



COMMUNITY UPDATE

The latest from Northern Health

July 2023

Organization and community news

Is your hospital experiencing a service interruption? What does this mean for you?

At times, hospitals (particularly emergency departments) may need to stop accepting patients for a temporary period of time. This could be due to unavoidable staff illness, skilled staff or physician shortages, a lack of necessary supplies, or simply too many patients for the staff at one time.

If you're experiencing a life-threatening emergency, always call 9-1-1 and you will be transported to the nearest available facility.

Service interruptions are temporary and necessary for patient safety. We appreciate your patience as we work to provide you with care you need, when you need it!

Learn more on the [Service Interruptions page on the NH website](#).

Helpful wildfire resources:

As preparation for the 2023 wildfires, we have compiled a list of resources to keep you informed:

- [Northern Health – Wildfires and your health](#)
- [Extreme heat and heat warnings](#)
- [Wildfire preparedness](#)
- [Latest air quality advisories](#)
- [BC Wildfire fire list](#)
- [Emergency Info BC Advisories](#)
- [Heat Warning in BC](#)
- [Disaster stress](#)
- [BCCDC – Wildfire smoke](#)
- [FireSmoke Canada – BC smoke forecasts](#)
- [Recover after a wildfire – Re-entering your home or business](#)

Northern Health Board selects new President & CEO

After an extensive international recruitment process, Northern Health's Board of Directors has selected Ciro Panessa as the next President & CEO of Northern Health (NH). Ciro will be starting in the role on September 5, 2023.

"After a thorough selection process, I'm thrilled to welcome Ciro Panessa as the next president and CEO of Northern Health," said Adrian Dix, Minister of Health. "Ciro brings a wealth of experience that will greatly benefit people in the north, and I look forward to working together to continue to improve the health-care services that people rely on. I would also like to thank Cathy Ulrich for her many years of exceptional dedicated service to the people of Northern B.C. and wish her well during her retirement." [Read more.](#)

Provincial booking system for appointments with pharmacists going live

Starting Thursday, June 29, 2023, people can book an appointment to see a pharmacist through a new provincial online booking system, making it even easier and more convenient to access the health care they need.

The new online booking system is similar to the Get Vaccinated system where people booked appointments to get their COVID-19 and influenza vaccinations. Through the new online booking system, people can search for available appointment times at nearby pharmacies based on their minor ailment or contraceptive needs. Appointments can continue to be made by calling or visiting a pharmacy. Walk-in service without an appointment is also available at some pharmacies. For more information, visit our [Stories site](#).

Mills Memorial Hospital Replacement Project - Quarterly Update

Read the [June 2023 quarterly project update](#) to learn about all the exciting milestones and much more happening with the new Mills Memorial Hospital under construction in Terrace. For regular updates about the project, visit [Let's Talk MMH](#).

Exciting milestones reached for the Dawson Creek & District Hospital Replacement Project

The Dawson Creek & District Hospital Replacement Project has recently reached some exciting milestones! [Graham Design Builders LP has been selected as the preferred proponent and the contract has been signed](#). Construction is expected to begin in July and the new hospital is expected to be ready for patients in 2027.

Other exciting news includes a [ground blessing ceremony](#) that was held to pay respects to the territory on which the new hospital will be located and [project displays at local art auctions](#). Read the full [July 2023 quarterly update](#) or visit the Let's Talk DCDH website for more information about the project.

Northern Health wants you to take the SPEAK Survey!

Have a say in shaping the health programs and services in your region, and tell us about your social, economic, physical, and mental health and well-being.

“It’s so important for people living in our region to fill out the provincial survey and ensure that Northern voices and experiences are heard.” -Dr. Jong Kim, Northern Health Chief Medical Health Officer.

Northern BC residents who complete the survey will be entered for the chance to win one of 3 iPads or 1 of 150 grocery gift cards. Learn more about the [SPEAK survey](#).

Northern Health Stories highlights

The [Northern Health Stories site](#) is a great place to read about what’s going on in Northern Health – people, places, projects, and more! Here are some recent highlights:

- [Qualitycast North: PQI provincial alumni strategy with Dr. Yang and Dr. Kanji](#)
- [Our People: Celebrating the Indigenous employees of Northern Health](#)
- [First-of-its-kind daycare comes to the Northeast](#)
- [Celebrating the inaugural graduating class of UNBC's Northern Baccalaureate Nursing Program](#)
- [Residents at Prince Rupert's Acropolis manor pleased with facility upgrades](#)
- [Celebrating the Indigenous employees of Northern Health - Coco Miller](#)
- [Celebrating the Indigenous employees of Northern Health - Angela Nap](#)
- [Celebrating the Indigenous employees of Northern Health - Nicole Cross](#)
- [Volunteer pilot program seeing success in Smithers](#)
- [Celebrating the Indigenous employees of Northern Health - Lyanne Gaspard](#)

Public Health

Blue-green algae tips for summer

With the warming weather, blue-green algae (cyanobacteria) blooms may appear in lakes across Northern BC. Blue-green algae are naturally occurring and can look like scum, grass clippings, fuzz or globs on the surface of water. Blue-green algae can be blue-green, greenish-brown, brown, or pinkish-red, and often smells musty or grassy.

Residents living near the shores of lakes, as well as visitors and those making day-use of lakes, are advised to take the following precautions:

- Avoid all contact with blue-green algae blooms. If contact occurs, wash with tap water as soon as possible.
- Do not swim or wade (or allow your pets to swim or wade) in any areas where blue-green algae is visible.

- As a reminder, Northern Health recommends that visitors and residents do not drink or cook with untreated water directly from any lake at any time. Boiling lake water will not remove the toxins produced by blue-green algae.
- An alternate source of drinking water should also be provided for pets and livestock. Pet owners should be wary of allowing pets to walk off-leash where they may be able to drink lake water – illnesses are a common outcome.

Learn more at [HealthLinkBC](#)

Overdose prevention and response

Toxic drug alert: Fort St. John, June 27

There has been an [increase in overdoses reported in Fort St. John](#) linked to stimulant use causing deep sedation requiring hospitalization and lengthy monitoring. This is a general overdose alert, substances circulating in the Northeast region are very toxic.

To find the most recent toxic drug alerts in the Northern Health region, along with safety information, visit the [overdose prevention webpage](#) on the NH website.

The Evolution of fentanyl in Canada over the past 11 years

The evolution of fentanyl in Canada over the past 11 years has been concerning, with a sharp increase in its identification since 2016. Between January 2012 and December 2022, fentanyl was identified in 77,141 samples submitted to the Drug Analysis Service (DAS) by Canadian law enforcement agencies. The majority of fentanyl identifications were reported from samples submitted in Ontario and British Columbia. Notably, there has been a rise in the presence of co-occurring substances with fentanyl, particularly sedative/hypnotics since 2020. This highlights the complex nature of the opioid crisis in Canada and emphasizes the need for ongoing monitoring and comprehensive strategies to address this ongoing public health issue. For more information, please visit [the evolution of Fentanyl in Canada over the past 11 years - Canada.ca](#).

Opioid Use Disorder among youth in BC (Infographic)

The British Columbia Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) has released a [new infographic](#) on the prevalence of opioid use disorder (OUD) among youth in BC.

The infographic indicates that there has been no significant increase in new OUD diagnoses among individuals under 25 years since March 2020. Additionally, the data reveals relatively lower rates of new OUD diagnoses among youth under 19 years compared to other age groups.

BC Coroners Services - Illicit Drug Toxicity Deaths

BC Summary:

- The rate of illicit drug toxicity deaths in BC is 45.2 deaths per 100,000 individuals in 2023.

- In 2023, there have been 1018 suspected illicit drug toxicity deaths. There were 176 suspected unregulated drug deaths in May 2023. The May number represents a 16% increase over the number of deaths in May 2022 (209) and a 19% decrease from April 2023.
- The number of illicit drug toxicity deaths in May 2023 equates to about 5.7 deaths per day.
- By Health Authority (HA), in 2022, the highest **rates** were in Vancouver Coastal Health (58.7 deaths per 100,000 individuals) and Northern Health (57.9 deaths per 100,000 individuals); the highest **number** of illicit drug toxicity deaths were in Fraser and Vancouver Coastal Health Authorities (281 and 313 deaths, respectively), making up 59% of all such deaths during 2023.

Trends

- One death has occurred at an Overdose Prevention Site (OPS).
- There is no indication that prescribed safe supply is contributing to unregulated drug deaths.

Northern Health Summary

- In 2023, NH has the second highest rate of illicit drug toxicity deaths in the province with a rate of 57.9 deaths per 100,000 individuals (N=74).
- In May 2023, the rate of illicit drug toxicity deaths was 2.3 per 100,000 (N=7).
- The Northwest (NW) has seen **25** illicit drug toxicity deaths in 2023 for a rate of 76.7 deaths per 100,000 individuals. This is the **second highest** rate in BC.
 - May 2023 there were **2** illicit drug toxicity deaths in the NW
- The Northern Interior (NI) has seen **43** illicit drug toxicity deaths in 2023 for a rate of 66.6 deaths per 100,000 individuals. This is the **fifth highest** rate in BC.
 - May 2023 there were **4** illicit drug toxicity deaths in the NI
- The Northeast (NE) has seen **6** illicit drug toxicity deaths in 2023 for a rate of 19.6 deaths per 100,000 individuals. This is the **third lowest** rate in BC.
 - May 2023 there was **1** illicit drug toxicity deaths in the NE

For more detailed information go to [Unregulated Drug Poisoning Emergency Dashboard \(bccdc.ca\)](https://bccdc.ca).

COVID-19

COVID is still with us, in our communities, impacting our friends and loved ones. Vaccinations remain the best defence against both influenza and COVID-19.

The COVID-19 spring booster program in BC is now complete. If you still want a spring booster shot you can:

- Use your existing invitation through the [Get Vaccinated system](#) and make an appointment
- If you don't have an invitation, call the provincial call centre to arrange an appointment [1-833-838-2323](tel:1-833-838-2323)

BC is now planning for a COVID-19 booster program in fall 2023 based on latest recommendations and vaccines to be approved by Health Canada.

Beyond vaccinations, we can all take key preventive measures to avoid illness, including:

- Stay at home if you feel unwell and try to avoid spending time with people at higher risk of serious illness.
- Practice respiratory etiquette: Wear a mask in crowded, public spaces, and cough and sneeze into your elbow.
- Clean your hands regularly.
- Avoid touching your face, especially your eyes, mouth and nose.

For more information, visit [BCCDC](#) or the [Provincial Infection Control Network of British Columbia](#).

Resources and information

The [Northern Health COVID-19](#) and [COVID-19 information](#) pages have information about immunization clinics, testing and self-isolation, the community toolkit, and trusted contacts.

For information outside of Northern Health, see [these trusted resources](#).