



MEDICAL STAFF DIGEST

A twice-weekly update for medical staff

March 9, 2021

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COVID-19

NH's COVID-19 resources

- On the NH physician website:
 - [COVID-19 information and resources](#)
- On OurNH:
 - [COVID-19 \(Coronavirus\)](#)
 - [Pandemic Recovery Toolkit](#)

COVID-19 case counts and statements

As of March 8, **4,901** cases have been reported in the NH region since the beginning of the pandemic.

- Cases currently active: **318**
- New cases: **5**
- Currently in hospital: **17**
 - Currently in ICU level care in hospital: **12**
- Deaths in the NH region since the beginning of the pandemic: **109**

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.

- [Joint statement on Province of B.C.'s COVID-19 response](#) – March 8, 2021
- [BCCDC Situation Report](#) – March 3, 2021

COVID-19 phase two immunization plans

**This plan is subject to change. Due to the complexity of Northern geography, logistics, outbreaks, vaccine supply, and other factors, changes to timelines and the plan may be made as required.*

The current immunization schedule developed for the North, in partnership with the First Nations Health Authority, the Métis Nation of BC, and Northern Health, is focused on phases one and two priority groups of BC's immunization plan (developed based on recommendations from the [National Advisory Committee on Immunization](#)), and on protecting those most vulnerable to severe illness, first. For more information on the vaccine and priority groups, visit the [Government of BC website](#) and the [First Nations Health Authority website](#).

For more info regarding the extended dose intervals for COVID-19 vaccines please see:

- [Public health statement on deferral of second dose of COVID-19 vaccine in BC](#) (PDF) - BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC)
- [Rapid Response: Extended dose intervals for COVID-19 vaccines to optimize early vaccine rollout and population protection in Canada](#) - National Advisory Committee on Immunization's (NACI)

For more information on the vaccine plan:

- [COVID-19 vaccine plan page](#)
- [NH COVID-19 community vaccine schedules](#)
- COVID-19 immunization update
- COVID-19 immunization call centre memo

Product change for arterial blood gas syringes

Beginning in December 2020 due to increased global demand related to the COVID-19 pandemic there was a shortage of Trudell Arterial Blood Gas Syringes. Therefore, PHSA has issued a [Product Change for Trudell Arterial Blood Gas Syringes](#).

A clinical review process has been completed to provide an alternative comparable product during this time of backorder. The backorder period was expected to be resolved by January 15, 2021, but is still on-going.

This is a temporary solution and when the backorder is resolved, Northern Health will resume use of Trudell syringes.

For more information, see the [full memo](#).

Northern Health Virtual Clinic: data on patient visits

The Northern Health Virtual Clinic supports after-hours access to COVID-19 and primary care services for those who cannot easily access these services in their communities. The goal is to connect people to their local primary care home wherever possible.

Thursday, March 4

- 194 COVID-19 nursing assessments

- 11 primary care provider appointments (11 primary care from Prince George, Terrace, Port Edward, Smithers, Fort St. John, Prince Rupert, and Quesnel)

Friday, March 5

- 194 COVID-19 nursing assessments
- 12 primary care provider appointments (8 primary care from Masset, Mackenzie, Kitimat, Fort St. John, Prince George, and Terrace, and 4 COVID-19 related)

Saturday, March 6

- 89 COVID-19 nursing assessments
- 12 primary care provider appointments (8 primary care from Terrace, Prince George, Fort St. John, and Quesnel, and 4 COVID-19 related)

Sunday, March 7

- 126 COVID-19 nursing assessments
- 14 primary care provider appointments (12 primary care from Prince Rupert, Prince George, Terrace, Quesnel, Fort St. John, Hazelton, Fort Nelson and 2 COVID-19 related)

Trusted links and resources for COVID-19

- [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**
- **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

Increased drug toxicity leads to record number of January deaths (BC Coroners Service Data – Released March 2)

On March 2, the BC Coroners Service [released reports](#) on [illicit drug toxicity deaths](#) and [type of drug](#) data for January 2021.

BC Provincial Summary

- There were 165 suspected illicit drug toxicity deaths in January 2021, a 104% increase from January 2020, which represents about 5.3 deaths per day in BC.
- 70% of the deaths were in the 30-59 year age group, and males accounted for 83% of the deaths, which remains consistent.

- The townships experiencing the highest **numbers** of deaths were Vancouver (53) and Surrey (52)
- The highest **rates** in BC were in Northern Health: **71** per 100 000 people. The provincial rate is **38** per 100,000 people. The highest rates by HSDA were: Northeast, Northwest, Vancouver, Northern Interior, and Kootenay Boundary

Northern Health Summary for January 2021

- **NH** had 17 illicit drug toxicity deaths (71 deaths per 100,000 individuals)
- **NW** had 5 illicit drug toxicity deaths for a rate of 78.9 deaths per 100,000 individuals. This is the second highest rate in BC. There was 1 death in December 2020.
- **NI** had 7 illicit drug toxicity deaths for a rate of 56.9 deaths per 100,000 individuals. This is the fourth highest rate in BC. There were 15 deaths in December 2020. All the deaths occurred in Prince George in January 2021.
- **NE** has seen 5 illicit drug toxicity deaths in January 2021 for a rate of 91.3 deaths per 100,000 individuals. This is the **highest rate** in BC. There was 1 death in December 2020

Toxicology Update

- Preliminary data in 2021 has found that fentanyl or its analogues have been detected in 80% of all illicit drug toxicity deaths.
- The detection rate of benzodiazepines has rapidly increased from 15% of samples in July 2020 to 49% of samples in Jan 2021 (BCCDC Etizolam Fact Sheet).

For more information, see the BC Coroners Service [news release](#).

Other organizational news

Serum Creatinine and eGFR values reported by NH Laboratories

As you may be aware from correspondence from the Provincial Health Services Authority (PHSA), a worldwide problem with creatinine results determined using **Roche chemistry analyzers**, and specific lots of enzymatic creatinine reagent, has resulted in **serum** creatinine levels being higher than expected and eGFR values being lower than expected, which may impact patient care.

At this time, the province is in the process of validating a new lot of creatinine reagent, but it is not yet available for use.

For more information, see the full memo.

Introduction of a new transfusion medicine product to NHA, Fibrinogen Concentrate (Fibryga)

We are excited to announce a new product, Fibrinogen Concentrate (Fibryga), throughout Northern Health. Effective immediately, the majority of the regional sites will have this product as part of their inventory, with the exception of Mackenzie, McBride, Chetwynd and Tumbler Ridge. The product will be in a reconstituted and/or pooled state for the treatment of acute bleeding episodes and congenital afibrinogenemia and hypofibrinogenemia.

The standard adult dose of Fibryga is 4g, which is equivalent to ten units of pooled cryoprecipitate. It is Northern Health's plan to eventually phase out cryoprecipitate. Substitution of short-dated cryoprecipitate as an alternate to Fibryga will be at the discretion of the Transfusion Medicine Services department.

For more in-depth information on product information, administration, monograph and Canadian Blood Services' Customer Letters, please see the link below:

[Fibryga® Virtual Tool Kit – fibryga® \(fibrygaresources.ca\)](mailto:fibryga@fibrygaresources.ca)

If there are any further questions or concerns, please contact:

- Dr. Victor Meneghetti: 250-645-6581
- Dr. Kamran Azar: 250-261-7458
- Julius Valido: 250-565-5977

The Dr. Charles Jago Awards (Adapted for COVID) - Nominees

To recognize our staff, we are introducing an easier, more condensed process where you can nominate your colleagues for the work they are doing by nominating them for a "Dr. Charles Jago Award (Adapted for COVID)". This recognition will allow for more staff to be highlighted, and will be a safe way for us to congratulate our staff during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Throughout March we will be highlighting staff and physicians who were nominated in the month of January in the Digests. Click the link to read the OurNH highlight on the nominees (more staff recognition to come!):

- [Ashley Dennis - Nominated for Empathy](#)
- [Susan Schienbein - Nominated for Respect & Collaboration](#)

The latest update on the Health Career Access Program

The new [Health Career Access Program \(HCAP\)](#) gives you the opportunity to receive paid education and on-the-job training to become a registered [Health Care Assistant](#).

Overview:

- Total seats to fill: 215
- All 215 positions have been posted on the Northern Health Career site
- Seats left to fill: 190
- We currently have had 2 successful cohorts begin the program

First Cohort: Started January 4, 2021

- Prince George & Vanderhoof seats
- 10 seats filled for Prince George (Parkside, Gateway Assisted Living, Gateway Complex Care, & Jubilee Lodge)
- 3 seats filled for Stuart Nechako Manor
- The group consists of 8 internal applicants, 5 external applicants.

Second Cohort: Started March 1, 2021

- Dawson Creek, Fort St. John and Chetwynd seats

- 4 out of 7 seats were filled in Dawson Creek
- 7 out of 8 seats were filled in Fort St. John
- 1 of 1 seat was filled in Chetwynd
- The group consisted of 2 internal applicants, 10 external applicants

We would like to send a thank you out to all the long-term care managers and staff who have been instrumental in getting this program started. Our current progress is due in a large part to your ongoing support.

If you have any questions about the program please email HCAP@northernhealth.ca.

[For more information on the HCAP, internal application process and resources for managers](#)