



# COMMUNITY UPDATE

*The latest from Northern Health*

**March 31, 2021**

## COVID-19

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### COVID-19 case counts and statements

As of March 30, **5,944** cases have been reported in the NH region since the beginning of the pandemic.

- Cases currently active: **297**
- New cases: **46**
- Currently in hospital: **32**
  - Currently admitted to HAU/ICU in hospital: **12**
- Deaths in the NH region since the beginning of the pandemic: **120**

For the latest provincial numbers, see the [BC COVID-19 dashboard](#), which is updated Monday-Friday. The dashboard may not work in all browsers; Chrome is suggested.

As well, see the [COVID-19 Epidemiology app](#), which visualizes COVID-19 in BC in comparison to other Canadian and global jurisdictions, at the HSDA level. It's updated on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays.

- [Joint statement on Province of B.C.'s COVID-19 response](#) – March 30, 2021
- [BCCDC Situation Report](#) – March 31, 2021

### Indigenous people 18+ can now book vaccine appointments (all communities)

Starting today, all Indigenous people born in or before 2003 (18 years+ at time of vaccination) are invited to book a COVID-19 vaccine appointment with the NH Call Centre. This applies to all Northern Health communities. To book your appointment, visit the [NH vaccine webpage](#) to get the call-in number for your community.

Appointments will last about 10 minutes, with an additional 15-minute wait time before leaving. Clinic locations will be confirmed at time of booking.

## AstraZeneca vaccinations paused for those under 55

Based on guidance from Health Canada and the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI), the Province is temporarily suspending the use of the AstraZeneca/SII COVISHIELD (AZ/SII) vaccine for people aged 55 and younger until further notice and information is available.

For more information: [AstraZeneca safety information from the British Columbia Centre for Disease Control \(BCCDC\)](#)

## Are you considered clinically extremely vulnerable?

Some people who are “clinically extremely vulnerable” can get their vaccinations earlier. This includes people on dialysis or people with certain cancers – see more details here: [Vaccines for people who are clinically extremely vulnerable](#). If you're on the clinically extremely vulnerable list, you'll get a letter inviting you to call in and book your vaccine appointment. The letter will be mailed to the home address that's on file with your Personal Health Number. Letters will be mailed starting March 24 and should arrive by April 15.

However, if you're Indigenous and will be 18 or older at the time of your vaccination, or if everyone in your community age 18 and older (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) is already eligible for vaccination, **you're already eligible anyway**. This means you don't have to wait for a letter – **you can call in anytime to book your vaccine**.

## Changes to visiting rules for long-term care and assisted living

The province is relaxing the rules around visiting at long-term care homes and assisted living facilities, effective April 1. Letters will be sent out soon to families outlining these changes.

- Family/social visits are no longer limited to one designated family member or friend. Additional family members and friends are allowed with a maximum of two visitors (plus one child) at the same time if the visit is indoors.
- Residents may have more social visitors outdoors, in an appropriate location, and in alignment with current provincial health officer guidelines. Infection prevention and control measures (e.g., visitors must be screened for signs and symptoms of illness prior to every visit, practice hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette – cough or sneeze into elbows sleeves and dispose used tissues properly – and wear medical masks) must be followed.
- There are no longer restrictions on the location, frequency, or duration of visits, and visits can now take place in residents' rooms.
- Physical touch between residents and their visitors is now allowed with infection prevention and control measures in place.
- Every resident is entitled to regular, routine, frequent opportunities for social visitation, allowing for a minimum of 60 minutes if desired.

For more details, see

- [Ministry of Health - Overview of Visitors in Long-Term Care and Seniors' Assisted Living](#)
- [Poster on visitor policy \(revised\)](#)

## Northern Health's COVID-19 Vaccine Plan page is the source of truth

The vaccine rollout can be a confusing time. For the most up-to-date information, check Northern Health's [COVID-19 vaccine plan page](#), which is updated often to reflect the latest changes. The page also includes a list of communities, with specific details for who can call in, where to get your vaccine, etc.

## Trusted links and resources for COVID-19

- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): A Northern Health Guide for Your Community](#) – watch for a fully updated version (coming soon!)
- [BC Centre for Disease Control](#)
- [HealthLink BC COVID-19 page](#)
- [WHO FAQ](#)
- [Health Canada FAQ](#)
- [COVID-19 content in other languages](#)
- WorkSafe BC - [COVID-19 information and resources](#)
- Northern Health COVID-19 Online Clinic & Information Line: **1-844-645-7811**
- Northern Health Environmental Health Officer Line: **1-250-565-7322**
- For **non-medical info**, call **1-888-COVID19 / 1-888-268-4319** 7 days, 7:30 am - 8 pm

For current information on restrictions on travel, gatherings and other issues, see the [Provincial Health Officer's COVID-19 webpage](#).

## Overdose prevention and response

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### Illicit drug toxicity deaths to February 2021: BC Coroners Report released

On March 24, the BC Coroners Service released its latest [report on BC's illicit drug toxicity deaths, January 1 to February 28, 2021](#).

#### Provincial Summary

February 2021 (N=155) saw a 107% increase in the number of deaths from February 2020 (N=75)

- This is the largest number of suspected deaths ever in the month of February.
- In February, VCH and FH had the highest **number** of deaths.
- NH had the highest **rate** of illicit drug toxicity deaths in the province with a rate of 58.1 deaths per 100,000 individuals in 2021.

#### Northern Health Summary

- NH had eight illicit drug toxicity deaths in February (~35 deaths per 100,000 individuals)
- All three NH regions are in the top five in the province for **rate** of illicit drug toxicity deaths, with the Northeast being the highest.
- The **Northwest** recorded eight illicit drug toxicity deaths in 2021 for a rate of 63.1 deaths per 100,000 individuals, which is the third lowest in the province.
  - There was one death in February.
- The **Northern Interior** recorded 12 illicit drug toxicity deaths in 2021 for a rate of 48.8 deaths per 100,000 individuals. This is the third highest rate in BC.

- There were four deaths in February.
- The City of Prince George had nine deaths in 2021.
- The **Northeast** recorded eight illicit drug toxicity deaths in 2021 for a rate of 73.0 deaths per 100,000 individuals. This is the second highest rate in BC.
  - There were three deaths in February.
  - The City of Dawson Creek recorded five deaths in 2021.

For more information on illicit drug toxicity deaths, visit the BC Coroners Service at [Statistical Report on Deaths in British Columbia](#).

## Other Northern Health news

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### **New Long-Term Care/Assisted Living Digest, Issue #20: Information for residents and families**

The long-term care task group is continuing to produce updates twice a month for residents and families of long-term care homes and assisted living facilities.

[This issue](#) provides an update on the new visiting restrictions for long-term care and assisted living, effective April 1, 2021.