

COVID-19 Status

November 6, 2020

We're unable this week to provide a seven-day review of COVID-19 numbers due to data issues at Alberta Health. But we can confirm this has been a troubling week, with spikes in new COVID-19 cases.

Here's what we know:

Alberta set a new record for highest number of daily new cases on Wednesday, Nov. 4, with 802. That was followed by 609 additional cases the next day. There are currently 171 individuals in Alberta hospitals with COVID-19, 33 of whom are in intensive care, an all-time high. AHS completed nearly 26,500 tests over two days (Nov. 4 and 5).

As of Nov. 5, AHS has confirmed 1,174 individuals with COVID-19 were present at schools while infectious. Currently, 524 out of 2,415 schools in the province (21.7 per cent) have reported an individual has attended their school while infectious.

Meanwhile, insights from AHS' Quality Measures Dashboard reveal some positive trends related to turnaround times from online screening, to swab collection, to the first attempt to provide results. Specifically, in the past three weeks, the time from online screen submission to first result notification attempt has gone from 101 hours (on Oct. 12) to 52 hours (on Nov. 3) for 80 per cent of high priority swabs with an online screening record. Additionally, the time from online screen submitted to swab collected has gone down from 30 hours to 13 hours for 80 per cent of high priority swabs with an online screening record in the same time period. These improvements are likely due to multiple factors, including recruitment of a temporary workforce and adding additional shifts, moving to winter locations with increased capacity, various quality improvement initiatives, and prioritizing testing for individuals who are symptomatic, close contacts of a confirmed cases or connected to an outbreak.

Finally, there have been eight deaths over the past two days, and our deepest condolences go out to the families and loved ones of these individuals.

Things You Need to Know

COVID-19 Testing for Healthcare Workers — The Latest Numbers

We continue to update the testing data for healthcare workers in the [AHS Healthcare Worker COVID-19 Testing dashboard](#). These statistics provide the total number of AHS, Covenant Health and Alberta Precision Laboratories (APL) employees and physicians tested, including a breakdown of the number of positive tests and those who have been confirmed to have been exposed in the workplace.

As of Nov. 4:

- 61,525 employees (AHS, APL, and Covenant combined) have been tested for COVID-19 and, of those, 1,032 (or 1.68 per cent) have tested positive.

- Of the 577 employees who have tested positive and whose source of infection has been determined, 134 (or 23.2 per cent) acquired their infection through workplace exposure. An additional 455 employees who have tested positive are still under investigation as to the source of infection.
- 3,951 physicians (AHS, APL, and Covenant combined) have been tested for COVID-19 and, of those, 57 (or 1.44 per cent) have tested positive.
- Of the 40 physicians who have tested positive and whose source of infection has been determined, six (or 15 per cent) acquired their infection through workplace exposure. An additional 17 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](#).

Government of Alberta Announces Additional COVID-19 Measures

As we continue to see unprecedented daily COVID-19 case numbers in our province, Premier Jason Kenney and Chief Medical Officer of Health Dr. Deena Hinshaw Friday announced additional measures for communities across Alberta.

These measures seek to limit the significant risk of transmission associated with gatherings in the home, and underscore the need for all Albertans in all communities to consider limiting their social bubble, while we continue to also follow all other public health measures and guidance.

About 40 per cent of active cases in Edmonton and Calgary are currently linked to household transmission or at a private event — and we know that the same risk exists beyond Edmonton and Calgary. As such, effective immediately, the mandatory 15-person limit on social gatherings (already in place in Edmonton and Calgary) is being expanded to include all communities on [the watch list](#).

Additionally, effective immediately, all Edmonton and Calgary residents are asked to stop holding social gatherings within their homes.

Residents in these cities are asked to socialize outdoors or in structured settings, such as restaurants, hotels and other businesses, where it is easier to limit risk of exposure. These types of businesses are subject to legal limits and take steps to prevent transmission, including screening staff, distancing and other measures that have been successful in mitigating transmission.

Finally, all Albertans are strongly recommended to limit cohorts to no more than three: your core household, your school, and one other sport or social cohort. Young children who attend child care could be part of four cohorts, given child care settings have not been a high risk for spread.

We must all also consider wearing masks in all indoor work settings, except when alone in a workspace, when distanced from others, or an appropriate barrier is in place. AHS has updated its masking directive with further information on masking in AHS settings.

Here's more information on that:

Updates to Continuous Masking Directive

Masking remains critical to our efforts to reduce transmission of COVID-19 in Alberta and within our facilities.

We continue to work to achieve 100 per cent compliance with our [Continuous Masking Directive](#), which requires all staff, physicians and volunteers to mask in all patient areas at all times, and also mask in ALL other areas where a minimum physical distance of two metres (six feet) cannot be maintained at all times. This applies to all zones and all types of AHS facilities: both healthcare and administrative. To support improved understanding of masking requirements in administrative areas as well, some additional guidance has been added to the directive regarding the use of cloth masks in these settings.

We cannot overstate the importance of all aspects of this directive for our staff, physicians and volunteers. Your support in ensuring compliance, both with yourself and your colleagues, is appreciated.

We also require all patients, visitors and designated support persons to help us in these efforts.

The AHS directive has also been updated to strengthen and clarify requirements of outpatients, visitors and designated support persons, and now includes some guidance around enforcing this compliance.

Specifically, the [updated directive](#) now includes dedicated guidance on visitors refusing to mask, patients not requiring emergent care and who refuse to mask, and the means of engaging protective services and law enforcement, if necessary.

No patient shall be denied service in AHS because they cannot or will not wear a mask; however, in exceptional circumstances, non-urgent or routine care may be deferred or handled virtually when individuals refuse to mask and safe accommodations cannot be made to provide such care.

It is strongly recommended that all staff, physicians, contracted care providers and volunteers review the updated directive, and note specifically new information regarding means of managing masking refusal, including:

- Offering virtual care to adult outpatients requiring or awaiting routine care who are unable or refuse to mask.
- When it may be appropriate for a non-urgent/non-emergent adult outpatient who refuses to mask to be asked to leave an AHS facility/setting.
- Working collaboratively with designated support persons and families/visitors to find the most appropriate and safest solution for the situation, as per the AHS How to [Support Mask Wearing: COVID-19 Worker Supports](#).

- Means of enforcing compliance with families or visitors, including last-resort escalation at the discretion of the site leader or designate to removal from an AHS facility, and engaging the support of Protective Services (if on-site) or local police (if appropriate), as necessary.

Please take the time to review and understand the [updated directive](#).

We understand and appreciate that staff are managing complex situations and working hard to protect all those in our facilities from COVID-19.

We thank you for your continued vigilance and leadership.

Temporary Changes to Contact Tracing Processes, Time to Shrink Bubbles

We are seeing a sustained record number of new COVID-19 cases confirmed in Alberta daily and, with each case, double to triple the number of close contacts that require notification and follow-up.

Our contact tracing team is working tirelessly to meet demand; however, to support this team — and the health of our communities — we need additional contact tracing support from Albertans.

Thursday, AHS announced temporary changes to contact tracing processes for COVID-19 cases in Alberta, as part of a pilot approach.

Specifically, effective Nov. 6, AHS will continue to directly notify close contacts of cases of COVID-19 confirmed in three priority groups **only**:

- Healthcare workers.
- Minors (parents will be notified if their child has been exposed in a school setting).
- Individuals who live or work within congregate or communal facilities.

At this time, AHS will no longer directly notify close contacts of positive cases that are confirmed outside of these three priority groups.

Instead, Albertans who are not within these priority groups, who have tested positive for COVID-19, will be asked to notify **their own** close contacts of the exposure. [Event organizers](#) will also still be directed to notify event attendees of an exposure, and workplaces will be informed by AHS of a case and directed to send out the notification to employees.

AHS will continue to directly contact all positive cases of COVID-19 to notify of the result, identify priority contacts that AHS will notify, and provide the case with guidance on notification of their own contacts.

Close contacts are defined as anyone who was within two metres of a positive case of COVID-19 for more than 15 minutes without consistent and appropriate use of personal protective equipment (PPE). A close contact is ALSO someone who has had direct contact with bodily fluids of a person who has COVID-19 (e.g., was coughed or sneezed on), or who provided direct care for a person who has

COVID-19. Anyone who falls into any of the above categories is considered a close contact of a confirmed case of COVID-19.

The identification and notification of close contacts of COVID-19 remain critical to Alberta's fight against COVID-19. Rapid notification of close contacts ensures that those exposed can isolate and get tested before potentially spreading disease to others.

This pilot approach will improve the efficiency of all contact tracing, and allow the contact tracing team to focus on populations at greatest risk of illness and further spread. AHS also continues to hire more staff and develop additional, innovative approaches to augment the contact tracing team.







As we move these changes forward, it's imperative that all Albertans — including everyone at AHS — consider limiting their social bubble. To the extent that we all limit our social interactions, we can further reduce the risk and scope of exposures when a case is confirmed. I (Verna) talk more about shrinking our bubbles in this video.



Of course, we must also follow other public health guidelines intended to keep us safe. You can see them here on this postcard.

Protect your friends, families, communities, and health system.

Please, help us help you:

-  Shrink your bubble
-  Wash your hands
-  Wear a mask
-  Keep your distance
-  Stay home if you feel unwell
-  Get your flu shot



Healthy Albertans.
Healthy Communities.
Together.



In addition to considering limiting your social interactions, we encourage Albertans to download the ABTraceTogether contact tracing app. It has been updated, is directly integrated into our contact tracing system and complements current AHS contact tracing approaches to increase the speed, accuracy and effectiveness of contact tracing procedures. Through the app, health officials are able to notify people who may have been infected faster, enabling AHS contact tracers to provide the guidance needed to protect their family, friends and community and reduce the spread of COVID-19.

We understand and appreciate Albertans may have questions about these changes, and we are here to support Albertans in notifying their own close contacts.

AHS has developed a new webpage, ahs.ca/ShrinkYourBubble, where Albertans can find supports, including email templates and scripts to use when notifying their own close contacts, as well as guidelines to help them identify their own close contacts.

We must continue to support each other through these challenging times, and that includes encouraging transparency and information sharing, to protect against further spread of illness.

If you are contacted by the AHS contact tracing team, please work with them and follow the direction that they give you.

If you are contacted by a friend, family member, colleague or neighbour, please support them and follow the direction that they give you, too.

We thank our contact tracing teams – and all teams – who continue to work to limit the spread of COVID-19, and help Albertans protect each other.

We are all in this together.

Acute Care Outbreak Information Available on New Web Page

With a growing number of COVID-19 cases in the province, staff, physicians and the public want to know more about outbreaks within acute care settings. To provide that information, AHS has developed a webpage dedicated to reporting the daily COVID-19 outbreak numbers in acute care settings across the province. It will be updated each weekday afternoon, and will include confirmed COVID-19 cases in patients and healthcare workers from active outbreaks. You can check out [Acute Care Outbreaks webpage](#).

Dr. Hinshaw Responds to Herd Immunity Arguments

As the pandemic continues with no end in sight, the argument for herd immunity is being made and shared more frequently, especially on social media. Specifically, there has been significant discussion about the Great Barrington Declaration; its authors claiming those at “minimal risk of death (should) live their lives normally to build up immunity to the virus through natural infection, while better protecting those who are at highest risk.”

Dr. Deena Hinshaw, the province’s Chief Medical Officer of Health, recently wrote a detailed response to this declaration, arguing “the claim that this approach is achievable with minimal impact is not correct for several reasons.” Dr. Hinshaw explains why herd immunity will lead to increased deaths and increased hospitalization, and points out it’s still unclear if COVID-19 infection confers long-lasting protection against future infections. “Herd immunity by natural infection is not a wise, or possibly even an achievable, goal to pursue,” she concludes.

We encourage you to take the time to read Dr. Hinshaw’s [full response](#), so you can better understand the human toll and efficacy of pursuing a ‘herd immunity’ strategy.

Verna’s Weekly Video Message — EMS in a Time of Pandemic

Our 5,600 EMS professionals have been working to better serve patients during the COVID-19 pandemic, making every effort to ensure the safety of patients and the EMS team at large. And behind the scenes, EMS continues to work to [consolidate 911 EMS dispatch services](#), which will allow AHS to co-ordinate those services more effectively.

Joining me (Verna) to tell us more about [some of EMS’ work during the pandemic and the latest on consolidated dispatch](#) are:

- Darren Sandbeck, Chief Paramedic.
- Kathleen Fraser, Provincial Program Director, EMS Office of Respectful Workplace.
- Dale Weiss, Executive Director of EMS Operations.

Darren, Kathleen and Dale discuss how we are keeping our responders safe, what goes into consolidating EMS dispatch, and the work of the EMS Office of Respectful Workplaces.



NEW: Photo of the Week — Halloween Brings Out Costumes and Smiles



Starting today, we wish to highlight a photo every week that illustrates your efforts, compassion and achievements as we respond to the pandemic and support Albertans who come to us for care.

Today's photo comes from Alberta Children's Hospital in Calgary, where registered nurse Dragon Kolenda brings out the smiles in nine-month-old patient Isebel Coldwell, who's dressed as Hermione from Harry Potter for Halloween.

Influenza Data Update

Yesterday, AHS published the second weekly [influenza data report](#) for this current influenza season.

We are pleased to see that more people have been immunized against influenza so far this season, as compared to this time last season; however, we still have a long way to go.

Enough influenza vaccine has been purchased to immunize 45 per cent of Albertans. This year, more than ever, it's imperative that we as staff, and as members of our communities, get immunized. This protects our patients, and our families, friends and colleagues, from further illness.

[Click here](#) for more on the clinics for public, including your families.

Novel Influenza Case Confirmation:

The lab-confirmed influenza case that was included in last week's update, under Central Zone, has since been identified as a novel strain of influenza and not as a case of seasonal influenza. As such, this case has been removed from the [weekly seasonal data report](#). The H1N2 case is not considered a risk to Albertans; however, we are offering further testing in areas of central Alberta to ensure we have a clear understanding of the full influenza picture in those communities. More information on the [H1N2 case](#).

Be Well - Be Kind

Thank You for Your Support in the 2020 AHS United Way Campaign

2020 has been a year of new challenges, stresses and demands on the healthcare system and our people. We have been striving to find new ways as a team to meet these demands, and the annual AHS workplace fundraising campaign for United Way was one of the ways we can defend against poverty, mental health crises, and homelessness.

The [annual campaign for United Way](#) supports our vision of 'Healthy Albertans. Healthy Communities. Together.' To the many staff, physicians and volunteers who participated in the campaign – a sincere thank you.

United Way funds go to thousands of organizations across Alberta, including registered charities, foundations and trusts. With our large and diverse workforce, United Way allows us to work together to raise funds, and each of us can allocate them to the causes and organizations closest to our hearts. Your donations from this campaign help local families and individuals find a healthier future. Thank you for spreading hope and support to every part of our province.



Sharing the Love — Congrats to Sherwood Park Assessment Centre Staff



Sherwood Park's East Drive-Through Assessment Centre closed its doors on Oct. 30. Since opening in March, staff at the site completed more than 80,000 swabs. The partnership with AHS and Strathcona County was essential to the site's success. AHS Community Health staff and Strathcona County staff helped operate assessment centre, with AHS deploying staff from several areas to help with swabbing and operations. Staff concluded their last day with a safe and fun celebration, dressing up as minions before the Halloween weekend. Thank you to our staff for their efforts in making the assessment centre a success and for going above and beyond your duties to help support the COVID-19 response.

Celebrity Shout-Out — Country singer Dean Brody

Musicians, actors and athletes all over Canada keep sending messages of gratitude to our staff, teams and volunteers.

This week's message comes from [Canadian country singer Dean Brody](#).

"Thank you for being on the front lines; we appreciate you," says the native of Jaffray, B.C., best known for hits such as *Whiskey in a Teacup* and *Another Man's Gold*. "You continue to show up in a much larger scale for us all and taking the risk so we can be safe. Appreciate you guys."



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 had a COVID-19 test and was impressed with the professional, friendly and efficient manner in which my appointment was handled. I particularly admired the staff cheerfully directing traffic on the access roadway on a bitterly cold morning. I was in a warm car, the staff were in a cold warehouse, checking information, clarifying the procedures, administering the test. As challenging as life is currently, we are all so blessed to be served by such incredible AHS staff. Thank you to everyone for making this procedure efficient and so much calmer than we could have anticipated.

— Anonymous

Thank you so much for your kind compassionate care. It's scary having to go to ER in the midst of a pandemic but you all showed kindness.

— Sandra Robertshaw

Wrapping Up — Closing Thoughts on Remembrance Day, Sacrifice and Self-Compassion

Wednesday is Remembrance Day, a day for all Canadians to remember those who served and sacrificed for our country to keep us free and safe. This Nov. 11, let's spend a moment of quiet reflection to honour those heroes who answered when duty called — and perhaps their selfishness and bravery can inspire all of us at this critical moment. Because, make no mistake, this is our moment. Each and every day, all of you — those on the front lines and those supporting the front lines — are doing everything possible to protect others from COVID-19. We see the sacrifices you're making; we see your courage; we see your struggles and resilience. Duty has called, you've answered, and your efforts have been nothing short of heroic during this historic moment in time. But please know we don't need you to be a hero. Please take care of yourself and do not hesitate to ask for help if you need it.

This week marks eight months since the first confirmed case of COVID-19 in Alberta — and it's been a tough time for all of us. I know many of you are feeling tired, frustrated and drained, both physically and emotionally. And yet we know we need to carry on, take care of ourselves and do our best to keep our spirits up because, although COVID-19 is our enemy, so are despair and frustration. I (Verna) would like to close this week's email with a new video in which I encourage all AHS staff, physicians and volunteers to practise self-compassion, and give ourselves permission to share our feelings — recognizing that having rough moments is normal, especially during a time of crisis. I also share some resources that can help all of us get through this most difficult time.



Thank you for all that you do, especially during these most trying of times.

As always, with gratitude and appreciation.

*****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 *****

Josipa Pavicic on behalf of AHS - Provincial Indigenous Health Hub

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