

## MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release  
December 17, 2019

Provincial Health Services Authority  
BC Emergency Health Services

### **BCEHS and Helijet celebrate 15 years of flying with Santa**

**Vancouver** – Today Santa, BC Emergency Health Services (BCEHS) and Helijet mark the 15th anniversary of the “Santa Flights,” an event that brings the jolly old elf via air ambulance to visit children in BC hospitals.

“Each holiday season, we eagerly look forward to the Santa Flights and the happiness it brings to children who have been bravely fighting illnesses in hospitals,” said Adrian Dix, Minister of Health. “I’m delighted to celebrate 15 years of this merry tradition, and soon there will be smiles on little faces when BCEHS and Helijet bring Santa around.”

It was 2005 when Santa Claus first stepped aboard a passenger helicopter when he needed a special sleigh to fly toys to children in the pediatric ward of a Lower Mainland hospital.

Now the holiday season tradition sees Santa flying via air ambulance to visit children in five hospitals – Victoria General, Nanaimo Regional General, BC Children’s, Surrey Memorial and Royal Columbian in New Westminster – all in a single day.

When Santa and his entourage, including Helijet President and CEO Danny Sitnam and BC Ambulance Service paramedic Ray Sims arrive at each hospital with toys in tow, it is a welcome distraction for young patients and their families.

It is also an opportunity for specialty-trained, Infant Transport Team (ITT), paramedics to see children under happier, less stressful conditions. Sims was a member of the very first team when it was formed in 1976 to provide specialized paramedic care to the province’s youngest patients.

“It’s incredibly rewarding to see all of these young patients as their faces light up and they visit with Santa,” says Sims. “Infant Transport Team paramedics help care for and transport babies and young children with acute or traumatic emergency health needs to hospital, so reunions like this are extra special for all of us.”

“Helijet is proud to work every day with BC Emergency Health Services and its paramedics to provide 24/7 helicopter service for thousands of critically ill patients across the province,” says Sitnam. “Our sincere hope is that these visits bring a small measure of happiness to children who are spending the holidays away from home. Our dedicated staff at Helijet has helped fly Santa for the past 15 years and we’re delighted to do it.”

(more)

**Helijet International** is a Canadian-owned company and the world's largest scheduled helicopter airline carrying well over 2.4 million passengers in the past 33 years. In addition to its scheduled helicopter services, Helijet is a major service provider of dedicated medically equipped helicopters to the BC Air Ambulance Service, which is operated by BCEHS. Helijet provides exclusive use helicopters and business turbojet services to world renowned Sport Fishing Resorts, public service and energy companies throughout the West Coast of British Columbia and Pacific North West. Online at [www.helijet.com](http://www.helijet.com). Twitter: [@Helijet](https://twitter.com/Helijet).

**BCEHS** is responsible for the delivery and governance of pre-hospital emergency medical care and inter-facility patient transfer services through the BC Ambulance Service and BC Patient Transfer Services. BCEHS is supported by the Provincial Health Services Authority (PHSA). For more information, please visit [www.bcehs.ca](http://www.bcehs.ca) or follow us on Twitter [@BC EHS](https://twitter.com/BC_EHS).

-30-

### Media contacts:

#### **BCEHS/BC Ambulance Service**

Sarah Morris  
P: 604-660-6925  
M: 604-230-0114  
[sarah.morris@bcehs.ca](mailto:sarah.morris@bcehs.ca)

#### **Helijet International**

Trevor Pancoust  
604-646-3567  
[tpancoust@pacegroup.com](mailto:tpancoust@pacegroup.com)

#### **Victoria General Hospital**

Cheryl Bloxham  
Island Health  
P: 250-370-8878  
M: 250-889-9156  
[cheryl.bloxham@viha.ca](mailto:cheryl.bloxham@viha.ca)

#### **Nanaimo Regional General Hospital**

Dom Abassi  
Island Health  
P: 250-755-7966  
M: 250-668-3098  
[dominic.abassi@viha.ca](mailto:dominic.abassi@viha.ca)

#### **BC Children's Hospital (Vancouver)**

Jessica Holmes  
Provincial Health Services Authority  
P: 604-875-3560  
M: 778-877-6784  
[jessica.holmes@phsa.ca](mailto:jessica.holmes@phsa.ca)

#### **Surrey Memorial Hospital & Royal Columbian Hospital**

Aletta Vanderheyden  
Fraser Health  
P: 604.613.0794  
[media@fraserhealth.ca](mailto:media@fraserhealth.ca)

## QUICK FACTS

December 17, 2019

### A closer look at air ambulance operations across BC

- The **BCEHS air ambulance program** responds to the needs of critical hospital transfer patients and emergency medical calls through the deployment of **four helicopters and seven airplanes** and dedicated flight crew available 24/7.
  - Helicopters are based in: Vancouver, Kamloops and Prince Rupert.
  - Three helicopters are operated by Helijet and one (Kamloops) is operated by Summit Helicopters.
  - BCEHS airplanes are also a contracted resource and based in: Vancouver, Victoria, Kamloops, Kelowna, Prince George, Prince Rupert and Fort St. John.
- Annually, BCEHS responds to more than **7,000 patients** requiring transportation by air ambulance.
  - Helicopters respond to 30 per cent of all air ambulance calls in BC; airplanes respond to 70 per cent.
  - The helicopters are primarily used in patient transfers from within a 100-mile radius of the bases in Vancouver, Prince Rupert and Kamloops.
  - The addition of night vision technology has enhanced the safety and overall reach of air ambulance helicopters, resulting in more medical transports around the clock.
- All air ambulances operate with **Critical Care Paramedics (CCPs)**, who hold the highest level of specialized care credentials and are deployed by air to medical emergencies across the province.
  - **Infant Transport Team (ITT)** paramedics are CCPs based at BC Children's Hospital in Vancouver. They have completed advanced training and provide emergency medical care to pediatric, neo-natal and high-risk obstetric patients.
- Critical care and infant transport paramedics use specialized helicopters and airplanes (air ambulances) and ground ambulances outfitted with specific equipment to provide critical care. CCPs and ITTs especially bring a critical care unit to the patient's side.
- Presently there are **99 licensed CCPs and ITTs** caring for patients across BC.
- A breakdown of air ambulance transports in BC (for 2018/19): The North accounts for 41 per cent of air transports. The Interior accounts for 26 per cent and Vancouver Island 13 per cent. The Fraser Valley accounts for less than three per cent of all air transports.

**Contact:** BCEHS Media Relations  
[Media@bcehs.ca](mailto:Media@bcehs.ca)  
604.660.6925