

For immediate release
December 12, 2023

Provincial Health Services Authority
BC Emergency Health Services

Santa brings Christmas cheer to kids in six hospitals, with a lift from BCEHS and Helijet

Vancouver, B.C. – Children, parents and staff in B.C. hospitals are being treated to a special pre-Christmas visit today by Santa Claus, who is once again travelling in a BCEHS air ambulance courtesy of Helijet. The jolly old elf is back in the air to bring smiles and joy to courageous children who are in hospital pediatric units this holiday season, and to the dedicated front-line health care workers who look after them.

For the 19th straight year, BCEHS and Helijet are helping Santa bring toys and Christmas cheer to kids in six hospitals, all in a single day. This year's "Santa Flights" will visit 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.

"I'm delighted that BCEHS and Helijet are helping Santa make their special hospital run to lift the spirits of children who require care in hospital at this special time of the year," said Adrian Dix, Minister of Health. "I am constantly amazed by the tremendous courage and resilience of our children who are bravely fighting to get well soon. Santa's visits not only bring joy and hope to our young patients but also celebrate the dedication of our front-line workers, including specialized paramedics who provide crucial medical care for children across the province. Thank you all for making this wonderful trip possible."

Joining Santa for the air ambulance flights is Brian Thornburn, one of BCEHS' specially trained Infant Transport Team (ITT) paramedics who 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 critical care team like ITT that has provided specialized paramedic care to the province's youngest patients since 1976," Brian said. "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, President and CEO of Helijet which operates 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. "And for the 19th straight year, all of us at Helijet are happy to have this opportunity to help make the holiday season special for these courageous kids and their families who find themselves in hospital instead of at home as Christmas approaches."

Hashtag: #SantaFlights

About Helijet

Helijet International is a privately held Canadian-owned company based at the Vancouver International Airport, British Columbia, Canada, and is recognized as North America's largest helicopter airline, carrying well over 2.4 million guests in the past 37 years. In addition to its scheduled helicopter services, Helijet is the Province of British Columbia's longest-standing air service provider of dedicated medically equipped helicopters.

Helijet provides exclusive-use helicopter and fixed-wing services to world-renowned sport fishing resorts, public service and energy companies throughout the west coast of British Columbia and North America. Helijet's wholly owned subsidiary, Pacific Heliport Services, Ltd., is Canada's largest privately managed Heliport operator, overseeing the downtown Vancouver, Victoria and Nanaimo's Transport Canada-certified heliports. Helijet has been recognized by communities and aviation associations alike as a socially responsible and forward-thinking air operator that deeply engages with the communities it serves.

*Helijet is committed to introducing and integrating zero-emission vertical lift technologies into the communities that it serves; in conjunction with transforming its current Heliport infrastructure to meet future urban air mobility Vertiport standards. Additional Helijet details are available at 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 or follow us on Twitter: [@BC_EHS](https://twitter.com/BC_EHS)
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QUICK FACTS

December 12, 2023

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 10 airplanes** and dedicated flight crews 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 **7,900 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. (fiscal 2022/23):
 - Northern Health **40.3%**
 - Interior Health **24.7%**
 - Vancouver-Coastal **17.5%**
 - Vancouver Island **14.9%**
 - Fraser Health **2.2%**
 - Out-of-province **0.3%**
- 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.

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