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Provincial Health Services Authority  
BC Emergency Health Services

## **Helijet and BCEHS celebrate 20 years of “Santa Flights” and bringing Christmas cheer to kids in BC hospitals**

**Vancouver, B.C.** – It’s a milestone year as Helijet International and BC Emergency Health Services (BCEHS) mark 20 years of presenting their annual “Santa Flights”.

Now a holiday season tradition, Santa is once again “hitching a ride” in a BCEHS air ambulance for a whirlwind, same-day tour to visit children in pediatric units at six hospitals in the Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island.

It’s also a big year for BCEHS, which is celebrating the 50th year of British Columbia’s provincial ambulance service. Today, BCEHS is one of the largest ambulance services in North America, providing care to British Columbians in every corner of the province.

This year’s “Santa Flights” itinerary includes 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. At each stop, Santa brings toys to the kids and Christmas cheer for everyone including family members and healthcare workers.

“Santa’s visits bring joy and hope to our young patients who find themselves in hospital at this special time of the year,” said Josie Osborne, Minister of Health. “The Santa Flights also remind us to celebrate the dedication of our front-line workers, including specialized paramedics who provide crucial medical care for our courageous children as they fight to get well soon. We appreciate the efforts made by everyone to fly Santa to visit these children and add a little holiday cheer.”

Joining Santa and his elf for this year’s “Santa Flights” is David Nemec, one of BCEHS’ specially trained Infant Transport Team (ITT) paramedics who care for, and transport, babies and young children with acute or emergency health needs. David is also the interim unit chief of Station 283, the Infant Transport Team’s station based at BC Children’s Hospital.

“We all look forward to the Santa Flights each year and it’s an honour to represent our dedicated ITT critical care team on this year’s rounds,” said David. “Every day, we help children all over B.C. who need medical care, but when we fly in with Santa, we get to visit kids in a setting where they’re in better spirits. It’s so gratifying to see them smile as they bravely face their health challenges.”

Also flying with Santa is Danny Sitnam, President and CEO of Helijet which operates Sikorsky air ambulance helicopters used by BCEHS. “We began this whole idea with a single flight that took Santa by helicopter to one hospital in our first year. No one knew back then that it would grow to what it’s become today, with six hospital visits in a single day. Only flying Santa by helicopter makes that possible. All of us at Helijet are happy to have this opportunity to work once again with BCEHS and help make the holiday season special for these kids who find themselves in hospital 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 2.5 million guests in the past 38 years. In addition to its scheduled helicopter services, Helijet is the Province of British Columbia's longest standing and largest 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 and related ground/building infrastructure 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](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 9 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 **8,200 patients** requiring transportation by air ambulance.
  - Helicopters respond to approximately 25 per cent of all air ambulance calls in B.C.; airplanes respond to approximately 75 per cent.
- A breakdown of the originating health authority of air ambulance transports in B.C. (fiscal 2023/24):
  - Northern Health **40.6%**
  - Interior Health **25.2%**
  - Vancouver-Coastal **18.3%**
  - Vancouver Island **13.4%**
  - Fraser Health **2.0%**
  - Out-of-province **0.4%**
- 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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