

For immediate release  
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Provincial Health Services Authority  
BC Emergency Health Services

### **Santa gets a lift from BCEHS and Helijet to bring Christmas cheer to kids in hospital**

**Vancouver, B.C.** – Children, parents and staff in B.C. hospitals are once again being treated to a pre-Christmas visit by Santa Claus following the resumption of air ambulance Santa Flights by BC Emergency Health Services (BCEHS) and Helijet.

For 17 years, BCEHS and Helijet have delivered toys and Christmas cheer to BC hospitals, including Victoria General, Surrey Memorial, Royal Columbian, Nanaimo Regional General, Abbotsford Regional Hospital and the BC Children’s Hospital and BC Women’s Hospital + Health Centre. Last year, due to the pandemic, toys were delivered to children in hospital by staff as Santa was unable to visit them in person. This year, Santa is back to bring smiles and the joy of Christmas to the courageous children in pediatric units and the dedicated front-line health care workers who look after them.

“I’m delighted to hear that BCEHS and Helijet are helping make Santa’s personal hospital visits a reality once again,” said Adrian Dix, Minister of Health. “Every day I am amazed at the tremendous courage and resilience B.C. children and youth have shown throughout this pandemic. That’s especially true of the children who are bravely fighting illnesses in our hospitals. Every step we take to put this pandemic behind us is cause for celebration, and Santa’s return to our hospitals is especially inspiring.”

“This year, more than ever, Santa, together with BCEHS and Helijet, is bringing some magic to children in our hospitals,” said Dr. Bonnie Henry, B.C.’s Provincial Health Officer. “In a time of stress and worry, it’s so nice that we have a chance to brighten the spirits of both the children receiving care in our facilities, and those front-line workers, who continue to show dedication and courage while providing crucial medical care.”

Joining Santa for the air ambulance flights will be Joanna Stefani, one of BCEHS’ specially trained Infant Transport Team (ITT) paramedics, who helps care for and transport babies and young children with acute or traumatic emergency health needs to hospital.

“It’s an honour to be part of a dedicated emergency response team like ITT that has provided specialized paramedic care to the province’s youngest patients since 1976,” said Joanna. “We usually meet patients and their families during stressful medical emergencies, so joining them instead for a wonderful holiday tradition is incredibly special for me and all the paramedics I proudly represent today.”

Also on board the Santa Flights is Danny Sitnam, the President and CEO of Helijet, which operates the province’s air ambulance helicopters for BCEHS.

“Everyone at Helijet is proud to work with BCEHS and its paramedics to provide 24/7 helicopter service for critically ill patients across the province,” said Sitnam. “After last year’s restrictions, and everything else the province has been through since the pandemic began, it’s especially heartwarming to return this year and help Santa lift the spirits of the children and health care teams at B.C. hospitals.”

Hashtag: #SantaFlights

**About Helijet International** *Helijet International is a Canadian-owned company and the world’s largest scheduled helicopter airline, carrying over 2.4 million passengers in the past 34 years. In addition to its scheduled helicopter services, Helijet also provides dedicated medically equipped helicopters to the BC Air Ambulance Service, which is operated by the province’s BC Emergency Health Services. Additionally, Helijet provides helicopters and business turbojet services to BC’s world-renowned fishing resorts, and public service and energy companies throughout the West Coast of British Columbia and Pacific NorthWest. Additional Helijet details are available at [Helijet.com](http://Helijet.com). Twitter: [@Helijet](https://twitter.com/Helijet) Instagram: [@helijet](https://www.instagram.com/helijet)*

**About BCEHS** *BC Emergency Health Services 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) Instagram: [@bc\\_ehs](https://www.instagram.com/bc_ehs)*

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## QUICK FACTS

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### A closer look at air ambulance operations across B.C.

- The **BCEHS air ambulance program** responds to the needs of critical hospital transfer patients and emergency medical calls through the deployment of **six helicopters and ten airplanes** and dedicated flight crew available 24/7. These air resources are based in Vancouver, Nanaimo, Kamloops, Kelowna, Prince George, Prince Rupert and Fort St John.
- Annually, BCEHS responds to more than **7,400 patients** requiring transportation by air ambulance.
  - Helicopters respond to 30 per cent of all air ambulance calls in B.C.; airplanes respond to 70 per cent.
- A breakdown of air ambulance transports in B.C. (for fiscal 2020/21):
  - Northern Health **40%**
  - Interior Health **26%**
  - Vancouver-Coastal **17%**
  - Vancouver Island **14%**
  - Fraser Health **2%**
  - Out-of-province **less than 1%**
- A vast majority of 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.

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