

COVID-19 Status

April 13, 2020

Alberta now has 1,651 confirmed cases of COVID-19, an increase of 82 new cases in the past 24 hours. Of these, 237 are suspected of being community acquired. As of today, 44 people are in hospital, 14 of whom are in intensive care. The number of people who have recovered from COVID-19 is now 823.

In the past day, four people have died. All were residents of long term care centres. To date, 183 cases have been confirmed at continuing care facilities in the province.

We extend our sincere condolences to the families, friends and caregivers affected and are stepping up efforts with partners in the community to care for and protect older adults.

Effective April 15, continuing care workers must wear masks at all times when providing direct patient care or working in patient care areas. As well, starting April 16, workers in long term care and designated supportive living sites will only be allowed to work at one location. This requirement must be fully in place by April 23.

Our aggressive approach to testing for the pandemic continues. Alberta has now tested 74,709 people for COVID-19 and performed 77,316 tests. This includes completing 2,038 tests in the past 24 hours.

Capacity and Personal Protective Equipment Update

As we heard last week from Premier Jason Kenney, AHS's and other partners' response to Alberta's COVID-19 modelling work gives us great confidence in our province's ability to meet the anticipated surge in cases of COVID-19 in the coming weeks. We have built capacity in the system by postponing elective procedures and surgeries, reducing non-essential lab and diagnostic imaging testing, discharging acute care patients as soon as they're able to return home or to the community, moving seniors who are in hospital into more appropriate care settings, where appropriate, and redeploying resources and staff to places where they will be greatly needed.

By the end of April, Alberta Health Services will have the following in place to support patients with COVID-19:

- 2,250 acute care beds,
- Nearly 1,100 ICU beds,
- Approximately 760 ventilators.

This is more than enough to meet the projected demand for hospital services during the peak of the outbreak in Alberta.

We have also had great success in securing large quantities of personal protective equipment (PPE). Alberta Health Services, as one provincial healthcare provider, has strong purchasing power. We are also so grateful for the foresight of the AHS leadership team in our procurement areas, under the direction of

Jitendra Prasad, AHS Chief Program Officer, Contracting, Procurement and Supply Management, for leveraging their expertise and relationships to ensure we have what we need to keep our teams safe and protected throughout this pandemic. We are also confident in our expected needs and supplies of ventilators to support the most severely ill patients. Should the data continue to trend as it has been, we feel we are in a good position to provide the care Albertans will need, while keeping our healthcare teams safe.

In addition to supplying our hospitals and healthcare centres, we also provide PPE supplies to physician offices, continuing care sites, seniors' lodges, pharmacists, midwives, emergency shelters and EMS teams across Alberta.

The [Government of Alberta announced today](#) that PPE will be sent – including N95 and procedural masks, gloves, goggles, and ventilators – to our fellow Canadians in Ontario, Quebec, and British Columbia. We are able to keep Albertans safe and help other Canadian healthcare systems to take on the challenges they face in managing COVID-19.

Changes in COVID-19 specimen collection recommendations

Earlier today, Alberta Precision Laboratories (APL) provided updated recommendations for COVID-19 specimen collection and clarified instructions for the use of various types of swabs.

The standard practice for collecting COVID-19 samples had previously been to swab a patient's nose - either a deep nasal swab or deeper nasopharyngeal (NP) swab. However, our provincial public health labs were finding variability in the quality of the samples coming in to the lab on the deep nasal swabs.

The lab has confirmed that a throat sample collected on the Aptima swabs we are using now is effective at detecting the virus. Going forward, swabbing the NP or the throat will now be the recommended standard, not the nose.

Instructions on proper collection techniques, and the swabs that are most appropriate for various sites are available [here](#).

The COVID-19 test we use in the APL-Public Health Provincial Lab is very sensitive in detecting the virus. The performance of the ProvLab test equals or exceeds that of many other COVID-19 tests used in Canada and those that have received regulatory agency approval. This change is an opportunity for continuous improvement by enhancing and clarifying our specimen collection recommendations. It also provides some additional flexibility as providers can now collect a throat sample, which is easier for both provider and patient. This change will also reduce the variability in the quality of the samples coming into the lab and further reduce the chance of a false-negative.

Reducing Infection Transmission from Personal Items and Clothing

There are many questions arising from healthcare teams about the use of scrubs, personal clothing and how to clean surfaces at home after a shift, to reduce the risk of self-contamination and transmission of COVID-19 outside the healthcare environment.

PPE, including scrubs, are worn to protect clothing from contamination. By protecting yourself and using your PPE properly at work, you're also protecting your family members and loved ones. AHS-issued scrubs are supplied to areas where they are clinically necessary, for example, to staff on COVID-19 designated units, who provide direct patient care and to other areas where required by departmental policy. For more information refer to the [Healthcare Attire Information Sheet](#). Hair and shoe coverings are not required PPE. If hair coverings are worn for personal reasons; launder as per the [Healthcare Attire Information Sheet](#).

Here are some additional recommendations:

- Washable clothing is preferred in the healthcare setting. Regularly launder clothing in a hot water wash cycle followed by a cycle in the dryer. For more information refer to the [Healthcare Attire Information Sheet](#).
- Minimize contact between unprotected clothing and patient environments. For instance, do not lean up against walls, countertops, furniture, patient beds/cribs, or medical equipment.
- Change your clothes at the end of a clinical day, either at the hospital or other facility, or once you arrive at home. If you change at work, transport the clothes you have changed out of into either a disposable plastic bag or a washable cloth bag that can be laundered at the same time as the clothes.

In addition to the above IPC recommendations, [physical distancing](#) is being practiced in work spaces to help reduce the spread of COVID-19 at AHS.

AHS has a dedicated page for [PPE information](#) developed by the PPE task force, and more information about Infection Prevention and Control measures for personal items and clothing can be found [here](#).

Message from the Wisdom Council

We are thankful to our partners across the province as we collectively work with Albertans to slow the spread of COVID-19. Alberta's Indigenous communities have been collaborative and supportive in our efforts as we work together to support the unique needs of these communities. The Wisdom Council provides guidance and recommendations to ensure AHS develops and implements culturally appropriate and innovative health service delivery for Indigenous Peoples, including our work on COVID-19.

We received a very encouraging message this week, from the Wisdom Council Chair, Casey Eagle Speaker and Co-Chair, Wally Sinclair. Here are some excerpts from that message:

We must remain diligent in staying home and doing our best to continue disinfecting our surrounding regularly. We've heard hand hygiene remains the single most effective action to prevent the spread of infection remember the importance of this advice to wash your hands frequently. Be sure to exercise, go for walks as it benefits your body, mind and spirit. Spring is a time to appreciate the beauty of Mother Nature, listen and watch the birds chirping, breath in the fresh air and give thanks we can still appreciate the beauty of re-birth of this beautiful planet we call home.

Focus on staying well spiritually, mentally, physically and emotionally. We have experienced many challenges but we have and will overcome. It has been and continues to be with our way of knowing that the warrior spirit in all of us needs to stay strong. Our Ancestors stood strong and we are still here. The future is always based on hope. We will come out of this dark time with a

renewed sense of hope and love for each other. We continue to pray for our Wisdom Council members, Dr. Verna Yiu, AHS executive, IHP staff and all nurses, doctors and all healthcare frontline workers. We will get through this challenge TOGETHER! Trust and have faith in your prayers we will overcome.

In the Spirit of Health and Reconciliation (Reconciliation)

-Casey and Wally

New Recommendations for Continuous Masking

There is emerging evidence that asymptomatic, pre-symptomatic or minimally symptomatic individuals can transmit COVID-19.

Alberta Health Services (AHS) is implementing a [continuous masking](#) strategy, in addition to use of personal protective equipment (PPE) as part of droplet and contact precautions.

The new strategy — consistent with guidance provided by the Public Health Agency of Canada and Dr. Deena Hinshaw, Alberta's Chief Medical Officer of Health — is intended to bring consistency across AHS and community healthcare settings, improve safety for both healthcare workers and patients, while aiming for judicious use of masks and PPE.

The recommended approach for masking of healthcare workers providing direct patient care or working in patient care areas in both AHS and community settings is as follows:

- Wear a surgical/procedure mask continuously, at all times and in all areas of the workplace when involved in direct patient contact or if adequate social distancing from patients and co-workers cannot be maintained.
- Use surgical/procedure masks in a judicious manner to help conserve supplies and ensure availability throughout this COVID-19 pandemic.
- The surgical/procedure mask should be immediately changed and safely disposed of whenever it is soiled or wet, whenever it may have become contaminated and after care for any patient on Droplet +/- Contact precautions (i.e. suspected or confirmed influenza-like illness or COVID-19).

The recommended approach for masking for healthcare workers who do not work in patient care areas and do not have direct patient contact:

- All staff who can perform their duties from home should do so to preserve PPE.
- Individuals whose function must be performed in person do not need to wear a mask but should practice social distancing.
- Masking is required if social distancing cannot be maintained or if entry into patient care areas is required.

There are several reasons for the new recommendations and why we're acting now:

- There is concern some healthcare providers may have early or mildly symptomatic COVID-19. We are recommending continuous masking for those who are face-to-face with patients or who are in work settings where they cannot maintain a consistent six-foot (two-metre) physical distancing from co-workers. The strategy is aimed to protect patients and co-workers.
- A broader healthcare worker masking policy may reduce the number of staff required to be furloughed in the event of exposure to COVID-19.

- PPE conservation is critical and a sustainable approach is required. In other jurisdictions, a consistent policy of continuous mask use has led to reductions in overall PPE use.

Please note: This does not change requirements to self-isolate when sick, and NO healthcare worker with symptoms of illness should come to work. Also, both the Public Health Agency of Canada and Alberta's Chief Medical Officer of Health recommend all individuals, including healthcare workers, consider masking when they are out in public.

For more information on PPE guidance, please visit www.ahs.ca/covidppe.

New Continuing Care Restrictions

Additional steps are being taken to prevent the spread of illness in continuing care facilities. All workers in these sites will be required to wear masks at all times when providing direct patient care or working in patient care areas. We are making this change to protect patients from inadvertent exposure from a healthcare worker who could be without symptoms, but still be infectious.

Continuous masking will also minimize the risk of an asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic healthcare worker exposing other workers to the illness. In addition to new masking requirements, we are requiring all workers in continuing care facilities to work at only one site. This will help prevent the spread of illness between facilities.

These requirements are currently in effect in outbreak locations for all long term care and supportive living sites across the province. Work is underway with the organizations that provide care in these settings to transition to this requirement, which will be implemented beginning late next week.

In the Zones

Zone Emergency Operations Centre (ZEOC) Update – North Zone

Our North Zone Population, Public and Indigenous Health (PPIH) team continues to be in communication with representatives from the 33 First Nations, eight Métis Settlements and Métis Nation of Alberta, and has been working with Friendship Centers on urban Indigenous supports, including vulnerable populations, as the pandemic continues to evolve in our province. The PPIH team is hearing their concerns, noting their vulnerable populations, and is providing resources to educate and equip their communities around COVID-19.

Temporary Expansion to Peter Lougheed Centre

It was announced today that an expansion to the Peter Lougheed Centre (PLC) in Calgary will help meet patient needs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Alberta-based Sprung Structures has donated a temporary structure to AHS that will add up to 6,000 square feet of treatment space which will be located in AHS parking lots 10 and 17, next to the PLC. Work is now underway to prepare the site for the structure, which is 70 metres by 105 metres, and will create approximately 100 more care spaces for Calgary-area patients. It is a tensioned membrane building, which combines an aluminum substructure with highly tensioned membrane panels. AHS

will invest up to \$3 million to turn the structure into a site for safe, high-quality healthcare delivery which meets all standards for infection prevention and control.

There have been 835 cases of COVID-19 identified in the Calgary zone as of April 8. This represents 61 per cent of all the cases in Alberta. AHS is working on other measures to increase the number of acute care beds in the Calgary zone and throughout the province in response to a surge of demand caused by COVID-19. These measures include postponement of all elective surgeries and procedures, and identifying non-clinical spaces in AHS facilities that can be adapted for patient care. In all, AHS is ensuring that more than 3,000 acute care and intensive care spaces are available for patients with COVID-19.

More details will be shared as this project and construction take shape.

Patient Care Handouts Available Online

Albertans can now read about [COVID-19 self-care instructions](#) and [how to manage symptoms of COVID-19 at home](#) on MyHealth.Alberta.ca. These two patient care handouts provide concise COVID-19 related general health information and home care advice. The health information has been reviewed by AHS medical experts and is approved for use by healthcare providers across Alberta to provide:

- standardized online patient education
- discharge instructions at the point of care
- home care advice by Health Link tele-triage staff

MyHealth.Alberta.ca team currently is working to make the handouts available through ahs.ca/covid online resource as well as in Connect Care system for discharge workflow.

Be Well - Be Kind

#FoundationsofGratitude shows support for healthcare heroes

We're incredibly grateful to our health foundation partners for launching #FoundationsofGratitude today. Through this campaign, foundations from across the province are coming together to show their appreciation for healthcare professionals and support staff during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Albertans are asked to join the foundations in showing support, by creating and placing hearts in their windows at home, and sharing images of their "HEARTwork" and messages of support online, using the social media tag [#FoundationsofGratitude](#).

Thank you to our talented and compassionate staff who are facing COVID-19 head on to support Albertans. We also thank our foundation partners and their donors for their tremendous contributions toward healthcare in our province. For more information on #FoundationsofGratitude, visit [here](#).



#FoundationsOfGratitude

COVID-19 Effect on Addiction and Mental Health

A weekly digest providing the latest literature and resources regarding the effect of COVID-19 on addiction and mental health is available. Every Monday, the newest evidence and resources will be shared and compiled by the AHS Provincial Addiction and Mental Health Knowledge Exchange team. You can [subscribe](#) to receive the latest updates.

In seriousness, these are very difficult times for most of us, as we face new realities and increasingly stringent restrictions. Many of us are juggling working remotely, with the intensified pressures of home life, while navigating the overwhelming information about COVID-19 coming at us. But, in the midst of all of this, there can still be great hope. We have been reminded daily of the meaningful and wonderful ways humans are coming together to help each other with kindness and compassion. There is much good in our world to celebrate, even during this pandemic. This [video is such a poignant and uplifting illustration to remind us to choose hope.](#)



We are confident our expected needs and supplies of ventilators will support the most severely ill patients. If data continues its current trend, we feel we will be in a good position to give Albertans the care they will need and keep our healthcare teams safe.

We are working with Alberta's Provincial Operations Centre and Provincial Emergency Social Services to ensure our partners have adequate inventory for essentials services.

For more information see:

- [Guidelines for Continuous Masking in Healthcare Settings](#)
- [Guidelines for Continuous Masking in Home Care and Congregate Living Settings](#)

Cleaning at Home

Many healthcare workers, first responders and essential services workers have asked how they and their families can be safe at home.

High touch surfaces are those touched often and most likely to be contaminated, such as:

- Tabletops
- Light switches
- Door knobs
- Sink taps
- Toilet handles
- Kitchen counter tops.

Clean and disinfect high touch surfaces daily or when visibly soiled.

Use a “wipe twice” or 2-step process to clean and disinfect. First wipe the surface thoroughly with soap and water to clean and remove soiling and debris. Then wipe again with a clean cloth saturated in a disinfectant to destroy or de-activate COVID-19 and other micro-organisms.

Environmental Public Health recommends two disinfectants:

- Diluted household bleach. Prepare fresh daily; add 80 mL (1/3 cup) of 5% household bleach to 4 litres (16 cups) of water.
- Accelerated hydrogen peroxide (0.5%), used according to label instructions.

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April 15, 2020 Webinar: COVID 19 AND DIALYSIS PATIENTS Your Questions Answered

This message is intended to advise you of an upcoming webinar presented by the Kidney Foundation in partnership with the Canadian Society of Nephrology.

COVID-19 is a serious health threat and the situation is evolving daily. In these uncertain times, it’s normal to feel anxious, especially for those with underlying health conditions. Talking to people you can trust and getting the information you need can help. The Kidney Foundation, in Partnership with The Canadian Society of Nephrology is proud to present this webinar, COVID-19 and Dialysis Patients - Your Questions Answered.

COVID 19 AND DIALYSIS PATIENTS Your Questions Answered Wednesday April 15th, 2020 - 12:15 – 1:45 Eastern Time

More information on this webinar, including how to register, can be found in both the attached document and the link below

<https://cdn.cyberimpact.com/clients/21780/public/4ab19ca3-3211-4a55-a5de-eefb1422d9d0/files/COVID/Flyer - COVID-19 and Dialysis Patients - Your Questions Answered.pdf#page=1>

Pregnancy During the COVID-19 Pandemic STUDY:

Please see below for a Facebook link and a website link to a recently launched study that will examine stress in pregnant women during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study has been approved by the University of Calgary Conjoint Health Ethics Board. We would appreciate broad dissemination through your networks. Please note that participants must live in Canada and be able to respond in English (we are working on a French translation). Thank you!

https://www.facebook.com/Pregnancy-During-the-Covid-19-Pandemic-105854971072121/?modal=admin_todo_tour

<https://www.pregnancyduringthepandemic.com/>

Clinical Knowledge and Content Management (CKCM) patient education materials:

The 2 Patient Care Handouts for Covid-19 are now published on MyHealth.Alberta.ca and the links can be distributed within zones.

[https://myhealth.alberta.ca/Alberta/Pages/Coronavirus-Disease-\(COVID-19\)-Care-Instructions.aspx](https://myhealth.alberta.ca/Alberta/Pages/Coronavirus-Disease-(COVID-19)-Care-Instructions.aspx)

<https://myhealth.alberta.ca/Alberta/Pages/How-to-manage-symptoms.aspx>

Next steps:

1. Link these patient education material from ahs.ca/covid
2. Integrate the patient care handouts to Connect Care for providers to access in After visit summary as Discharge Instructions
3. Add promoted search results on MyHealth.Alberta.ca for Covid-19 related health information
4. Consider translations of the patient education material in a few weeks to assess any content updates

We thank everyone who has changed their normal routines, treasured traditions and family and community gatherings to keep all Albertans safe. We know everyone is making sacrifices to stay at home and stop the spread of COVID-19.

Thank you and stay safe.

*****Please share this information as appropriate*****

*****For Alberta Health Services – Indigenous specific questions/concerns please**

email ahs.ecc.operations.ih@ahs.ca ***

*****For Indigenous Services Canada please**

email sac.cdemergenciesab-urgencesmtab.isc@canada.ca ***