



COMMUNITY UPDATE

The latest from Northern Health

March 16, 2022

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Monthly newsletter

Going forward, this newsletter will be released monthly. You can expect the next one in early April. Frequency may increase again in the future.

Thank you for your continued subscription. For regular news and updates, please follow our [web and social media accounts!](#)

COVID-19 Restriction updates

Many COVID-19 restrictions are lifting or changing

Effective March 11, 2022:

- Masks no longer required in public indoor settings under a public health order
- Long-term care visitation restored (with precautions)
- Faith gathering capacity limits lifted
- Overnight child and youth camp Order lifted
- Childcare guidelines revised
- K-12 school guidelines revised (changes effective on return from Spring Break)

Effective April 8, 2022:

- BC Vaccine Card no longer required in most settings
- Businesses transition from COVID-19 safety plan to communicable disease plan
- Post-secondary residence vaccine requirement lifted

Please visit the [BC Government website](#) for more information.

COVID-19 Information and updates

Rapid antigen testing kits from pharmacies

BC residents over 40 can get free [rapid antigen testing kits](#) from their local pharmacy with their Public Health Number (PHN). These should be picked up proactively, when you do not have symptoms. Each eligible person can get one kit every 28 days to ensure everyone who wants a kit can get one. You cannot pay for additional kits

Your PHN is available on the back of your BC driver's license, BC Services card, or CareCard. If you're under 40, keep following the BC Government site for updates about kit availability.

COVID-19 testing and self-isolation

Wondering [when to get a COVID-19 test](#)?

For most people:

A COVID-19 test is not recommended if:

- You have no symptoms, even if you are a close contact of someone who has tested positive
- You are fully vaccinated (two doses), experiencing mild symptoms and can manage your illness at home. Self-isolate for five days. Notify your close contacts so they can self-monitor for symptoms

A COVID-19 test is recommended if:

- You have symptoms, and:
 - You are at higher risk of severe illness
 - You identify with a high-risk setting - such as health care workers, first responders, residents of congregate settings, or live in a remote or rural community

For more information, including how to get a test, and information about rapid test use, please see the [Northern Health COVID-19 testing and self-isolation page](#).

COVID-19 vaccine and booster

COVID-19 vaccine

Please visit the [BCCDC COVID-19 vaccine website](#) for information about: vaccine doses (first, second, third, booster, and pediatric), vaccine registration and eligibility, vaccines and children, getting a vaccine, vaccine safety, vaccine considerations (including pregnancy), proof of vaccination, and more.

Please note that vaccination 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.

COVID-19 booster

Boosters are the health care system's best defense against COVID-19 because the vaccine becomes less effective over time. The booster returns, and even improves, vaccine effectiveness from shortly after when you received Dose 2. **If or when you are eligible (6 months after Dose 2), please [book your booster](#) immediately.** For more information on Omicron and the importance of getting your booster dose, check out "[Omicron Wave COVID-19](#)", a presentation by Medical Health Officer Dr. Corneil.

Novavax/Nuvaxovid COVID-19 vaccine

Health Canada has recently approved the protein-based [Novavax/Nuvaxovid](#) COVID-19 vaccine. The vaccine is approved for people who are 18 years of age and older. Its safety and effectiveness in people younger than 18 years of age have not yet been established.

It is not yet available for use, but people interested in this vaccine can call [1-833-838-2323](tel:1-833-838-2323) for more information and to request this vaccine.

Online screening tool for COVID-19 treatments available now

An online screening tool and virtual assessment service is available for people with a positive COVID-19 test to see if they are eligible for COVID-19 antiviral treatments and to go on to receive treatment.

British Columbians can now find out if these treatments are right for them through this new virtual service by following the four-step process available online (www.gov.bc.ca/covidtreatments), starting with a self-assessment. A physician and pharmacist team will decide if treatment is safe and appropriate as part of this process.

Paxlovid and Sotrovimab treatments are not suitable for everyone and must be prescribed by a health care provider who can assess interactions with other conditions or medications. Some patients may not be able to receive treatment if they are already taking some other medications.

To access this tool, and for more information, please visit the [BC Government COVID-19 treatments page](#).

Treatment for eligible individuals who test positive for COVID-19

If you test positive for COVID-19, you may be eligible for specific anti-viral treatments if you:

- Received a clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV) letter
- Are being actively treated for cancer
- Have received an organ transplant
- Have cystic fibrosis or severe renal disease
- Are moderately or severely immunocompromised
- Unvaccinated or partially vaccinated people who have certain chronic health conditions or identify as Indigenous

These treatments do not stop you from getting COVID-19. They are used to prevent severe illness in people who are at higher risk from COVID-19. To be effective, they must be taken within five to seven days of developing symptoms.

To access these treatments:

Contact your health care provider, doctor or specialist as soon as you know you are positive for COVID-19 and ask if you are eligible for specific treatments.

To learn more about COVID-19 treatments, visit the [BCCDC COVID-19 treatments page](#).

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. It's 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 March 15, **29, 026** cases have been reported in the NH region since the beginning of the pandemic.

- New cases: **24**
- Currently in hospital: **36**
 - Currently in ICU level care in hospital: **5**
- Deaths in the NH region since the beginning of the pandemic: **318**

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](#) – March 15, 2022
- [BCCDC Situation Report](#) – March 9, 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

Coroners Report: Illicit Drug Toxicity Deaths – Data from January 1 - 31, 2022

Summary

- January 2022 was the fourth consecutive month with more than 200 suspected deaths, with 207 suspected illicit drug toxicity deaths (47 deaths per 100,000), which is approximately 6.7 deaths per day
- 207 suspected illicit drug toxicity deaths represents a 10% increase in the number of deaths in January 2021

Northern Health Summary

- **Northern Health (NH) had the highest rate of illicit drug toxicity deaths in the province** with a rate of 74.5 deaths per 100,000 individuals
- **NH rates have continued to increase in the recent months.**
- **The Northwest** saw three illicit drug toxicity deaths in January 2022 (a rate of 46.2 deaths per 100,000 individuals). This is the sixth highest rate in BC.
 - In 2021, Upper Skeena local health area (LHA) had the highest rate in BC with a rate of 175.7 illicit toxicity deaths per 100,000 individuals, with a total of eight deaths
 - In 2021, Terrace LHA was also in the top 10 in BC with a rate of 68.1 illicit toxicity deaths per 100,000 individuals, with a total of 15 deaths
- **The Northern Interior** saw 11 illicit drug toxicity deaths in January 2022 (a rate of 85.2 deaths per 100,000 individuals). This is the second highest rate in BC
 - In 2021, Nechako LHA was eleventh in BC with a rate of 66.7 illicit toxicity deaths per 100,000 individuals, with a total of 11 deaths

- **The Northeast** saw five illicit drug toxicity deaths in January 2022 (a rate of 81.9 deaths per 100,000 individuals). This is the third highest rate in BC.
 - In 2021, Peace River South LHA was twelfth in BC with a rate of 63.3 illicit toxicity deaths per 100,000 individuals, with a total of 18 deaths

Full reports can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

Organizational news

New simulation baby in Fort St. John provides state-of-the-art pediatric training

The Fort St. John Hospital Foundation is excited to announce the arrival of a new [SimBaby](#)[™] with tracheostomy, applied for through the [TB Vets Charitable Foundation](#) granting process. TB Vets awarded the Foundation a \$56,788 grant to help purchase the simulator for Fort St. John Hospital.

To continue reading about this new addition, please visit the [Northern Health Stories site](#).