



# COMMUNITY UPDATE

*The latest from Northern Health*

August 2023

## **Organization and community news**

Northern Health is a large organization with many complex services and operations. We are pleased to share with you a new resource, "[Understanding Northern Health](#)", a guide with information, resources and tools from NH and a variety of provincial and regional agencies and organizations. We hope you find it helpful for accessing resources, understanding the Northern and provincial health care system, and answering general questions.

### **Helpful wildfire resources:**

As the 2023 wildfire season continues, here's a reminder of useful resources for staying informed:

- [Northern Health – Wildfires and your health](#)
- [Extreme heat and heat warnings](#)
- [Wildfire preparedness](#)
- [Latest air quality advisories](#)
- [BC Wildfire fire list](#)
- [Emergency Info BC Advisories](#)
- [Heat Warning in BC](#)
- [Disaster stress](#)
- [BCCDC – Wildfire smoke](#)
- [FireSmoke Canada – BC smoke forecasts](#)
- [Recover after a wildfire – Re-entering your home or business](#)

### **Ground has been broken on site of the new hospital in Dawson Creek**

It's official! A small group gathered on July 17, 2023, to dig the ceremonial hole and celebrate the start of construction. Check out the photos on [Let's Talk DCDH](#).

### **Northern Health CEO Cathy Ulrich honored by First Nations Health Authority**

Long time CEO and president of Northern Health, Cathy Ulrich, was honoured by the First Nations Health Authority at this year's spring Caucus. Cathy has been a valued leader and

partner in advancing health care services and programs in the North and for Indigenous peoples. We send her heartfelt good wishes as she retires in August. Read the full June issue of the [First Nations Health Authority News](#) for more.

### **Northern Health temporary site to ensure access to overdose prevention, harm reduction services in Dawson Creek**

Northern Health is working to ensure ongoing access to life-saving overdose prevention (OPS) and harm reduction services in Dawson Creek by establishing a temporary overdose prevention site on the grounds of Dawson Creek & District Hospital. [Read more.](#)

For a related item on the most recent Toxic Drug Alert issued for Dawson Creek, see the Overdose Prevention and Response section, further below.

### **Kitselas donates \$10,000**

Kitselas First Nation has donated \$10,000 to the Dr. R.E.M Lee's Foundation's 'Closer to Home' campaign to support Tier 3 level neo-natal care services in the birthing unit at the new Mills Memorial Hospital. [Read more.](#)

### **Village of Valemount and Northern Health Collaborate to Acquire Property for Staff Housing**

The Village of Valemount and Northern Health have joined forces to address the pressing issue of accessible and affordable housing for healthcare professionals, essential workers, and community staff. This collaboration involves the purchase of a property on 6th Avenue in downtown Valemount, which will provide stable accommodation for employees, helping to alleviate the shortage of affordable housing in the area. The aim is to ensure that essential workers can find suitable housing near their workplaces, leading to improved staff retention and a focus on delivering high-quality healthcare services to the community. [Read press release.](#)

### **Check it out! First look at the new Dawson Creek & District Hospital**

Draft renderings have been released on Let's Talk DCDH including [exterior views](#), [patient rooms](#), and [interior spaces](#). Register for the site so that you can add comments and share your thoughts! Design is ongoing and subject to change.

### **Interested in employment and/or business opportunities with the Dawson Creek & District Hospital Project?**

Graham Design Builders is responsible for all employment, apprenticeship training, and subcontracting related to the construction of the new hospital and they are committed to employing as many locals as possible. To view the list of upcoming subcontractor awards and business opportunities, visit [Let's Talk DCDH - Employment and business opportunities.](#)

### **Northern Health Stories highlights**

The [Northern Health Stories site](#) is a great place to read about what's going on in Northern Health – people, places, projects, and more! Here are some recent highlights:

- [Students explore career opportunities and practice hands-on health care](#)
- [Redefining self-care: More than bubble baths!](#)
- [Watch out for wheelchairs biking the streets of Smithers this summer!](#)
- [Spotlight on our people: Meet the Nurse Practitioners of the Primary Care Clinic](#)
- [Alzheimer's sucks](#)
- [GoHealth BC: Supporting nursing in BC's rural and remote communities](#)
- [Wildfire smoke](#)
- [Chris Simms reflects on working at Northern Health for over a decade](#)
- [Celebrating the Indigenous employees of Northern Health - Taylor Boucher](#)
- [Celebrating the Indigenous employees of Northern Health - Donna Porter](#)

## Ministry of Health highlights

Including highlights from the [Ministry of Health](#) and [Ministry of Mental Health & Addictions](#) that are of interest to all BC residents:

- [PharmaCare covers new medical device for people with diabetes](#)
- [Province takes action to eliminate hepatitis C](#)
- [New ALS therapy covered by BC PharmaCare](#)
- [Minister's statement on lives lost to poisoned drugs in June](#)

## Public Health

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### Blue-green algae tips for summer – have fun but be safe around the lake

Summer brings many things, including enjoying our time on the many lakes in northern BC. For those living on lakes year-round, part time, or just visiting, it's important to stay healthy while enjoying the experience.

With the warming weather, blue-green algae (cyanobacteria) blooms may appear in lakes across northern BC. Blue-green algae are naturally occurring and can look like scum, grass clippings, fuzz or globs on the surface of water. Blue-green algae can be blue-green, greenish-brown, brown, or pinkish-red, and often smells musty or grassy.

People who come in contact with visible blue-green algae, or who ingest water containing toxins from blue-green algae, may experience skin irritation, rash, sore throat, sore red eyes, swollen lips, fever, nausea and vomiting or diarrhea. Symptoms usually appear within one to three hours and resolve in one to two days. Symptoms in children are often more pronounced. [Read more.](#)

## Overdose prevention and response

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### Supports expanding for people in mental-health, substance-use crisis

People in a mental-health or substance-use crisis will have the support of experts as new mobile, integrated-response teams are coming to nine communities throughout the province, including Prince Rupert.

The Province is expanding Mobile Integrated Crisis Response (MICR) Teams (also known as Car programs) to help people in crisis and to free up police resources to focus on crime. [Read more.](#)

### Toxic drug alert: Dawson Creek

There has been an increase in overdoses in Dawson Creek linked to a bright orange/red powder, a blue substance sold as crystal meth, and possibly other coloured substances causing sudden overdose, requiring hospitalization and lengthy monitoring.

Please take care, drugs move throughout the north, share this alert widely. We have included safety recommendations on our [website](#).

## BC Coroners Services - Illicit Drug Toxicity Deaths

### BC Summary

The rate of unregulated drug deaths in BC is 45.5 deaths per 100,000 individuals in 2023. In 2023, there have been 1228 suspected unregulated drug deaths. There were 184 suspected unregulated drug deaths in June 2023. The June numbers represents a 17% increase over the number of deaths in June 2022 (157) and a 2% increase from May 2023.

The number of unregulated drug deaths in June 2023 equates to about 6.1 deaths per day.

By Health Authority (HA), in 2022, the highest **rates** were in Northern Health (60 deaths per 100,000 individuals) and Vancouver coastal (56.8 deaths per 100,000 individuals); the highest **number** of unregulated drug deaths were in Fraser and Vancouver Coastal Health Authorities (338 and 363 deaths, respectively), making up 57% of all such deaths during 2023.

### Trends

- Smoking was the most common mode of drug consumption in 2023 with 67% showing evidence of smoking followed by injection (16%), nasal insufflation (13%), and oral (5%)
- In 2023, 81% of unregulated drug deaths occurring inside (private residences, other inside residence including social and supportive housing, SROs, shelters, and hotels etc.) and 18% occurring outside in vehicles, sidewalks, streets, parks etc.
- There is no indication that prescribed safe supply is contributing to unregulated drug deaths.

### Northern Health Summary

In 2023, NH has the highest rate of unregulated drug deaths in the province with a rate of 60.0 deaths per 100,000 individuals (N=92).

In June 2023, the rate of unregulated drug deaths was 4.9 per 100,000 (N=15).

- **The Northwest** has seen **29** unregulated drug deaths in 2023 for a rate of 74.2 deaths per 100,000 individuals. This is the second highest rate in BC.
- June 2023 there were **2** unregulated drug deaths rate of 3.8 deaths per 100,000 individuals
- **The Northern Interior** has seen **55** unregulated drug deaths in 2023 for a rate of 71.0 deaths per 100,000 individuals. This is the third highest rate in BC.

- June 2023 there were **10** unregulated drug deaths rate of 6.5 deaths per 100,000 individuals
- **The Northeast** has seen **8** unregulated drug deaths in 2023 for a rate of 21.7 deaths per 100,000 individuals. This is the third lowest rate in BC.
- June 2023 there were **2** unregulated drug deaths rate of 2.7 deaths per 100,000 individuals

For the Coroner's full report please go to: [Unregulated Drug Death Summary](#)

For more detailed public information please go to [Unregulated Drug Poisoning Emergency Dashboard \(bccdc.ca\)](#).

## COVID-19

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COVID is still with us, in our communities, impacting our friends and loved ones. Vaccinations remain the best defence against both influenza and COVID-19.

The COVID-19 spring booster program in BC is now complete. If you still want a spring booster shot you can:

- Use your existing invitation through the [Get Vaccinated system](#) and make an appointment
- If you don't have an invitation, call the provincial call centre to arrange an appointment [1-833-838-2323](tel:1-833-838-2323)

BC is now planning for a COVID-19 booster program in fall 2023 based on latest recommendations and vaccines to be approved by Health Canada.

Beyond vaccinations, we can all take key preventive measures to avoid illness, including:

- Stay at home if you feel unwell and try to avoid spending time with people at higher risk of serious illness.
- Practice respiratory etiquette: wear a mask in crowded, public spaces, and cough and sneeze into your elbow.
- Clean your hands regularly.
- Avoid touching your face, especially your eyes, mouth and nose.

For more information, visit [BCCDC](#) or the [Provincial Infection Control Network of British Columbia](#).

### Resources and information

The [Northern Health COVID-19](#) and [COVID-19 information](#) pages have information about immunization clinics, testing and self-isolation, the community toolkit, and trusted contacts.

For information outside of Northern Health, see [these trusted resources](#).