

COVID-19 Facebook live update: August 26, 2020

>> Good afternoon.

I'm Nigel Allen and I'm the moderator for this COVID-19 update for Wednesday, August 26th.

We are joined by Yukon Premier Sandy Silver and Yukon chief medical officer of health, Dr Brendan Hanley.

Our sign language interpretation is being provided today by Kevin Klein from Winnipeg.

We also have with us Andre Bourcier from the French language services directorate who will translate any questions from French-speaking reporters.

Following our speakers we will go to questions from reporters.

We will call you by name and you will each have one question plus one follow-up.

Premier Silver?

>> Thank you, very much.

And just a quick shout out to Mary who's normally with us, and who's on a much deserved vacation.

Hope she is out there having a good time.

I want to thank everyone for joining us on the traditional territories of the Taa'an Kwächän Council and the Kwanlin Dün First Nation.

I am very pleased to be here with Dr Hanley.

It has now been three weeks since we have entered into phase three.

Our longest phase.

In this phase, the changes that will take place will gradually -- be gradual and adaptive, and we will adjust to new life under this reality.

Last week, we were able to welcome students back to school and Yukon.

We have done this by adapting the way that we deliver services and while schools look different this year, it is something to celebrate.

That our new reality includes a safe place for children to learn.

As we set the tone for the new and different school year, I would like to thank parents, teachers, administrators, the educational community for everything that you're doing to be flexible and to work through this unprecedented challenge together with your students and children.

There will be bumps along the road, but I am confident that we can work together as a team to give Yukon children the best education possible this year.

We are the first in the country to send our children back to the 2020-2021 school year and I am very proud of the collective work that has been taken to make this happen in a safe way.

We have received lots of feedback that students are excited to be back into school, to further the good work that has gone into adapting our schools to function in the safest way possible we have received additional funding from the federal government, all of which will go towards further adopting our schools to respond to COVID-19.

The Prime Minister announced \$2 billion for all provinces and territories to support a safe return to school.

That translates in the Yukon to just over \$4 million that will be provided to Yukon to -- and two different allotments, approximately \$2 million now and approximately \$2 million at the end of the calendar year.

We are very happy to receive this support and very appreciative that the federal government's understanding of the ongoing financial burden that COVID-19 has created.

These funds can be used in a number of different ways.

They can be used-- there is lots of flexibility.

They can be used to adopt learning spaces, for things like new desks or whiteboards.

They could be used for custodial staff, cleaning supplies, the procuring of personal protective equipment, additional buses, additional cleaning on buses, mental health supports for students and staff, and further health and safety training for staff and for teachers on call.

And more supports to meet the needs of students and also the community needs as well.

This funding is flexible, and we will be using it in a variety of different ways as school plans are changed and adapted in response to the current health situation.

On top of the hard work of school communities, educators, administrators, school councils, and parents, the milestone of welcoming children back to school was only possible because of the dedication and sacrifices of Yukoners, of all Yukoners who have done their part to keep us all safe.

To date, every time we have had a case of COVID, we have kept community spread at bay.

By following the rules individually and working together as a community.

Each and every one of you're making changes, adjustments, and sacrifices every day to help reduce the spread of COVID-19 and to keep us all safe and I thank you very much for that.

With no active cases of COVID-19 and no known community transmission, Yukon remains very well positioned in phase three to continue a path of adapting and responding to our new reality.

As always, I want to take a moment to remind us all of the Safe Six.

Keeping physically distant, so staying two metres apart from anybody outside of your bubble, staying home if we feel sick, following the new social and organized gathering guidelines, respect the limitations on group sizes.

Limit travel to rural communities and be respectful when you do go.

Self isolated when you're returning from travel to anywhere outside of British Columbia, Northwest Territories, or Nunavut, or if you have come in contact with anyone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19.

Most of all, most important, wash your hands and wash them frequently.

Before I pass things over to Dr Hanley I just want to say once again, thank you.

Thank you for following the guidelines to keep yourselves, your loved ones, and your community safe.

Can't thank you enough for doing that.

With not, thanks again and have a healthy and safe rest of your week.

Dr Hanley?

>> Thank you, Premier Silver.

Like the premier says, we are almost a week into the school year and I want to echo my thanks to all the people who have made this happen so far.

The kids have taken some brave first steps into the classroom, and are, perhaps with some dragging of the feet, rejoicing at being with their friends again and being in the social milieu of school.

For all of its emotional ups and downs, that is such an important environment for children to experience again.

Parents I know are still anxious about how this will all turn out, but also relieved by and large that school routines are starting up again.

So I echo my thanks to students and parents for your patience and your trust, and your contributions to making this work.

And thanks again to all the teachers, principles, support staff and departmental staff who have worked so creatively and with such passion to make the school -- schools safe learning environments for all our students.

This is another brave and necessary step to renormalizing our lives in the face of a pandemic.

None of this is easy.

Every school has developed a plan based on public health guidance and note what was schools look the same.

That is good, and we will all learn from each other.

There is no textbook or app or program for this work.

As we achieve yet another pandemic landmark, we can reflect how we are all learning how to live with COVID and to live with the increased uncertainty in our lives.

That the pandemic has brought to us.

Last week, I was listening to an interview with an author and I heard her quote a well-known Arab proverb.

"when there is danger, seeing to it."

We can learn to adapt to risk and danger in remarkable ways.

Think of people picking their way through shards and rubble after the latest disaster, or surviving from day to day in areas where war prevails.

Millions of people are right now living with threats of famine, flags of locusts, conflict, war, extreme climate events, or dangerous workplaces.

Yet they make the best of it, have families and love them, talk and play with friends, make plans, and enjoy whatever they have the opportunity to enjoy.

Here, we are living hardships like some of us have never experienced.

We don't quite know what tomorrow or next week will look like.

We have to live with added uncertainty, with loss, even with fear.

On the other hand, looking around the country and the world, we have to admit -- admit Yukon is in a very good place today, whether we talk about COVID-19 in its impact or our overall well-being.

So while today we may need to live with a little fear and a lot of uncertainty, we have to find those ways to sing to the danger, to carry on living our lives to the fullest in the best way that we can in these difficult times.

In this part of the world, most of us hardly think twice about living with another lethal threat in our midst, bears.

But we are reminded frequently how dangerous and unpredictable they can be, including recent intrusions in Marsh Lake and the tragic attack in a Saskatchewan.

But by and large, we have learned and continue to learn to live with bears in our midst.

We all have our bear awareness and our bear stories, and that is part of our lower.

Around the world, we are seeing a resurgence of COVID-19 in a some places thought have managed to reduce and control the spread.

In some areas, people who were ordered bylaw to remain in their homes and who have just started to reemerge are now facing quarantine again.

Because of the steps we took early on and the measures we introduced, we have been able to recover a little bit more quickly and move towards that reopening plan we are in.

But even as we move further along in this phase three of the Yukon area mining plan, we have to remain methodical and cautious.

Again, following the opening of schools, I have heard from many individuals again demanding that we close the border with BC to prevent COVID-19 from getting an.

Of course, our border was never closed.

People have since the beginning been able to travel and if they were critical or essential, or if they were travelling through to either Alaska or Northwest Territories.

Food suppliers continue to transit through, as did those delivering other goods.

But since the entry order was lifted, travel is no longer so restricted.

But quarantine requirements remain in place.

On July 1st, we removed the self-isolation requirement for individuals from BC and NWT and Nunavut if they were able to come directly to Yukon.

Everyone else coming through our border must still self-isolate and provide a plan to the enforcement officers at the borders.

At this point, I wish to continue the slow and careful pace.

I do not want us to have to move back.

But I do feel confident that we can stay where we are.

I am not yet advising that we lift self-isolation requirements for those coming from other jurisdictions at this time.

You will see the travel statistics and the information bulletin for today.

Most travellers into Yukon since April 29th who stayed in Yukon are from those travelling outside the bubble areas in Canada.

Second are Yukoners returning from outside, and third RPC travellers coming in.

As we opened up, we do accept greater risk but I believe the risk is well worth it.

Since July 1st, we have hardly seen a rush of new cases.

In fact we have only seen one new case in Yukon since that date.

Two months of the BC bubble and when extra case in Yukon, with no one having serious illness.

I don't wish COVID on anyone, but overall, I have to think that is a pretty fair trade.

And I remain very confident that there is neither widespread disease nor community transmission of COVID within our borders.

Opening up to BC, by removing these quarantine requirements has been very important for Yukon.

Allowing increased travel in and out, families to reunite, increased opportunities for visitors from BC, more economic opportunity for retailers here, and allowing for easier flow of goods and transport.

These are all elements of a healthier society.

Just like getting our kids back to school, we have had to move in directions where we are taking a small risk for a greater good and learning to live with the situation as it is today.

Children need to go to school, parents need to go to work, life needs to go on.

Babies will be born, people will form relationships then people will die, COVID or no COVID.

Closing our border to BC would not guarantee as any gains in a stopping the spread of COVID-19 and letting fear rule our lives is not going to keep COVID-19 at bay.

So, with nearly 1,000 active cases in BC, how worried am I?

As I said last week, we are continuing to watch closely and like the public health officials in BC, we are concerned.

But despite increasing cases, there are a number of differences from the previous spike in BC.

Most cases are traceable to known contacts and clusters.

The number of hospitalizations and deaths is not increasing.

And indeed, younger people and gatherings appear to be driving the numbers.

But like Doctor Henry states, the link in increased cases is to younger adults gathering in these large numbers without physical distancing.

Pandemic fatigue definitely affect us all, but we must continue to counteract the risk of COVID with practised, sensible measures.

Which means no partying at close distance to each other.

The risk of importing cases from BC has increased, but by a very low amount as the average rate of infected people in BC is in the range of one and 5,000.

By reinforcing messages to our visitors and to Yukoners returning from BC, we will keep the chances of introduction of cases into Yukon minimal.

More importantly, by continuing to observe public health measures, we will keep COVID contained even when it is introduced into Yukon.

BC recently announced that party organizers will be fined \$2,000 and party goers 200 if they violate the gathering rules, to show how seriously they are government is taking this inappropriate behaviour.

Likewise, it is up to all of us to respect those Safe Six and to avoid these types of actions having to be taken here.

Young people may not be as worried about COVID, and mostly they are right.

But this is not a danger to be courted with.

I am sure we already with sadness the tragic death of a 19-year-old, otherwise healthy young man in Québec who died within 25 days of being diagnosed.

Singing to the danger does not mean inviting danger in, it means facing up to it and learning to live with the risk by applying the public health measures based on the best evidence we have.

It takes us working as a team tobacco COVID, and our youth are a critical part of that team.

They note that even when they feel young and strong and even invincible, their parents and grandparents may not be.

Though they may need reminding at times, I know that our youth know well their responsibility to protect their elders and those who are most us -- more susceptible to infection, just as they were so carefully protected and nurtured through their childhood.

So where to go from here?

For now, we hold where we are allow everyone to get used to the children being back in school, and work out all the kinks we can.

We continue to watch trends and the rest of the country.

We need people to continue to do the right thing.

And for now, that doesn't mean a self isolating for 14 days if you're travelling into or back to Yukon after being outside our bubble areas.

That is a hardship, but I think that keeps us in a reasonable balance for now.

Eventually, I would like to move away from that model when I am more confident that our reopening measures are stable, that we can follow all the Safe Six and public health measures.

Then we can take another look at our quarantine measures in place and advise on the overall best approach for the health of our population.

To do that safely though, we must continue to do what we have been doing and doing so well.

We need to follow the Safe Six.

Wash our hands, stay two metres away from those not in our bubble or cohort.

We need to stay home when we are sick, avoid large gatherings.

We need to travel respectfully and self isolate if we returned from anywhere other than BC, NWT, or none of it, or have been in contact with someone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19.

Self isolation means 14 days for those who have travelled from those places that we are asking for self isolation requirements to be in place.

I know other places in the world are looking at ways to cut this down, perhaps with testing, perhaps not.

We need more experience and evidence to do this.

Many other options await us but for now, as we settle into school and winter and flu season, we should hold onto what we know works well, while we learn about other measures.

We now have guidelines for contact sports, and have published them on Yukon.ca today.

By adapting the way we play contact sports during the pandemic, we can get back on the ice, field, in court.

So I am very pleased that these guidelines are now available.

The new guidelines apply to children and adult leagues and are to be used along with the government of Yukon's existing sports and recreation guidelines.

We have also published our revised guidelines for gatherings, and now that we are in phase three of reopening, of course you have more ways to gather and to be together while keeping physically distanced.

And to review, we have two main types of gatherings.

Organized gatherings and social gatherings.

Organized gatherings are exceeded events which may be in a rented menu such as weddings, celebrations of life, and cultural events.

You can have up to 50 people at an organized event indoors, and up to 100 people outdoors.

Rental venues need to have an operational plan and guests and organizers need to follow the plan.

Social gatherings are events in the private homes or public spaces such as birthday celebrations, retirement parties, or backyard barbecues.

In these situations, you can have up to ten people indoors or 15 people outdoors -- 50 people outdoors for these types of gatherings again with spacing in place.

Before I close, we all know that COVID is not the only skirt that crosses through all ages.

Next week is international overdose awareness week back in Canada and in Yukon.

Many community partners will be hosting a number of events next week throughout Yukon to raise awareness about overdose prevention.

Earlier this summer, along with Yukon's coroner we released the number of Opioid Deaths in Yukon since January this year.

We continue to see high numbers of overdoses and we remain incredibly grateful to all responders who are saving lives in their formal and informal capacities.

There will be more information published next week on overdose awareness activities.

That is all for today.

Thank you, Merci.

>> Thank you, Dr Hanley.

We will now go to reporters for questions and we will begin with the Canadian press.

[Inaudible]

>> Are you there?

>> Reporter: Sorry.

I don't have a question.

>> Okay.

No problem.

We will move on to John, CKRW.

>> Reporter: No questions.

Thank you.

>> Thank you.

Chris, CBC?

>> Reporter: Yeah, hi.

I guess my first question is, regarding the last case -- the last positive case and there was contact tracing done here and in Dawson city.

Clearly that resulted in no community transmission.

I guess I'm wondering if Dr Hanley could speak to why that is?

Did we get lucky, what was the lack of spread a result of?

>> You know, there are many things about COVID that we don't understand.

And we don't always get all the information about every case that we might want.

What we are able to establish after substantial contact tracing, of course the exposure notifications, is that we found no spread, no contact, no positivity among any of the contacts associated with that case.

I think that is just, you know, we could easily have found-- we know there are differences between how people transmit and spread disease, and that can depend on the setting, the environment, or it can depend on the person, whether that is the person transmitting or people who may be more or less susceptible.

There are many factors that can lead to one event leading to nothing, or two transmission which of course could be one or a few or even many.

I think the combination of circumstances, certainly one of the key learning points from this last case was that the case, and all of the contacts observed really good compliance with preventive measures.

So really, this was I think yet another example of how a case, by following good distancing measures along the trajectory and along travels, there were many possibilities that were prevented just because they were doing the right thing.

That was actually the same with any of the contacts we identified.

They were doing largely the right thing.

So the contact circle was actually limited.

Even among the exposure notifications, when we put out those kind of large nets, of course we found nothing, just negative cases.

So I think, yeah, there is always that sort of capriciousness but I have referred to before about the virus.

We know in different circumstances, even in the same circumstances you may get different results, just based on who knows what and other factors.

AB some of that is locked, but I think largely this is contained because people were doing the right thing.

>> Follow-up?

>> Reporter: Thank you, Dr Hanley.

My next question is for the premier.

That is about this 4.1 \$6 million that the territory will be getting for school.

Premier, you mentioned that the money is flexible.

What in your mind are the priorities for the Yukon government in terms of where this money would be needed and what do you plan to spend it on?

>> The conversation we had with the first ministers yesterday, with all the premiers and the Prime Minister was, you know, the need for -- everybody has extra costs when it comes to COVID and getting our students back to class.

But the needs and Québec or Prince Edward Island are going to be different than the needs and British Columbia or Yukon.

So we were surprised by this announcement, but pleasantly surprised by this announcement, and it is going to go a long way to help us with the learning spaces that we have.

And as every single school goes through their new guidelines, their new plans, they are going to be bumps along the road as well in preparing for COVID.

And looking at best practices and one school versus the other.

So again, whether for personal equipment or for cleaning supplies or supports for mental health, health and safety training for staff, what we have to do is take a look at what has been already identified in the department as far as necessities, and also what has already been identified as spending within the department.

But also some of the more external or new costs as they come up.

Talking really quickly with Minister McPhee, she knows that that money will be very well spent.

It is just a matter of now trying to work with the school communities, work with each of the educational facilities and prioritize based upon need.

>> We will now go to Gabrielle with the Whitehorse Star?

>> Reporter: High.

Thanks, another question for Premier Silver.

I was hoping you could elaborate a little bit.

You said something has been identified by the department as necessities.

What are those things?

>> That's exactly what the sponsor for.

Things like the adaptation of those learning spaces.

You know, this is an unprecedented year of getting students back into the classroom and the school communities, each of the principles and parents and teachers and communities have done such a great job of preparing.

But, you know, we are the first jurisdiction in Canada to get our kids out of the gates and back into the classrooms.

So whether again a this additional buses, but is a good example where this support could come -- it has the flexibility to allow spending on buses and additional cleaning of those buses, but at the same time we have already reality -- reallocated some funds for additional buses and roads and continue to work with our partners to make sure that on a case by case basis we get ahead of those needs.

So a very welcome influx of just over \$4 million from the federal government but again, without that announcement -- before that announcement, these were the things we are planning for already.

Personal protective equipment, we know the Department of Education, working with highways and Public Works did a lot of great work to prepare for having masks and personal protective equipment.

Now it is the question out, now that we have this, how do we prioritize it and get it back into the system so that we can continue to make sure that every one of our schools is as safe as possible for this return to classes.

>> Follow up?

>> Reporter: Yeah, I am wondering if you have an estimate of how much the adaptation for learning spaces for COVID have cost so far, and are you aware of whether any changes -- teachers have spent their own personal money adapting learning spaces, as I know sometimes happens even within a regular year.

>> As an educator myself, I can attest to that.

I don't have those numbers with me right now.

I know that the department has done a very good job of dealing with costs as they come up internally, and now this extra \$4 million is really going to help in that support.

But whether there was money coming from Ottawa or not, the health and safety of our students is of the utmost importance as we get back to this new normal, back to face-to-face classes and working with the community, with Minister McPhee and her amazing team.

We will continue to prioritize based upon the need and based upon the involvement of each of those educational communities in each of the communities.

>> We will now go to Claudiane, Radio-Canada.

>> Reporter: Yes, first question to the premier also regarding education.

Some parents are wondering if this money would be considered to rent outside spaces or otherwise find ways to bring kids from grade ten to 12 back to a full-time school year?

Could this funding be used for the?

>> So again, the one thing every premier said to the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister yesterday is we need flexibility.

We need to make sure this money is spent on our priorities, and as we always have, we will continue to make sure that those priorities come from the school communities themselves and make sure the money is well spent for that need.

It is going to be an ongoing situation.

Obviously working in the classroom and trying to get the students to maximize the amount of face-to-face education as we possibly can, we will make sure this money is well spent to increase, and continue to focus in on the safety of our students and trying to get back to as normal as possible, in these unprecedented and extremely abnormal times.

>> Follow up?

>> Reporter: I'm going to have to sacrifice my second question to reask the question.

Will the kids be brought back to a full-time school year with this funding?

>> We will give you an opportunity to ask another question but again, I don't have that for you right now.

We will keep on monitoring the situation.

Our goal is to get the classrooms to be as normal as possible.

And we are lucky in Yukon, in that we are going into the classrooms now and we are actually having face-to-face education.

We don't have community spread.

I think we are in a better situation than most jurisdictions in Canada to get back to a new normal.

But I can't tell you right now, because I haven't been with the department in those conversations for every one of those individual schools to prioritize.

I will leave that up to the department to work with the principles, the teachers and the school councils to make those determinations.

But please, by all means ask another question.

>> Reporter: Thank you very much.

[Speaking French]

>> Interpreter: So the question is for Doctor Hanley.

Can you please talk about the new electives you have given for organized sport with kids coming back to school, and all the sports activities coming back?

[Speaking French]

>> I will repeat quickly, because that is more detailed than I gave in my talk.

But the contact sport guidelines are published with the details, but one of the features that we are excited about is it talks about mini legs.

The formation of groups of up to 60 people within an organized cohort, so that games and even tournaments can be arranged within that cohort.

So that you're allowing -- although you're trying to minimize physical contact, also allowing the normal contact that might occur within play.

So that you can actually have games.

But putting in all of the measures, including limiting it to containable groups.

So that again, you're finding your balance between reasonable risk but allowing kids and adults to actually participate in games in an organized way.

>> We will now go to Maryne with L'Aurore boréale.

>> Reporter:

[Speaking French]

>> Interpreter: So the question is for Dr Hanley.

Can you please repeat in French, what are the guidelines for groups, how many people and how it can be done for parties and different activities?

[Speaking French]

>> Follow-up?

>> Reporter:

[Speaking French]

>> Interpreter: So last week, you said that there was a number of complaints about people not respecting the rules.

Were any of these complaints regarding groups of people?

[Speaking French]

>> We will now go to Hailey with Yukon News.

>> Reporter: And another question for Dr Hanley.

I know this question comes up every week, but with Walmart instituting mandatory masks and superstore announcing they are

about to do the same, has their perspective changed on masks at all?

What is Yukon public health instructing people right now to do?

>> At thanks.

The question about mandatory masks, and certainly I have the greatest respect for places, places of employment or places of commerce -- commerce that decide, with due caution, to institute those policies.

But that doesn't change my perspective, from an overall point of view where I don't advise at this moment mandatory masks policies as a territorial initiative.

I think that, again, it is similar to the approaches I have taken with the schools.

That masks should always be -- should be reserved for those places where physical spacing is not able to be maintained.

And unfortunately, those situations are still few and far between -- fortunately they are still few and far between in our territory.

So I think the increasing familiarization with masks, having masks available, especially as we are going to be more required to use them for certain settings is a good direction.

But I have no interest at this point in making masks a mandatory measure from an overall policy point of view.

>> Follow up?

>> Reporter: I do, as we move into the fall which is flu season but also Thanksgiving, December holidays, it is a big time for travel and I'm sure people are starting to make their plans.

Are you encouraging people to limit nonessential travel?

How should they be approaching holiday plans they might be considering?

>> That's a good question, and I think again we need to look at where we are as a country and where we are overall.

For one thing, I think there is a general reluctance for most people to travel, and a general discouragement of nonessential travel.

But recognizing that there is a some interpretation involved in what that means and, you know, if you have not seen your family for a year or more, how important doesn't that become?

A lot of that does come down to individual considerations.

What I would say, if you travel, travel wide -- wisely.

Follow all of the requirements as you go through the steps of travel, and follow the law when you return and follow the advice and the guidance of the law when you return.

And even if he were to go to BC and return, just be very prudent.

Especially if you're in an area where there is COVID-19 activity, even if there is no requirement to self I select, be aware of where you're coming from or in contact with any area where there is active COVID, just be very aware of that and act accordingly.

>> Thank you, Hailey.



Thank you, Premier Silver and thank you, Dr Hanley.

I would like to thank everyone for their time today.

Our next COVID-19 update is scheduled for Wednesday,
September 2nd at 2:00 PM.

Thank you.

