



MEDICAL STAFF DIGEST

A weekly update for medical staff

March 15, 2022

In this issue

[Overdose prevention and response](#)

[COVID-19 clinical guidelines](#)

[COVID-19 news and updates](#)

[Other organizational news](#)

[COVID-19 Virtual Clinic data](#)

[Wellness and more](#)

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 equates to approximately 6.7 deaths per day
- 207 suspected illicit drug toxicity deaths represent a 10% increase in the number of deaths in January 2021.
- The LHA numbers up to date to the end of 2021, they are updated on a quarterly basis.

Northern Health Summary

- **NH had the highest rate of illicit drug toxicity deaths in the province** with a rate of 74.5 deaths per 100,000 individuals (N=19).
- **NH rates have continued to increase in the recent months.**
- **NW** has seen three illicit drug toxicity deaths in January 2022 for a rate of 46.2 deaths per 100,000 individuals. This is the sixth highest rate in BC.
 - In 2021, Upper Skeena 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

- **NI** has seen 11 illicit drug toxicity deaths in January 2022 for 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
- **NE** has seen five illicit drug toxicity deaths in January 2022 for 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](#).

COVID-19 clinical guidelines

***New* update for Health Authority staff including NH Virtual Clinic staff and prescribers**

Recently, various novel agents have become available in BC for the **treatment of COVID-19 in mild-moderately ill patients**. These therapies include an anti-spike protein monoclonal antibody (mAB) sotrovimab (Xevudy) and a direct-acting oral combination antiviral nirmatrelvir/ritonavir (Paxlovid).

For more information and to continue reading, please see [this memo](#).

COVID-19 inpatient vaccines

New order set available for patients (ages five and up) admitted to hospital. A recent one million participants' [study in the New England Journal of Medicine](#) showed that a third dose booster reduces mortality by 90%. Continuing to encourage vaccinations, including boosters, to our patients is key for us to continue managing through the pandemic.

The order set can be found on [OurNH](#) and the [physician website](#).

COVID-19 news and updates

COVID-19 case counts and statements

Visit the new [COVID-19 surveillance dashboard](#) from the BCCDC, to see graphs, maps, and data showing COVID-19 case rates, test positivity and vaccination coverage by local health area (LHA) and community health service area (CHSA).

As of March 14, **29, 002** cases have been reported in the NH region since the beginning of the pandemic.

- New cases: **23**
- Currently in hospital: **32**
 - 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 14, 2022
- [BCCDC Situation Report](#) – March 9, 2022

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.

Masking requirements at Northern Health facilities still in effect

Following the [recent announcement from the PHO](#) of the changes to [BC COVID-19 restrictions](#), NH will be looking to transition from our COVID-19 Safety Plans to a general exposure control plan to reduce risk of all communicable disease over the next few weeks.

Until this plan is in place, all NH sites should maintain their current COVID-19 Safety Plans, including:

- Maintain capacity limits on communal spaces to ensure physical distancing, where possible.
- Staff should maintain a two-metre distance from others when eating or drinking.
- Continue to hold education sessions and staff meetings with appropriate physical distancing, where possible.
- Continue to use a principles-based approach to determine the appropriateness of travel.
- Keep existing plexi-glass barriers in place.
- Maintain enhanced cleaning protocols.
- Follow NH visitor guidelines and screening protocols.
- Uphold existing mask protocols for staff, visitors, and patients.
- Use personal protective equipment as indicated by a Point of Care Risk Assessment or department guidelines.
- Staff gatherings such as potlucks, BBQs and staff celebrations are not permitted.
- Maintain current work from home arrangements, where needed.

Rapid antigen testing kits from pharmacies

[Rapid antigen testing kits](#) are free for residents of BC 50 years and older who have a Personal Health Number (PHN). You are allowed to obtain one kit every 28 days to ensure everyone who wants a kit can get one. (You cannot pay for additional kits.)

You can get your kit at your local pharmacy (please ensure you have your PHN available. This can be found on the back of your BC driver's licence, BC Services Card or CareCard).

A test should only be used by people who develop symptoms of COVID-19 and want to confirm a positive or negative result. The tests are not suitable for international travel requirements.

Please note: if you're under the age of 50, kits will be available soon.

Return of volunteers to acute sites

As public health restrictions begin to relax and COVID-19 transmission and risks change, Northern Health is moving to re-integrate volunteers into existing volunteer programs. Long-term care and assisted living have already begun the process of reintegrating volunteers, and NH Executive has now approved the return of programs to acute settings, with [safety and restart protocols](#) in place.

If your site is ready to relaunch your volunteer programs and welcome our valued volunteers back, or if you have any questions about integrating volunteers with your worksite, please reach out to volunteer resources volunteers@northernhealth.ca. Volunteer resources will help you put a plan in place for your site, ensuring that the established protocols are followed and the plan aligns with COVID-19 safety plans still in effect.

Trusted links and resources for COVID-19

- On the NH physician website:
 - [COVID-19 information and resources](#)
- OurNH resources:
 - [COVID-19 \(Coronavirus\)](#)
 - [Pandemic Recovery Toolkit](#)
- [Northern Health online booking form – COVID-19 test](#)
- [Northern BC community immunization coverage page](#)
- [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](#).

Other organizational news

Privileging dictionary evaluation survey

Across BC, privileging dictionaries set benchmarks and practice expectations for privileges in health care facilities and have been in use since 2015. They are intended to support consistency in the expectations and oversight of medical staff privileges in BC.

The [privileging dictionary evaluation survey](#) is part of an evaluation of the use of privileging dictionaries. It is made up of 18 questions and should take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete.

Please see the survey link for more information about the survey and questions. If you have any questions about the survey, you can contact the BC MQI office at BCMQUIProgramOffice@bcmqi.ca. We appreciate your participation in this survey, your feedback is vital to help improve future versions and processes!

Referrals to tuberculosis (TB) services for patients with nontuberculous mycobacteria (NTM)

Provincial TB Services (TBS) is committed to providing appropriate, timely and safe tuberculosis (TB) care to British Columbians. In addition, TBS also provides support to physicians who manage NTM patients in community clinics.

With the [BCCDC NTM clinic referral form](#), BC physicians with NTM patients in outpatient clinics can request the following supports:

1. **MD-to-MD virtual consultation with/out a prescription.** Indicate consultation by telephone call (provide a phone number) or dictated consult note.
2. **Prescription only.** Any BC physician who wishes to establish their patient on NTM therapy is encouraged to provide this care.
 - o Rifampin (or rifabutin) and ethambutol are provided at no cost by the BCCDC pharmacy; BCCDC-funded drug costs may be subject to change.
 - o Requests must include the exact rifampin (or rifabutin) and ethambutol prescription requests with medication name, dosage (not mg/kg), interval and duration.
 - o Requests must include the shipping address of the preferred community pharmacy that will be dispensing medications to your NTM patient.

The BCCDC has a new [NTM Clinical Resources webpage for health professionals](#). This page provides links to forms, frequently asked questions and other NTM resources including physician-focused pulmonary NTM guidelines. The [NTM page for patients](#) also has frequently asked questions, a NTM patient handout and other NTM websites. [Translated content](#) is available for the NTM handout and medication sheets. Languages include Chinese, French, Korean, Punjabi, Spanish, Tagalog, and Vietnamese.

View the recording of the Better Together for Health Research in Northern BC event!

The Better Together Event for Health Research in Northern BC event focused on discussing key developments for supporting Health Research in Northern BC. The [recording of this event is now available](#).

Presenters included:

- Dr. Julia Bickford, Regional Director, Research Evaluation and Analytics, Northern Health
- Dr. Marcelo Bravo, Lead, Patient Orientated Research and KT Capacity Building, Co-Lead, BC Support Unit Northern Centre
- Dr. Esther Alonso-Prieto, PhD, Chair Research Review Committee, Lead, Clinical Research Ethics.

Advance Care Planning basics – Public education sessions

Advance Care Planning is a process that encourages adults 19 years old and older to think about and communicate their values, wishes and beliefs for their future health care. This process is especially important for adults living with complex and/or chronic health challenges. While many Canadians recognize that it is valuable, it is estimated that only one in five have actually participated in Advance Care Planning.

Northern Health is hosting two virtual events for the public on April 12 (from 12-1 pm, and 4-5 pm) to share the importance of Advance Care Planning and how to get started. View the poster (attached to the email digest) for more information about how to register. Registration is required by March 31 and can be done via email to advancecareplanning@northernhealth.ca.

Select UHNBC first floor department phones will be refreshed on March 23! Get the updated PG Phone Refresh Master Phone List and learn more about how this impacts you

We are pleased to announce the upcoming installation of the new Cisco phone system for the following first floor departments at UHNBC:

Ambulatory Care	NICU
Biomed	OR Booking
Cast	Pre-surgical screening
Hemo	Renal
Infection Control	Trauma Program
Maternity	

Please review this memo for the information that you will need and stay tuned for upcoming schedule announcement.

In addition to changing the phones, two significant changes will be taking place:

- Some phone numbers will get a new 10 digit number
- Local dialing will change from 4 to 6-digits

Will my number change? Wherever we can, we are trying to keep numbers the same but there will be some circumstances that require us to change your number. To find out if your number is changing, refer to the [March 2022 - Updated PG Phone Refresh Master List](#). Numbers will be added as we work through different areas of the hospital. Share your new number with frequent contacts and by updating your email signature and voicemail message in advance. Number changes to the Global Address Listing will be initiated by the

project team at the time of the cutover. **If your department is scheduled for replacement in the next month and you don't see your number on this list or it is wrong**, please contact phone.help@northernhealth.ca

*Managers with a new number that require an EARL call routing change should submit a request via the ITS Service Desk

What about my extension? All 4-digit dialing will become 6-digit dialing by adding a prefix of 50. For example, if you used to dial 5511 to call for IPT 1, you will now dial 505511. This allows for internal 6-digit dialing across all upgraded NH sites and no long distance charges. For a list of NH Cisco site prefixes, click [here](#).

What about faxing? Faxing services will also be upgraded to provide an enhanced experience. Faxing will now be 10-digits (no 9 or 1 needed). Some fax numbers will also change, but the old and new numbers will work for a period of 30 days so that contacts can be updated.

How can I get training on my new phone? Remote training sessions (via Teams) will be offered closer to the cutover dates for each department. Stay tune for more updates.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Phone.Help@northernhealth.ca

Town hall meetings and CME events for medical staff

Northern Health has been offering town hall meetings to share information about the COVID-19 pandemic, recruitment and retention strategies, to get feedback on upcoming plans and projects, and more! After every presentation, there will be time for questions and comments. There are also many interesting continuing medical education presentations coming up that we will be showcasing.

For more information about upcoming town hall and education events, including topics for each presentation and how to join the (virtual) meetings, please click into the schedule of events:

- [April 4 \(5-6 pm\): Northern Education Rounds \(Health Authority Organizational Structures and Co-Leadership\)](#)
- [April 19 \(5-6 pm\): Northern Education Rounds \(Addressing Patient Safety Events\)](#)

Dates and log-in information for these events will be posted to the [Continuing Medical Education site](#). The town hall events will be recorded.

Please contact physician.education@northernhealth.ca for access to the latest town hall recording.

COVID-19 Virtual Clinic data

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.

Monday, March 7

- 51 nursing assessments
- 49 primary care provider appointments from Chetwynd, Dawson Creek, Fort St John, Hartley Bay, Houston, Kitimat, Moberly Lake, Port Edward, Prince George, Prince Rupert, Quesnel, Rose Prairie, Smithers, Terrace, and Thornhill

Tuesday, March 8

- 38 nursing assessments
- 44 primary care provider appointments from Charlie Lake, Chetwynd, Dawson Creek, Fort Nelson, Fort St John, Moberly Lake, Pouce Coupe, Port Edward, Prince George, Prince Rupert, Tappen, Terrace, Thornhill, and Topley

Wednesday, March 9

- 44 nursing assessments
- 53 primary care provider appointments Baldonnel, Charlie Lake, Dawson Creek, Fort Nelson, Fort St John, Iskut, Kitimat, Peace River, Pouce Coupe, Prince George, Prince Rupert, Quesnel, Smithers, and Terrace

Thursday, March 10

- 49 nursing assessments
- 52 primary care provider appointments from Baldonnel, Charlie Lake, Chetwynd, Dawson Creek, Fort St John, Groundbirch, Hartley Bay, Houston, Prince George, Prince Rupert, Quesnel, Smithers, Terrace, and Thornhill

Friday, March 11

- 31 nursing assessments
- 52 primary care provider appointments from Arras, Blackfalds (AB), Chetwynd, Dawson Creek, Fort St John, Houston, Kitwanga, Nipawin (SK), Pouce Coupe, Port Edward, Prince George, Prince Rupert, Quesnel, Smithers, Telkwa, and Terrace

Saturday, March 12

- 25 nursing assessments
- 43 primary care provider appointments from Chetwynd, Dawson Creek, Fort St John, Fraser Lake, Houston, Kitimat, Kitwanga, Prince George, Prince Rupert, Quesnel, Smithers, Terrace, and Tumbler Ridge

Sunday, March 13

- 19 nursing assessments
- 39 primary care provider appointments from Chetwynd, Dawson Creek, Fort St John, Houston, Prince George, Prince Rupert, Quesnel, Smithers, Taylor, Terrace, and Thornhill

Wellness and more

Resources for wellness are available on the [Health and Wellness page](#) of the Physicians Website. For more information on [staff deals](#), the [NH Community Corner](#), and [RAARs](#), visit [OurNH](#).