



# COMMUNITY UPDATE

*The latest from Northern Health*

January 21, 2022

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## COVID-19

### **Northern Health regional Public Health Orders lifted; provincial COVID-19 restrictions apply**

Northern Health (NH) has repealed NH-specific public health orders for Gatherings and Events, to align the region with COVID-19 restrictions for all of BC.

While NH-specific measures have been repealed effective January 20, 2022 – all current Provincial Public Health Orders and restrictions, including PHO orders on masks in public indoor settings, on gatherings and events, and on restaurants, pubs, bars and nightclubs continue to be in effect and enforced in the Northern Health region. More information on the provincial restrictions in place across BC can be found on the [Provincial and regional restrictions webpage](#).

Vaccination continues to be the best line of defence against COVID-19. There are ongoing vaccine clinic opportunities throughout the region, including for newly-eligible 5 to 11 year olds. To find a clinic, visit the [COVID-19 immunization clinics webpage](#).

### **Northern Health adjusting services to strengthen patient safety**

Northern Health (NH) is planning temporary services adjustments to strengthen patient care due to existing staffing challenges and Omicron related COVID-19 staffing pressures.

“Northern Health is proactively identifying services to be adjusted as we manage the ongoing staffing impacts on the health system, to ensure we can continue to provide safe patient care,” said Northern Health president and CEO, Cathy Ulrich. “Existing staffing challenges in the North are compounded by Omicron-related impacts, and some staff will need to be temporarily reassigned within communities in the region, to ensure essential service levels.”

The temporary service changes include:

- Surgical service postponements are planned or ongoing in the coming weeks at University Hospital of Northern BC-Prince George, Wrinch Memorial Hospital in Hazelton, Bulkley Valley District Hospital in Smithers, and at Northeast BC facilities including Dawson Creek & District Hospital, impacting both surgical and ambulatory care procedures
  - Wrinch Memorial Hospital is postponing or not booking approximately 20 procedures including scopes and dental procedures for the week of January 23
  - Bulkley Valley District Hospital is reducing from two surgical slates to one, postponing 10-12 procedures per week between January 16 and January 29
  - In Northeast BC, Dawson Creek & District Hospital is reducing surgical bookings over the next three to four weeks
- In long-term care, staffing at sites across the region is being monitored on a daily basis;
  - Several LTC facilities in the region have paused admissions and are operating fewer beds to ensure safe provision of care within existing staffing levels
  - There are temporary reductions across the NH region to adult day programs and non-urgent home health services
- Temporary reductions across NH to outpatient ambulatory clinics, some community care services, and outpatient laboratory services in some communities
- Situation response teams are in place to support site managers in Hazelton and Burns Lake, as both communities are experiencing staffing challenges across all facilities and services

To continue reading and for more information, please visit the [NH Stories site](#).

## **COVID-19 testing and self-isolation**

### **Testing guidance update and rapid tests**

As Omicron activity increases across BC, guidance for when to get a COVID-19 test has been updated. Due to the increase in demand for tests, and to preserve testing capacity, testing sites may prioritize testing for those at risk of more severe disease, and those who live or work in high-risk settings such as health care workers. Some people referred for testing may get a rapid antigen test kit to take home.

Rapid COVID-19 tests (rapid antigen tests) are now available as take-home kits at some Northern Health testing centres for people with symptoms, in addition to PCR testing. The type of test a person receives will be based on their symptoms and risk factors.

For more direction on using rapid tests, contact tracing and what to do after testing positive, visit the [BCCDC Rapid Antigen Testing for COVID-19 site](#).

Those who receive a rapid antigen test will be provided with instructions for self-reporting a positive result, self-isolation, managing symptoms, and notifying their contacts. They do not require additional testing to confirm their test result.

### **When to get tested**

Testing is most needed for people who have symptoms of COVID-19 and are at risk of more severe disease and currently eligible for treatment, live or work in high-risk settings such as health care workers.

If you have mild symptoms of COVID-19, you do not need a test. Stay home and isolate away from others until you feel well enough to return to your regular activities and you no longer have a fever.

Testing is recommended for people who meet certain criteria and have symptoms associated with COVID-19 infection. For more information, please see the [BCCDC When to get a COVID-19 test page](#).

### **How to get a test**

Those seeking testing have a few options:

- Completing the [Northern Health COVID-19 test booking form](#)
- Contacting your primary care provider (family doctor or nurse practitioner)
- Calling the [Northern Health Virtual Primary and Community Care Clinic](#) at [1-844-645-7811](tel:1-844-645-7811)

**Please note** that you must first book a test. Rapid tests are not available via drop-in.

If you feel unwell and are unsure about your symptoms, contact your health care provider or call [8-1-1](tel:8-1-1). If you're still not sure, please use the BC [COVID-19 Self-Assessment Tool](#) to determine if you need to be tested.

More details and a full list of eligible symptoms and criteria is found here: [When to get a COVID-19 test](#)

## **COVID-19 immunization plan**

### **Pediatric dose**

The Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine is available for children 5 to 11. This vaccine uses a lower dose (10 micrograms), at one-third of the dose formulated for older children and adults, which will provide effective protection tailored to children's immune systems. The National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) advises that children receive a two-dose series of the vaccine with an interval of eight weeks or more between the first and second dose.

For more information about this vaccine (including information about the vaccine and how to register a youth): [COVID-19 vaccines for children 5 to 11](#).

**Third dose**

The third dose of the COVID-19 vaccination is for some people who are moderately to severely immunocompromised. People who need a third dose [will be contacted](#) by the provincial [Get Vaccinated](#) system when they are eligible to receive it.

**Booster dose**

The booster dose is an additional non-urgent, non-compulsory vaccine that gets immunity back up to a desirable level of protection for an extended period of time. It is available now.

Booster doses are now available for pregnant people. For more information, please see the [Province of BC website](#).

To book a booster dose, please ensure you're registered in the [Get Vaccinated](#) system. If you have difficulty accessing online booking, please call [1-833-838-2323](tel:1-833-838-2323).

**Please note** that pediatric, third, and booster doses may be by appointment only, not walk-ins. Please see the [Northern Health COVID-19 immunization clinic page](#) for more information for your community.

**Mobile clinics**

The Northern Health Mobile Clinic is back, coming to a community near you! Our vans will be traveling to different areas, running mobile clinics throughout many of our Northern communities. These mobile clinics will be offering first dose and second dose to all ages, and booster doses to those who are eligible. To stay updated on a mobile clinic happening in your region, please visit our [website](#) or follow your community page on Facebook.

**Northern Health is seeking health care workers to provide COVID-19 immunizations**

Northern Health is appreciative of all the assistance we have received to date from health care providers in the North supporting our COVID-19 immunization clinics. This support has been an integral component of Northern Health's COVID-19 response, administering vaccine doses to mitigate impacts of COVID-19 on our communities and health care system.

**Right now, we need your help again.**

Northern Health is seeking more qualified health care workers to provide COVID-19 immunizations and support our current booster campaign efforts throughout the region. Qualified health care providers include a number of occupations (e.g., midwives, practicing and non-practicing physicians, practicing nurses, retired nurses, nursing students, dentists, emergency responders). For a full list of who is qualified under current PHO orders please visit [here](#).

If you are qualified, interested, and available to assist with our continuing immunization efforts, we encourage you to reach out to [pandemicresponse@northernhealth.ca](mailto:pandemicresponse@northernhealth.ca)

We will review all expressions of interests and contact you if your availability aligns with clinic opportunities. Training and clinic orientation is provided.

### Northern BC community immunization coverage

Immunization coverage for every community in Northern Health is available for you on the [Northern BC community immunization coverage update \(PDF\)](#). This link includes both first- and second-dose counts and percentages per community and is updated every week.

### Community Toolkit

To empower local partners to share helpful information, we have created a [COVID-19 Community Toolkit](#) - a digital resource for community partners, which includes vaccine clinic information (including [clinic schedules](#)), a community guide, trusted information and links, and more!

### BC vaccination coverage rates and COVID-19 activity

#### BCCDC COVID-19 dashboard

Visit the BCCDC [COVID-19 surveillance dashboard](#) for information by local health area (LHA) and community health service area (CHSA).

#### COVID-19 Numbers

As of January 20, **22, 799** cases have been reported in the NH region since the beginning of the pandemic.

- Cases currently active: **1, 582**
- New cases: **203**
- Currently in hospital: **33**
  - Currently in ICU level care in hospital: **11**
- Deaths in the NH region since the beginning of the pandemic: **281**

As of January 18, **22, 336** cases have been reported in the NH region since the beginning of the pandemic.

- Cases currently active: **1, 418**
- New cases: **132**
- Currently in hospital: **29**
  - Currently in ICU level care in hospital: **9**
- Deaths in the NH region since the beginning of the pandemic: **281**

As of January 14, **21, 648** cases have been reported in the NH region since the beginning of the pandemic.

- Cases currently active: **1, 346**
- New cases: **227**
- Currently in hospital: **24**
  - Currently in ICU level care in hospital: **3**
- Deaths in the NH region since the beginning of the pandemic: **281**

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, for a visual comparison of COVID-19 cases in BC by HSDA to other Canadian and global jurisdictions, see the [COVID-19 Epidemiology app](#). It's updated on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays.

- [BC COVID-19 pandemic update](#) – January 20, 2022
- [BCCDC Situation Report](#) – January 19, 2022

### Trusted links and resources for COVID-19

- [Northern Health online booking form - COVID-19 test](#)
- [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 Virtual Primary and Community Care Clinic: **1-844-645-7811**
- Northern Health Environmental Health Officer Line: **1-250-565-7322**
- 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

### Overdose Alert issued for Northern BC

There has been an increase in overdose events across the Northern region from substances sold as “down.” Down is a street term used to describe opioids or opioid like substances that depress or slow the body down.

Substances circulating are highly toxic and may be further contaminated with benzodiazepines (benzos) causing heavy and prolonged sedation. Although, benzos do not respond to naloxone, due to the presence of opioids in many substances, overdoses may require more naloxone to reverse.

**One of the first signs of an overdose is choking, gurgling, or snoring sounds.**

For more information, please see:

- [Overdose alert poster](#)
- [NH Stories feature](#)
- [NH Overdose prevention page](#)

## Organizational news

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### Long-term Care/Assisted Living Digest – Issue 34

The long-term care task group is producing monthly updates for residents and families of long-term care homes and assisted living facilities.

[This issue](#) provides updated information on visitor restrictions, including essential and social visitor definitions and information on visitor rapid point-of-care testing for COVID-19.

### 2021 Dr. Charles Jago Awards: Recognizing employees living NH's values

At Northern Health (NH), we strive to make our values – empathy, respect, collaboration, and innovation – the core of what we do every day.

The Dr. Charles Jago Awards, named after our former board chair, acknowledge and celebrate the NH staff, physicians, and teams who have made outstanding contributions to our organizational goals, reflecting our values in the process.

For more information about the Dr. Charles Jago Awards, and to see the 2021 award recipients, please visit the [NH Stories website](#).

### Coming Together in the Northern way of caring

Since February 2020, throughout the challenging and unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic, people have shown how resilient they are. In Northern BC, we have seen people come together to help ensure the health and safety of their communities.

In celebration of the work being done, we have developed [Coming Together](#). This publication is a way for us to share a few stories about Northern Health professionals who make a difference in their communities. While we can't include every story, we hope the ones we were able to share here will help demonstrate the tireless efforts of these dedicated health care professionals.

We will continue to highlight health care professionals, their stories, and communities on the [Northern Health Stories site](#) – check back often!

### New animated video highlights respecting traditional tobacco, quitting commercial tobacco

January is a great time to look forward to the year ahead and continue on your wellness journey. If you aren't on a wellness journey yet, [it's never too late to start one](#).

This week is National Non-Smoking Week (Jan. 16-22), an annual event held in the third week of January aimed at educating Canadians about the dangers associated with commercial tobacco and preventing people who do not smoke from starting.

This year, we are excited to launch an animated video that may help you consider quitting commercial tobacco and learning more about [Respecting Tobacco](#).

To continue reading, and to watch the video, please visit the [First Nations Health Authority website](#).