



COMMUNITY UPDATE

The latest from Northern Health

October 2023

Welcome to the Northern Health community update! Stay connected as we bring you monthly updates and valuable insight into health care in the North.

Organization and community news

Northern Health is a large organization with many complex services and operations. We are pleased to share with you a new resource, "[Understanding Northern Health](#)", a guide with information, resources and tools from NH and a variety of provincial and regional agencies and organizations. We hope you find it helpful for accessing resources, understanding the Northern and provincial health care system, and answering general questions.

National Day for Truth and Reconciliation (NDTR) was September 30

September 30, the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation (NDTR), is an opportunity to educate ourselves, to reflect, and to promote awareness of the experiences and challenges faced by Indigenous people in Canada. The NDTR brings attention to the colonial history of Canada and the impacts of this history still felt today as called to by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Indigenous leaders.

September 30 is a time to honour the resiliency, traditions, culture, and rights of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people. It is a time for individuals to engage in conversations about reconciliation and colonialism, listen to stories of survivors, and learn from Indigenous perspectives to build relationships and increase understanding. At Northern Health we are committed to actively providing culturally safe care through humility and empathy. Northern Health's Indigenous Health team supports our efforts towards reconciliation as we aim to learn from history and contribute positively to a more inclusive society. [Read more.](#)

Ciro Panessa, President & CEO of Northern Health completes first month in new role

Starting at the beginning of September, Ciro is now nearing the end of his first month in his new position as the President and Chief Executive Officer of NH. Born in Prince Rupert and raised in Vancouver, Ciro has served as the Regional Director, Chronic Diseases, and since 2017, as the Northwest Health Service Delivery Area (HSDA) Chief Operating Office before

taking on the challenge of President and CEO for Northern Health. Ciro started his career as a Nurse and holds a Bachelor and Master of Science in Nursing from the University of British Columbia and a Family Nurse Practitioner, Advanced Graduate Diploma from Athabasca University.

Ciro is keenly interested in health equity and improving health services in partnership with communities to reach and engage people, partnering with First Nations and Indigenous Peoples on a journey of reconciliation, and believes Northern Health to be a leading health services organization serving people in rural and remote communities.

Get vaccinated! It's respiratory illness season again!

The Province is encouraging everyone age six months and older to register to get their COVID-19 and influenza vaccines this fall. Protect yourself, those around you, and the health care system. Invitations to book your appointment will start to roll out October 10, 2023. Read the full news release [here](#).

It's fast, easy and free to get vaccinated. Combined flu and COVID-19 vaccines will be available soon, with community clinic info available on our Northern Health [website](#) later this week.

Priority groups, including people with health issues, can get the vaccines first in early October. For more information, visit the Ministry of Health's [respiratory illness page](#).

Masking required in health care facilities starting October 3

Starting October 3, 2023 all visitors to NH health care facilities will be required to wear a medical mask. Masks will also be required in long-term care and assisted living facilities in all common spaces and when participating in common indoor events.

Let's keep our patients, residents, and staff safe and healthy this respiratory illness season.

Healthy habits can help protect you, your loved ones and your communities.

- Stay up to date with your flu and COVID-19 vaccines
- Stay home if you're sick
- Clean your hands well and often
- Wear a mask if you have cold/flu symptoms, or are getting over an illness
- Cover your coughs and sneezes

New recovery beds will support healthier communities in Northern BC

To help more people with addiction challenges in Northern BC connect with the care they need to live healthier lives, the Province is adding 17 new beds dedicated to recovery and support.

"Our government believes in the strength of community support," said Jennifer Whiteside, Minister of Mental Health and Addictions. "To cut down on the distance that many in Northern

BC have had to go for help, we're introducing new supportive recovery beds to bring that crucial support to communities across the North." [Read more](#).

Learn more about the design of the new hospital in Terrace

See renderings and learn more about the design of the new Mills Memorial Hospital, currently under construction in Terrace. Posters featuring different aspects of the project, including various departments and their floor plans, can be found on the [project website](#).

Dawson Creek & District Hospital Replacement Project

Have you had a chance to check out the [Let's Talk DCDH](#) website? It's where you'll find everything you want and need to know about the project including regular updates, exciting news, photos from events, quarterly newsletters and much more. Register for the site to give your input, ask questions and comment on project updates.

Helpful wildfire resources:

As the 2023 wildfire season continues, here's a reminder of useful resources for staying informed:

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

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:

- [National Day for Truth and Reconciliation - September 30](#)
- [10 sites in 10 nights: Bringing Starlink to the NH region](#)
- [Improving the hospital experience through patient choice](#)
- [Spotlight on our people: Kimberly Foster, GoHealth BC travel nurse](#)
- [Celebrate Health Care Simulation Week: September 18-22](#)
- [Learn more about the design of the new Mills Memorial Hospital in Terrace!](#)
- [Mary Charters recognized with 2022 Emergency Management Exemplary Service Award](#)
- [Jago Award nominee highlight: Dr. Denise Mcleod](#)
- [New HealthElife feature! Pathology reports now available in 3 days](#)
- [Preventing death by suicide: Creating hope through action](#)
- [NH Dietitian Robyn Turner-Klopper honoured by Dietitians of Canada](#)
- [Northwest Recruitment and Retention Ambassador: Eva Visscher](#)

Ministry of Health highlights

Including highlights from the [Ministry of Health](#) and [Ministry of Mental Health & Addictions](#) that are of interest to all BC residents:

- [Actions protect people, B.C. communities this respiratory illness season](#)
- [Expanded travel programs benefit patients needing cancer care](#)
- [Physician assistants are one step closer to joining B.C.'s health-care workforce](#)
- [B.C. surgical renewal breaks records bringing more patients surgeries they need](#)
- [B.C. communities can apply for new Foundry centres to support young people](#)

Public Health

Indigenous harm reduction

Harm reduction for substance use aims to enhance safety by promoting compassionate support from family, community, and health care. Strategies include naloxone training, sterile supplies, safe spaces, and more. Indigenous harm reduction goes further, addressing colonialism's impact on First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities. It seeks a decolonized, Indigenous approach, reconnecting people with culture and revitalizing spiritual and natural relationships.

The '[Connecting to Culture](#)' video series comprises three educational videos crafted to facilitate dialogues within First Nations communities on topics like harm reduction, substance use, and stigma. This series adopts an Indigenous perspective, featuring insights from Elders, peers, and youth.

Overdose prevention and response

Toxic drug alert: Prince George – October 3, 2023

Northern Health is issuing a toxic drug alert for the community of Prince George, after a GREY CHUNK sold as “down” tested positive for high levels of xylazine (25-30%) and a benzo called bromazolam (20-25%). This drug also contains fentanyl (1-5%). Due to the high levels of sedatives, this drug can cause severe and prolonged sedation, blackouts, and memory loss. Safety recommendations can be found on the Northern Health [website](#).

Text alerts for toxic drugs available in the North

In response to the toxic drug emergency, a text message alert system was launched across Northern Health. The system sends text alerts with timely information and up-to-date resources to people who use drugs, those who support them, and community members. It's a public health measure to prevent drug poisonings and deaths and provides. Opt-in by texting **JOIN to ALERTS (253787)**. [More information](#).

BC Coroners Report – August 2023

The BC Coroners has released data up to the end of August 2023. For the Coroner's full report please go to: [Unregulated Drug Death Summary](#)

For more detailed public information please go to [Unregulated Drug Poisoning Emergency Dashboard \(bccdc.ca\)](#).

BC Summary:

- In 2023, there have been 1645 suspected unregulated drug deaths. The rate of unregulated drug deaths in BC is 45.7 deaths per 100,000 individuals in 2023
- There were 174 suspected unregulated drug deaths in August 2023; 5.6 deaths per 100,000 individuals. The August numbers represents an 8% decrease over the number of deaths in August 2022 (190) and a 14% decrease from July 2023 (203).

Trends

- Smoking was the most common mode of consumption in 2023 with 65% showing evidence of smoking followed by injection (15%), nasal insufflation (14%), and oral (5%)
- In 2023, 80% of unregulated drug deaths occurring inside (private residences, other inside residence including social and supportive housing, SROs, shelters, and hotels etc.) and 19% occurring outside in vehicles, sidewalks, streets, parks etc.
- There is no indication that prescribed safe supply is contributing to unregulated drug deaths.

Northern Health Summary

- In 2023, NH has the highest rate of unregulated drug deaths in the province with a rate of 58.2 deaths per 100,000 individuals (N=**119**).
- In August 2023, the rate of unregulated drug deaths was 3.6 per 100,000 (N=**11**).
- **The Northwest** has seen **32** unregulated drug deaths in 2023 for a rate of 61.4 deaths per 100,000 individuals. This is the **fifth** highest rate in BC.
 - August 2023 there **no (0)** unregulated drug death: rate of 0 deaths per 100,000 individuals.
- **The Northern Interior** has seen **74** unregulated drug deaths in 2023 for a rate of 71.6 deaths per 100,000 individuals. This is the **second** highest rate in BC.
 - August 2023 there were **9** unregulated drug deaths: rate of 5.8 deaths per 100,000 individuals
- **The Northeast** has seen **13** unregulated drug deaths in 2023 for a rate of 26.5 deaths per 100,000 individuals. This is the **fourth** lowest rate in BC.
 - August 2023 there were **2** unregulated drug deaths: rate of 2.7 deaths per 100,000 individuals.

COVID-19

Getting immunized helps protect yourself, your community and B.C.'s health care system this respiratory illness season.

Starting in October, everyone 6 months and older can get an updated influenza (flu) and COVID-19 vaccine at the same time.

- **If you've received a COVID-19 vaccine in the province, you are already registered in the Get Vaccinated system and no action is required.** The best way to book is to wait for your invitation.
- If you haven't received a COVID-19 vaccine in B.C, [Register in the Get Vaccinated system](#) to receive your invitation to book an appointment.

For more information, visit the Ministry of Health [respiratory illness page](#).

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 respiratory illness](#) page has information about immunization clinics, testing and self-isolation, acute care and hospital visitor information, and information from trusted resources.