



COMMUNITY UPDATE

The latest from Northern Health

June 2024

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

Helpful wildfire resources

Wildfire season has arrived and we have compiled a list of resources to help you stay informed and prepared:

- [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](#)

Wildfire smoke information

Poor air quality can be harmful to health, especially for those with chronic conditions like asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), heart disease, diabetes, and for pregnant people, infants and children, and older adults.

Take steps to keep you and your loved ones safe and healthy:

- Reduce the amount of time spent outdoors
- Stay hydrated
- Avoid rigorous outdoor activities, like exercise
- Keep windows closed in vehicles and homes

- If you have one, use an indoor air cleaner or filtration system, or recirculate indoor air in a forced air system that is filtered (turn on your furnace fan)

For more information on how to stay safe in smoky conditions visit the [BCCDC Wildfire Smoke page](#).

Fort Nelson General Hospital emergency department services resuming – May 26, 2024

Emergency department services at Fort Nelson General Hospital are resuming on Monday, May 27, as community members begin to return following the Parker Lake wildfire evacuation.

Eleven patients and multi-level care residents were safely evacuated from the hospital on May 10, and relocated to other Northeast BC facilities according to their care needs. Since that time, based on information from wildfire officials, the Northern Rockies Regional Municipality and in collaboration with partners such as BC Emergency Health Services, Northern Health has been planning for a phased resumption of services to support Fort Nelson and area residents as they return to the community. [Read the information bulletin here](#).

Kitimat surgery is the latest surgical site to go digital

In February, the Kitimat General Hospital and Health Centre became the latest Northern Health surgical site to go-live with digital clinical documentation, as part of the SaferCare initiative. This brings big benefits for both patients and staff. Surgical services staff can now access and review patient and surgical information more efficiently and easily. Patients are better supported in their surgical journey by having access to NH Tracks, Northern Health's digital surgical tracking tool. Kudos to the Kitimat surgical services team for their hard work in making this go-live happen! [Visit our stories site for more details](#).

Recognizing excellence in nursing: Elaine Veldman

When we say our nurses are excellent, we mean it! In December, Terrace nurse Elaine Veldman was honoured with an Award for Excellence in Nursing Education by the Association of Nurses and Nurse Practitioners of BC. We offer our congratulations to Elaine, and chat with her about her career and award-winning work. [Read the full story here!](#)

Virtual and home-based activity options

If you live in a rural and remote community, virtual services can help you access services not readily available in your home community. Both physical activity resources and physiotherapy services can be accessed virtually!

Whether you're looking to speak to a physiotherapist or participate in an exercise program, virtual services can connect you with what works best for you wherever you are. For more info, [visit our website](#).

Falls Prevention and Healthy Aging Grant open

Do you know of a healthy aging champion in your community? Share the news that the [Northern Health Falls Prevention and Healthy Aging Grant](#) has opened. Local governments,

First Nations Bands, Indigenous organizations, and community organizations are invited to apply. The goal of the program is to support communities to prevent falls and support healthy aging. Grant projects will be funded up to \$10,000. The application deadline is June 30, 2024. This grant is supported by funding from the [Pacific Public Health Foundation](#). Please note, funding is not available for NH programs.

Let's have THAT talk about mental health for newcomers

The [have THAT talk](#) series was developed to raise awareness about the importance of mental health in all areas of our lives. Everyone can take action to promote mental health where we live, work, and play. Are you new to Canada? [Watch this 4-minute video](#) to learn about things that help our mental health and how to find supports.

The Multicultural Mental Health Resource Centre (MMHRC) provides resources in multiple languages to support culturally safe and competent mental health care for Canada's diverse population. Find resources on the [MMHRC website](#).

Appropriate use of the emergency department and options for accessing health care

Emergency rooms in the North are under increasing strain. Help take the pressure off the doctors and nurses that serve our communities by seeking care through these options, when you can:

- Call your family care provider
- Visit an urgent primary care centre or primary care clinic if one is available in your community
- Check out [HealthLinkBC.ca](#) or speak to a nurse at 8-1-1
- Talk to your local pharmacist about their expanded services [Book an appointment with a pharmacist](#).
- Book an appointment with the [Northern Health Virtual Clinic](#) at 1-844-645-7811
- Call 1-855-344-3800 to book an appointment with the [First Nations Virtual Doctor of the Day](#)

For life-threatening emergencies like chest pains, difficulty breathing, broken bones, or severe bleeding, the ER is the place to be. Call 9-1-1 for transport to your nearest available and appropriate facility. For more information, please visit our [service interruptions page](#).

Anti-Racism Awareness Week was May 27

The Government of BC has proclaimed May 27 until June 2, 2024, as Anti-Racism Awareness Week. The proclamation from the Government of BC reads, in part: "Anti-racism is the deliberate act of opposing racism and promoting a society that is thoughtful and just, with equitable opportunities for all people."

Northern Health is committed to opposing racism in our workplace and in our communities.

Learn more:

- For more on the Anti-Racism Act, visit: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/30655>

- For more on the Anti-Racism Data Act, visit: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/26926>
- For more on the Resilience BC Anti-Racism Network, visit: <https://www.resiliencebc.ca>

Health Human Resources (HHR)

The items in this Health Human Resources (HHR) section highlight some of NH's efforts to strengthen health care in the North by improving staff recruitment and retention as part of [BC's Health Human Resources Strategy](#).

New recruitment incentive

Northern Health launched a new \$30,000 [Rural and Remote Recruitment Incentive \(RRRI\)](#). Click the link to check out eligibility and how to apply.

GoHealth BC Recruitment and Retention Incentive

GoHealth BC is now offering a recruitment and retention incentive designed to encourage nurses to join the BC public sector. Eligible nurses who join the program between April 1, 2024 and March 31, 2025 can receive up to \$15,000! [Visit our website for more information](#) and share with anyone who might be interested.

Dr. Charles Jago Awards – Recognizing Northern Health employees who live our values

The Dr. Charles Jago Awards, named after former NH Board Chair, acknowledge and celebrate those who reflect our values and have made outstanding contributions to our organization. On Wednesday, May 8, an awards ceremony was held at the Prince George Civic Centre, to celebrate the 2024 award recipients and nominees. See the list of finalists on the [NH Story Site](#).

NH in-house security program in Prince Rupert collaborates with staff and engages with patients to provide trauma-informed security services

In October, Mills Memorial Hospital (MMH) in Terrace and Prince Rupert Regional Hospital (PRRH) saw their own “first classes” of RSOs complete their training and begin their new roles at the two hospitals. Six months after the launch of the program, Charles Leblanc, NH's Coordinator, Protection Services, shares an update on some of the work that's been happening locally at PRRH. [Read more here](#)

Recruiters on the road

NH's recruiters travelled all over this May, speaking with health care professionals locally, nationally, and internationally! Their travels included:

- Adventures in Healthcare presentation - Terrace, BC
- Canadian Association of Occupational Therapy (CAOT) Conference – Halifax, NS
- School District 81 Career Days, Fort Nelson Secondary School – Fort Nelson, BC
- Alberta Association of Nurses Conference – Edmonton, AB
- Healthcare Travelling Roadshow – Fort Nelson, BC
- Canadian Society of Respiratory Therapists – Banff, AB

- SAIT Classroom Presentation – Calgary, AB
- Adventures in Healthcare – Prince George, BC
- Grow Our Own Presentations and Hecate Strait Employment Development Society presentation – Prince Rupert, BC
- Speech and Audiology Conference – Vancouver, BC
- Adventures in Healthcare NE – Fort St. John, BC
- Security fair – Vancouver, BC
- Grow our Own presentation – Terrace, BC
- NTI American Critical Care Nurses Association – Denver, CO
- Prince Rupert Port Authority Career Fair - Prince Rupert, BC
- UNBC OT student connect – Prince George, BC
- Canadian Association of Medical Radiation Technologists Conference – St John, NB
- Canadian Council of Cardiovascular Nurses – Calgary, AB
- CASN Biennial Canadian Nursing Education Conference – Calgary, AB
- Canadian Association of Pharmacy Technicians – Niagara Falls, ON
- Metis Nation Health Promotion Gathering – Fort St. John, BC
- BC Health Care Careers UK Travelling Roadshow – United Kingdom

To see highlights of these events and conferences, check out [Northern Health Careers](#).

Capital Projects

Dawson Creek & District Hospital Replacement Project

As the days go on, more and more progress is being made on the new Dawson Creek & District Hospital! Visit Let's Talk DCDH to [view photos from a site walkthrough in mid-May](#).

Highlight – Emergency department

The emergency department in the new hospital is going to be double the size of the existing one. Treatment spaces will be increasing from 10 to 15, which includes four clinical decision spaces. In addition, there will be three high acuity treatment spaces as well as an enclosed and heated double bay ambulance garage. The emergency department will have its own designated entrance, waiting area, and registration area. Visit Let's Talk DCDH to [read more about the key features of the new DCDH emergency department](#).

Mills Memorial Hospital Replacement Project

Hospital construction completion is ahead of schedule!

Originally scheduled for end of September 2024, substantial completion of the new hospital – when Northern Health takes ownership of the new building – is now set for end of August. Staff will have three months to get oriented and trained in the new facility and prepare for patient care before we start seeing patients in the new hospital in November.

Want to see a hospital come together? Check out the new [MMH construction timelapse video!](#)

Stuart Lake Hospital Replacement Project

Construction at the Stuart Lake Hospital charges forward as we work towards welcoming patients in January 2025. The construction team continues to work towards finalizing the interior and each month the hospital is looking more and more finished. Check out the [most recent progress photos from this May](#) to see just how far things have come!

In addition to the construction team and the local Northern Health team, the community has played a crucial role in the design of the new hospital. Their feedback has been key to ensuring that the new space is welcoming and culturally safe for all. This recent blog post goes over just some of the [ways feedback has shaped design](#).

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:

- [We eat with our feelings: a normal part of being human](#)
- [Celebrating National Nursing Week 2024: Collaboration and teamwork](#)
- [QualityCast North: Send in the drones: Cutting edge rural medicine with Dr. John Pawlovich and Sandy Lee](#)
- [Celebrating National Nursing Week 2024: Making a difference every day in McBride](#)
- [Celebrating National Nursing Week 2024: Leadership in practice for the patient first](#)
- [Celebrating National Nursing Week 2024: Inner strength and resilience](#)
- [Celebrating National Nursing Week 2024: Empathy and responsibility](#)
- [Celebrating National Nursing Week 2024: Having a positive impact on someone's life every day](#)
- [National Physiotherapy Month: Baisakhi Sarkar's Story](#)
- [Hang ten and triage: Surfing Haida Gwaii with Dr. Jocelyn Black](#)
- [Qualitycast North: Have you tried turning it off and on again?](#)
- [Recognizing excellence in nursing: Elaine Veldman](#)
- [Meet Natou Kurtz – a thrill-seeking, outdoor-loving, biomedical engineer](#)
- [Kitimat surgery is the latest surgical site to go digital](#)
- [Fraser Bell reflects on nearly 20 years of working for Northern Health](#)
- [Prince Rupert in-house security team engages patients, provides trauma-informed security services](#)
- [Smoky times: How communities can help young families with wildfire smoke](#)
- [Mobile Ultrasound Program - On the move in the North](#)

Ministry highlights

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

- [Program gets on the road again to help promote safety](#)
- [B.C. ensures continued access to COVID-19 medication](#)

- [Province transformed ambulance system, record number of people supported](#)
- [Minister's statement on lives lost to poisoned drugs in March](#)
- [B.C. moves to ban drug use in public spaces, taking more steps to keep people safe](#)

Public Health

Rabies in BC: What you should know

Rabies is a [serious and deadly disease](#) if left untreated. The rabies virus spreads between mammals through contact with saliva and nervous tissue – usually by a bite. The virus then infects the brain and nervous system, and causes death of the infected mammal. In BC, only bats carry the rabies virus – other animals are rarely infected. In humans, rabies can be prevented if a person is immunized quickly after they are exposed to rabies.

Protecting yourself from rabies

The simplest way to protect yourself from rabies is to avoid contact with bats. Here are some more tips to protect yourself:

- Never touch a bat with bare hands.
- If a dead bat is found away from populated areas, contact the BC wildlife veterinarian: [250-953-4285](tel:250-953-4285).
- If you have bats in your home, contact the [BC Community Bat Program: 1-855-922-2287](#).

For more information and resources: [Rabies Brochure: Risk to You and Your Pet](#).

Overdose prevention and response

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](#).

Overdose Advisory: Dawson Creek – May 28, 2024

Northern Health is issuing an overdose advisory for Dawson Creek due to an increase in drug poisoning/overdose events. These overdoses may be associated with smoking a substance sold as heroin with crystals in it.

Take care, drugs move throughout the North, please share this alert widely. We have included safety recommendations on [our website](#).