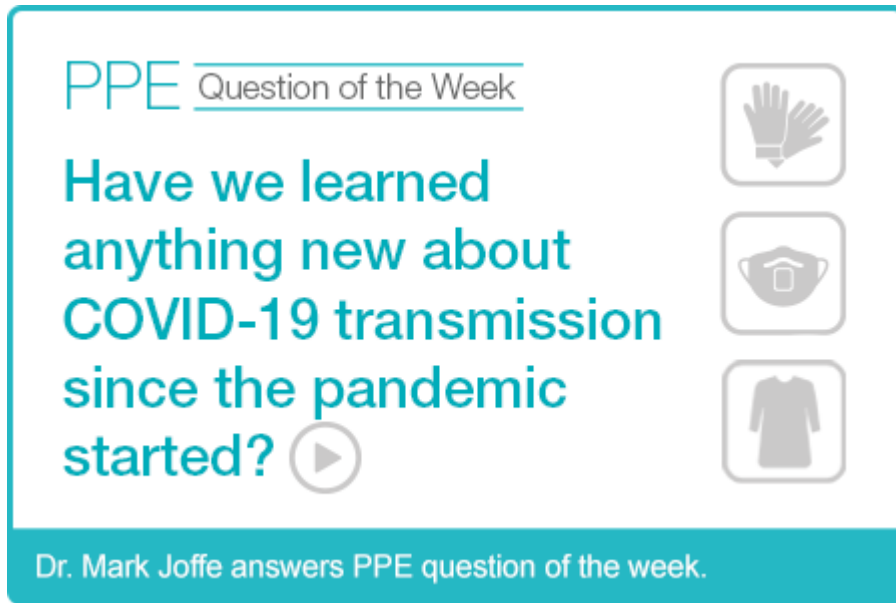
Several resources are available (including a recently updated fact sheet for practitioners) to support your conversations with patients and clients who are pregnant, trying to become pregnant, or who have recently delivered:

- **Web:** [ahs.ca/vaccinepregnancy](https://ahs.ca/vaccinepregnancy)
- **Updated:** [Alberta COVID-19 Immunization in Pregnancy Factsheet for Practitioners](#)
- [COVID-19 Immunization in Pregnancy](#)
- [COVID-19 and Pregnancy, Birth, and Postpartum and Breastfeeding: Information for Expectant and New Parents Public Health](#)
- [Alberta COVID-19 Immunization in Pregnancy Factsheet for Practitioners](#)
- **Videos:** [Dr. Sue Chandra on Why COVID-19 Vaccine is Safe During Pregnancy](#) & [Dr. Erin Bader on How the COVID-19 Vaccine Protects Mother and Baby](#)
- **Posters:** COVID-19 Vaccines & Pregnancy [8.5x11](#) | [11x17](#)

### **PPE Question of the Week — Have We Learned Anything New About COVID-19 Transmission?**

In this [PPE Question of the Week](#), PPE Task Force chair Dr. Mark Joffe addresses recent discussion around the role of aerosols in transmission of COVID-19 and what this means for our PPE guidance. There are many factors that come into play when a decision is being made on appropriate PPE. As per our Joint Statement with the unions, we continue to provide our front-line professionals the authority to make

decisions regarding appropriate PPE, based on their point-of-care risk/hazard assessment and professional judgment.



The image is a video thumbnail for a 'PPE Question of the Week' series. It features a teal border and a teal bar at the bottom. The text inside the border reads: 'PPE Question of the Week' in a light teal font, followed by 'Have we learned anything new about COVID-19 transmission since the pandemic started?' in a larger, bold teal font. To the right of the text are three icons: a pair of gloves, a face mask, and a long-sleeved shirt. A play button icon is positioned at the end of the main text. The teal bar at the bottom contains the text 'Dr. Mark Joffe answers PPE question of the week.' in white.

You can see more videos in the PPE Question of the Week Series on our [PPE webpage](#).

**Verna Weekly Video Message: National Day for Truth and Reconciliation**

Each year, AHS marks Sept. 30 as a time to reflect and remember the thousands of Indigenous children who were taken from their families and sent to residential schools. We honour the survivors and families who continue to feel the impacts of residential schools, and we honour the children who never made it home.

Over the last several months, we have collectively mourned for the hundreds of bodies that have been discovered from the sites of former residential schools all over the country. I recognize that this has been a very heavy time for all Indigenous people in this country, including our Indigenous staff.

This year, Sept. 30, formerly Orange Shirt Day, was renamed National Day for Truth and Reconciliation with the intention to get more Canadians to recognize that Every Child Matters.

In addition to bearing witness to the harms of residential schools, this day is also an opportunity to recognize and honour the strength of Indigenous people, families and communities, and the wisdom of Indigenous worldviews that have persevered.

Joining me (Verna) [to talk about National Day for Truth and Reconciliation](#) are:

- Randal Bell, a senior advisor with the Indigenous Wellness Core.
- Sherri Di Lallo, a manager with the Stollery Awasisak Indigenous Health Centre at the Stollery Children’s Hospital.



Visit [Together4Health](#) to view recordings of events held on National Day for Truth and Recognition. You can learn more about the [Indigenous Wellness Core on Insite](#).

### Calgary ICU Patient Talks about His Experience

We'd like to share something you might be interested in seeing and hearing: 46-year-old Calgary man Bernie Cook shares his story of contracting COVID-19 and being intubated in an ICU for almost two weeks. He admits he was once vaccine-hesitant but now encourages others to get vaccinated.

You can see a video interview below, and hear him on [CBC Radio's Calgary Eyeopener](#).



### AHS Facilities Included on Newsweek's World's Best Specialized Hospitals Lists

This week, Newsweek magazine released its [World's Best Specialized Hospitals 2022](#) list — and we'd like to offer congratulations to both the Alberta Children's Hospital (ACH) and Stollery Children's Hospital for being named among the globe's best pediatric hospitals. Also recognized: the Diabetes in Pregnancy Clinic at

Foothills Medical Centre (endocrinology); the ACH neurogenetics and pediatric oncology clinics; and the Foothills' pulmonary diagnostics unit. We know amazing work is being done at all of our facilities, and in all of our hospital units, across the province. We all have so much to be proud of — and we are grateful for, and impressed by, everything you do.

### **COVID-19 Testing for Healthcare Workers**

Testing data for healthcare workers is reported every two weeks and will return next week.

## **Be Well - Be Kind**

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### **Safety Matters — Communicating with Respect and Compassion**

We know this is an emotional and difficult time, especially on the front lines of our pandemic response. Our teams are working extremely hard. Many of us have also experienced disrespect and harassment from patients, families and visitors as well as our colleagues while doing our jobs to protect Albertans. Unfortunately, this includes aggressive behaviour from our own people towards staff and physicians who are validating immunization status and responding to inquiries. Disrespect and harassment are never OK and especially now when we are all under so much pressure. We need to work together to keep our workplace safe. [Emotions](#) can flare quickly right now. If you find yourself becoming upset in a conversation, ask for a moment, so you can calm down and reset.

How we talk to each other makes a difference. Our [values and competencies](#) guide us during these difficult times. There are also many resources to support you. You can learn about how to talk about [COVID-19 immunizations at work](#) and find more resources on [Change the Conversation](#). Find out how to address [disrespectful behaviour](#) and how to protect yourself from [patient/client harassment or violence](#). If you experience harassment of any kind, speak to your leader and report it in [MySafetyNet](#). Please [support each other](#) through this time – we are all people doing our best.

If you are feeling overwhelmed, reach out to our [Employee and Family Assistance Program](#) (EFAP). They are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and can be reached by calling **1-877-273-3134**. Use the [COVID-19 EFAP Support Menu](#) for a quick reference on resources for stress and burnout, immediate support and self-care. Physician supports are available through the [Physician and Family Support Program](#) at **1-877-767-4637**.

If your team needs more tailored supports and strategies on working safely with patients or clients, see [Workplace Harassment and Violence Prevention](#). To learn more about respectful team behaviours, see [Respectful Workplaces](#).

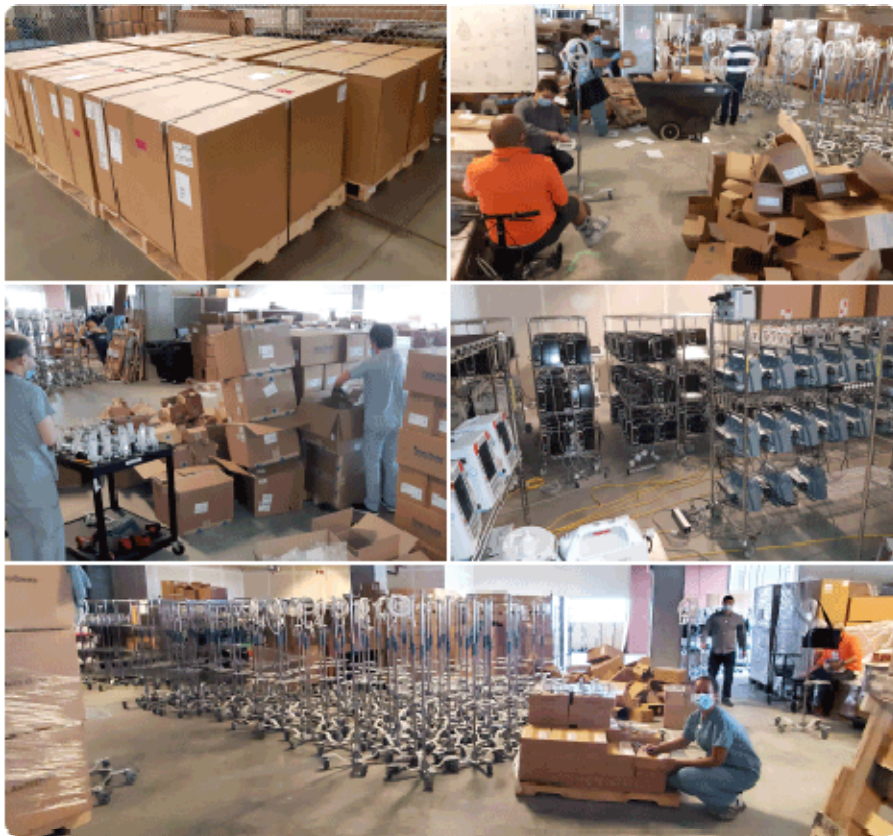
### **Sharing the Love**

#### *Clinical Engineering team steps up*

There has been a lot of focus and attention in recent weeks on what's happening on our front lines — and rightfully so. But this week we also wanted to provide a glimpse at behind-the-scenes work that supports our front-line efforts.



Here are photos from the Kaye Edmonton Clinic, one of two major pandemic equipment warehouses in the province, which recently received a shipment of high-flow air delivery systems, ventilators, infusion pumps, and other equipment — literally thousands of devices. These assets need to be received, unpackaged, assembled, inspected, tagged, charged, and readied for deployment to hospitals across the province as the AHS Emergency Co-ordination Centre determines.



During normal times, the AHS stockpile of disaster/pandemic equipment has been significantly smaller, requiring only occasional technical service and support. However, with huge volumes of assets being received and moved to respond to the pandemic, members of our Clinical Engineering team at acute care sites have been engaged to assist with this massive distribution effort all while still fulfilling their regular obligations.

We are grateful to everyone at AHS for their contributions to our COVID-19 response and for going the extra mile when needed, especially during this period of intense pressure on the health system. We see you and we appreciate you.

#### *Message from first-year medical students*

Earlier this week, first-year medical students at the University of Alberta left messages of gratitude for our healthcare team outside of the University of Alberta Hospital, Stollery Children’s Hospital and the Mazankowski Alberta Heart Institute.



### **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 coming in from across the province and beyond during the COVID-19 pandemic. We want to share some recent messages of gratitude with you — and you can see others on our [Sharing the Love webpage](#).

*The work of all caregivers and administration at AHS should be revered and applauded during these difficult times. Sending you my full admiration, support, gratitude and friendship wrapped in a warm and comforting virtual hug. You got this!*

— Bernie

*It appalls me to hear some people have been abusive and unappreciative of your efforts. If I hear anyone criticize hospital staff, they will quickly experience my wrath! Most of the public is well aware of the critical state our hospitals are in. We fully realize resources are finite and trained staff and access to specific equipment is at a premium. I wish I could convey my deep thanks to everyone that works in the hospital, from physicians and nurses to all support staff. Each one of you is equally important and vital in maintaining a healthy environment for patient care. Please take care of yourselves. Know that we are in your corner and support you.*

— Corinne Clark

*During this challenging time, I want to extend my sincere gratitude, support and thanks to all the workers at Alberta Health Services, especially those on the front lines in the ICU and COVID-19-filled units. We are so grateful for the dedication and compassion you show every day while protecting and caring for Albertans.*

— Matthew

*To all the amazing healthcare professionals and support staff, a huge thank you. You are all amazing and deserve nothing but kindness and compassion, now and every day.*



— Anonymous

### Wrapping Up

This week we are saddened by the death of one of our nurses, who worked in the ICU and emergency departments. Our thoughts are with her family, loved ones and colleagues. We know you are all under extreme stress and pressure. The pandemic is impacting people and our teams, both physically and mentally. We know you have been working tirelessly to care for Albertans throughout this long and exhausting pandemic. We acknowledge the stress and strain you're under, as well as the impact this is having on your families and loved ones. Please know we're here to support you. If you're struggling, reach out for help. There are a number of excellent supports listed in the **Supports When You Need Them** item near the top of this email. You are not alone.

With enduring gratitude and appreciation,

### Dr. Verna Yiu

AHS President & CEO

### Dr. Laura McDougall

Senior Medical Officer of Health



Healthy Albertans.  
Healthy Communities.  
**Together.**

