



Message from
Dr. Verna Yiu &
Dr. Laura McDougall

*AHS Update: AHS establishes Ukraine response,
provincewide COVID-19 case numbers remain stable,
AHS immunization policy amended*

Please print and share with your teams as needed

Dear staff, physicians and volunteers,

Today's Update

- **AHS Establishes Ukraine Response**
- **Resources to Help Manage Stress, Anxiety in Wartime**
- **Caregiver, Parenting Support Available**
- **COVID-19 Cases in Alberta**
- **AHS Amends Immunization Policy**
- **Eye Protection Guidance Updated**
- **COVID-19 Immunization Update**
- **Influenza Immunization Update**
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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.

Latest News

AHS Establishes Ukraine Response

The ongoing situation in Ukraine continues to change daily and is being monitored by all levels of government. As part of the larger Government of Alberta and Alberta Health planning, AHS is an integral part of the Ukraine response in the province. This planning and response will be done within and as part of the Emergency Co-ordination Centre.

AHS is working proactively to ensure the organization is prepared to manage and support current and future evacuees or anyone affected by the situation in Ukraine. In addition to ensuring we have supports in place for affected Ukrainians, AHS is also aware that staff may be feeling the emotional impact of this tragic situation and have [resources and supports](#) in place to help you manage stress and anxiety during this difficult time.

Supports When You Need Them

Resources to Help Manage Stress, Anxiety in Wartime

We know many of our people are of Ukrainian and Russian heritage, or have family and other loved ones in the country. If you need support to manage stress and anxiety arising from the war in Ukraine or other news events, we have a few specific resources.

Confidential support services are available through the [Employee and Family Assistance Program](#) (EFAP), 24/7, at 1-877-273-3134. EFAP is here for you if you are coping with loss, or need anything during or after [traumatic news and events](#), including [counselling services](#).

The [Help in Tough Times page](#) also offers quick access to important phone numbers, self-help resources and supports on handling stressful situations. Physicians can find support through the [Physician and Family Support Program](#) by the Alberta Medical Association. The support line, at 1-877-SOS-4MDS (767-4637), is also available 24/7.

In addition, we have [Change the Conversation resources](#) to help as we process these

events: [Being an Ally](#), [Trauma Awareness](#) and [Supporting One Another](#).

If you have questions or concerns, please email Ukraine.Inquiries@ahs.ca.

Caregiver, Parenting Support Available

Parenting is a complex experience and the past two years have made it even more so.

Whether you need coaching or help accessing resources, such as childcare or school work assistance, [childcare and parenting](#) support is available. To access this support, call the client services centre at 1-877-273-3134. You will be asked some questions to ensure you receive support that best suits your needs. A childcare specialist will walk you through the available resources.

If you feel overwhelmed about any issue, call the [Employee and Family Assistance Program](#) intake line any time at 1-877-273-3134. This service is confidential and available 24/7.

Physicians can contact the [AMA Physician and Family Support Program](#), also a confidential 24/7 support line, at 1-877-SOS-4MDS for options and support.

There are many ways we can support you through these challenging times no matter what your situation. See the [Resilience, Wellness and Mental Health Resource Guide](#) for a comprehensive list of health and wellness supports. You can also download [Headversity](#), the resilience app, to learn skills to proactively build your mental health. Questions? Contact wellness@ahs.ca.

COVID-19 Status

ICU Update

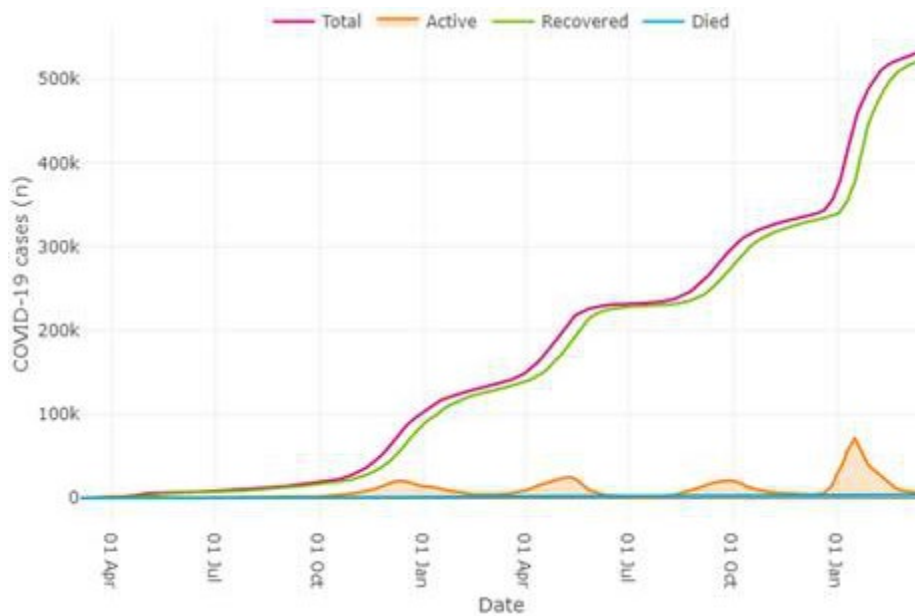
As of 1 p.m. today (March 18), AHS has 229 general adult ICU beds open in Alberta, including 56 additional spaces above our baseline of 173 general adult ICU beds. There are 161 patients in ICU. Provincially, ICU capacity (including additional surge beds) is currently at 70 per cent, down from 83 per cent a week ago. Without the additional surge spaces, provincial ICU capacity would be at 93 per cent, down from 110 per cent a week ago.

New and Active Cases

As of March 16, there are 6,552 active cases in Alberta, a 2.0 per cent decrease compared to March 9. Four of the five AHS zones reported a decrease in active cases compared to last week, as you can see in the table below.

	Active Cases (as of March 16)	Active Cases (as of March 9)	Per cent Change
Calgary	2,303	2,144	+7.4%
Edmonton	1,971	1,992	-1.1%
North	700	854	-18.0%
Central	918	989	-7.2%
South	650	700	-7.1%
Unknown	10	10	0%
Overall	6,552	6,689	-2.0%

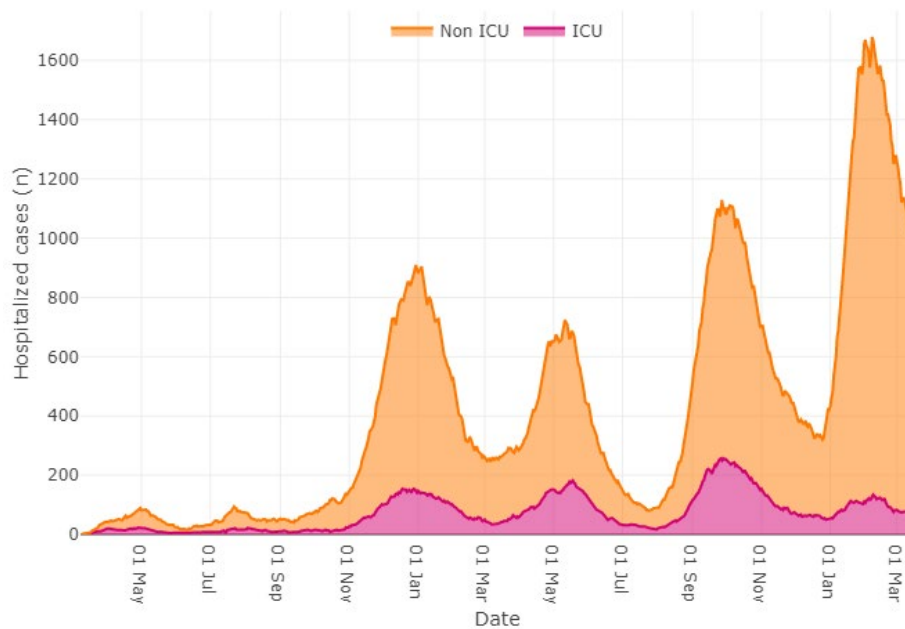
For the seven-day period ending on March 16, there was an average of 504 new cases of COVID-19 per day, compared to 459 cases per day the previous reporting period (March 3 to March 9), a 9.8 per cent increase. The Calgary Zone reported the highest total number of new cases with 1,304 (an average of 186 new cases per day).



Please note: We know these data underestimate the number of people with COVID-19 across the province, and changes in testing eligibility make it difficult to compare cases week over week.

Hospitalizations

On March 16, 900 individuals were in non-ICU hospital beds for COVID-19 compared to 1,024 individuals on March 9, a 12.1 per cent decrease.



Variants of Concern

Alberta Precision Laboratories continues to closely monitor SARS-CoV-2 variants. From March 8-14, an average of 71 per cent of positive samples were strain-typed. Of those, the seven-day rolling average was 59 per cent Omicron BA.1 lineage and 41 per cent Omicron BA.2. Delta is rarely detected. The BA.2 sub-lineage continues trending to higher proportions, as has been seen in other countries where Omicron BA.2 is now the predominant strain. While viral recombinants between Omicron and Delta have been reported in several cases globally, no recombinant SARS-CoV-2 viruses have been detected in Alberta through our ongoing genomic sequencing.

Other notable COVID-19-related information:

- Data from the last seven days indicate 40.8 per cent of new admissions to non-ICU spaces are due to COVID-19 infection directly, 29.1 per cent had COVID-19 as a contributing cause and 30.1 per cent are cases where the infection was not determined to be a cause of admission, or where it was not possible to determine. For ICU, the percentage of new admissions due to COVID-19 directly was 41.4 per cent; 31.0 per cent had COVID-19 as a contributing cause and 27.6 per cent were incidental infections or unclear.
- As of March 16, 4,019 individuals have passed away from COVID-19, including 27 since the last report. We extend our condolences to the families of these individuals, and to all who have lost loved ones from any cause during this time.
- As of March 16, 533,783 cases of COVID-19 have been detected in Alberta and 21,923 individuals have been hospitalized, which amounts to 4.1 individuals for every 100 cases. In all, 523,212 Albertans have recovered from COVID-19, meaning they are no longer considered contagious. The number of Albertans who have recovered from COVID-19 does not reflect the recovery time from a COVID-19 infection that could last beyond the time in which people are contagious.

- From March 10 to March 16, 17,144 COVID-19 tests were completed, a seven-day average of 2,449 tests per day. During this period, the daily positivity ranged from 16.6 per cent to 25.7 per cent. As of March 16, a total of 6.9 million tests have been conducted and 2.7 million individuals have been tested. COVID-19 testing eligibility has changed to accommodate the demand due to the increase in cases.

Things You Need to Know

AHS Amends Immunization Policy

AHS has amended its [Immunization of Workers for COVID-19 Policy](#) as directed by government. The updated policy is now posted to Insite.

The change allows any worker currently on a leave of absence due to their immunization status to return to work by March 31. The directive also removes the requirement for rapid testing before shifts for unimmunized workers. The requirement to be fully immunized will remain in place for new hires. Any worker hired after Nov. 30, 2021, must be fully immunized against COVID-19.

Change has been a constant throughout the pandemic. We recognize we've all faced challenges during this time and we are extremely grateful to our teams, including leaders, for their ongoing support and for going above and beyond as we continue to respond to the pandemic.

We also appreciate another change to this policy may cause frustration and stress among our people. It's important for us to keep our focus on how we support each other and create safe workplaces for all. See the [Information for Workers resource](#) for guidance on having respectful conversations about COVID-19 immunization in the workplace.

See more resources and supports for worker-to-worker relationships at [Change the Conversation](#) and [Respectful Workplaces](#). For patient-to-worker relationships, see our page on the [Prevention of Harassment and Violence](#).

Questions? See the [Leader FAQ](#) and [Staff FAQ](#). For additional questions, we encourage you to speak with your leader.

Eye Protection Guidance Updated

As the province continues to relax COVID-19 guidelines and restrictions, the PPE Task Force has reviewed the AHS guidance that remains in place, and how best to keep our staff, patients and families safe in this next phase of our pandemic journey.

While AHS will maintain continuous masking in place for now ([view Directive](#)), the PPE Task Force has made the decision to provide more flexibility around eye

protection.

Continuous eye protection must be maintained in AHS settings where frequent or unanticipated exposures to COVID-19 may occur.

Continuous eye protection will also remain in place in settings that are initial points of contacts for patients or the public, and for those working in areas where there is a greater risk of spread of the virus.

These include:

- Screening areas.
- Healthcare workers in EMS, emergency departments, urgent care or COVID-19 assessment centres.
- Other settings, including COVID-19 units, or in those experiencing COVID-19 outbreaks.

Eye protection must be utilized as part of [Modified Respiratory Precautions](#), and Contact and Droplet Precaution or as directed by your [Point of Care Risk Assessment](#). [Eye protection](#) is now optional in all other areas and situations.

As an added precaution, zone and site leadership may choose to mandate continuous eyewear during an outbreak situation, or based on local circumstances, as deemed appropriate.

We thank all staff, and physicians for continuing to follow this guidance, as we continue to provide exemplary care to all Albertans.

For more information about eye protection, visit [Use and Reuse of Eye Protection during the COVID-19 Pandemic](#).

COVID-19 Immunization Update

Pediatric walk-in vaccine appointments still available

Walk-in vaccine appointments continue to be available for children ages five to 11 at most AHS COVID-19 vaccine clinics.

Until March 31, AHS clinics will offer flexible hours with some evening availability to maximize the opportunities for eligible children to be immunized. Availability in the evening and on weekends varies throughout the province. To find an AHS clinic with extended hours and walk-in appointments, visit www.ahs.ca/vaccine#walkin.

Parents and guardians can still book appointments for children ages five and older online by using the [Alberta vaccine booking system](#) or by calling 811. Parents are asked to bring their child's Alberta healthcare card to the appointment if they have one, and identification that shows the child's age.

A reminder: AHS requires continuous masking at all sites, including immunization clinics. Both parents and their children will be required to wear a face mask and use hand sanitizer when visiting an AHS site for immunization.

Changes to travel restrictions

As of April 1, the [Government of Canada](#) will be lifting the pre-arrival COVID-19 testing requirement at the border for fully vaccinated travellers.

Passengers may still be subjected to random PCR testing at the airport, and travellers will still be required to use the [ArriveCAN App](#) to enter their proof of vaccination.

Currently, fully vaccinated travellers are required to show proof of a negative rapid antigen test administered by a lab, healthcare entity or other authorized provider before boarding a scheduled flight or arrival at the land border.

For more information: [COVID-19: Travel, testing and borders - Travel.gc.ca](#)

Influenza Immunization Update

As of March 17, 1.2 million doses of influenza vaccine have been administered, which means 27 per cent of the population has been immunized. A total of 54 influenza cases have been confirmed this season.

Interactive aggregate data is available online at [Alberta influenza statistics](#). For more information on influenza, visit [ahs.ca/influenza](#). Starting today, and for the remainder of the season, influenza data will be reported monthly.

Staff, physicians and volunteers can choose to be immunized at a pharmacy, doctor's office or public health clinic (for children under five years of age and their family and household members). Staff using these options are reminded to submit their [Got My Flu Shot form](#). See [Insite](#) for more on the staff immunization campaign.

Weekly Video Message — Managing Burnout

The pandemic has affected us all differently, whether we are working on the front lines or behind the scenes.

We know many of us are feeling the impact of cumulative stresses over the past two years, as well as compassion fatigue. Understandably, this can lead to burnout.

We want to do all we can to ensuring the well-being and psychological safety of everyone at AHS. To support this work, our Scientific Advisory Group (SAG) recently conducted a rapid review of ways we can mitigate healthcare worker burnout.

Joining vlog guest host Dr. Francois Belanger, Vice President and Chief Medical Officer, to [talk about the findings of the report and how we can support our people](#)

are:

- Dr. Lynora Saxinger, Physician and Medical Lead, AHS Antimicrobial Stewardship, North, and co-chair of the Scientific Advisory Group.
- Dr. Sharron Spicer, Interim Associate Chief Medical Officer, Physician Health, Diversity & Wellness.
- Mona Sikal, Executive Director, Employee Relations.



Join the President's Speaker Series

You're invited to join an online discussion on COVID-19's impact on the economy at the next President's Speaker Series event, April 4 from noon to 1 p.m.

COVID-19 has caused a significant drain on government and business revenues, and there will likely be lasting implications on public sector finances in Alberta and Canada, and the global economy. Healthcare is not immune to these implications and we must consider the future impact.

Our keynote speaker is [Pedro Antunes](#), chief economist and primary spokesperson at The Conference Board of Canada. In his presentation, Antunes will discuss the lasting impacts of the pandemic on Alberta's healthcare system, both in terms of demand for services and how COVID-19 has affected the province's healthcare workforce.

- [Register here](#)

Questions? Email PSS@ahs.ca.

Survey Research on Double Duty Caregivers

Dr. Jasneet Parmar, professor in the Department of Family Medicine at the University of Alberta, and her research team want to understand how the pandemic and double-duty caregiving has impacted Canadian healthcare providers' caregiving and

work experiences. They are inviting all Canadian healthcare providers who are also family caregivers to [complete a survey](#). It will take approximately 20 minutes to complete.

A double-duty caregiver is a healthcare provider who also provides care outside of work to a family member, chosen family or friend who is ill, disabled or frail.

For more information or if you have questions, please contact [Dr. Sharon Anderson](#).

Be Well - Be Kind

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 a recent message of gratitude with you — and you can see others on our [Sharing the Love webpage](#).

Many thanks to the nursing staff who continuously exhaust everything for their patients. I believe that you have made miracles simply by being present. I cannot thank you enough for the wonderful experience I have had in the unit. It was a miracle to have you in my life. Continue spreading love.

— Anonymous

Wrapping Up

Alberta shifted into daylight savings time last weekend, and this Sunday marks the official start of spring — a time for renewal and a time for hope. Let us move forward with optimism that brighter days are ahead of us all, literally and figuratively. We are thinking of the people of Ukraine, and those of Ukrainian and Russian heritage, and hoping that peace will be restored soon. We are also thinking of you. Please do what you can to enjoy the change of season, get outside into the sun and fresh air, and find ways to unwind. We know the past two years have been draining, both emotionally and physically. As you may have heard in this week's vlog, we are aware of the causes of burnout and compassion fatigue, and we urge you to use the many resources available to you if you need support. And we also encourage you, as daytime hours grow longer, to take time to care for yourself and find stress-busting activities that help you protect your physical and mental wellness. Because we need you. We need all of you. And we're grateful for everything you do.

With enduring gratitude and appreciation,

Dr. Verna Yiu

AHS President & CEO

Dr. Laura McDougall

Senior Medical Officer of Health



Healthy Albertans.
Healthy Communities.
Together.

