

COVID-19 Facebook live update: April 7, 2021

>> Pat: And will focus on technical aspects of COVID. He will also use the opportunity to respond to questions we may receive about the preget -- created by topics. Mary Tiessen is providing sign language interpretation. French language translation services is not available this it.

The Q&A format will remain the same.

We will call reporters by name and each will have two questions.

Before we begin I would like to verify that everyone can hear us?

If any reporters are having a problem, please e-mail ecoinfo@gov.yk.ca.

Dr Hanley?

>> Thank you, Pat.

Good morning,.

[Speaking French]

Last week we indicated we would be talking about testing for COVID-19 this week, but I have deferred that to a later time.

Instead given the situation in Canada, I wanted to focus more attention on variant Mac and vaccine progress.

First, let me say that we have no new cases of COVID-19 identified in Yukon.

The two recently announced cases have both been confirmed to have the B117 variant and I can tell you both individuals are now recovered so we have no active cases.

I want to also say right off the top that I acknowledge many people are asking about when we can open up now that vaccination rates are high.

I received a letter just last evening saying that Yukoners

have done their part and we need some tangible rewards.

I want to say that I completely agree and that my team and I are working through some considerations for the next government.

To be clear, I am not in a position to announce changes in measures during this period, unless changes were to be made urgently such as an aid COVID surge.

We are using this time to put together all the ingredients that will feed into the best public health advice that we can provide to a new government.

I do think the timing works well, not just because we are still actively implementing the vaccine campaign and encouraging all adults Yukoners to get vaccinated, but we are also carefully assessing the risk of variants in Canada which quite profoundly influences our susceptibility to outbreaks in Yukon.

I will therefore focus attention for this briefing on a variant and a vaccine update.

>> Unless you were completely off grid over Easter weekend you will no doubt be aware that some jurisdictions implemented more restrictions, or expecting more restrictions in Ontario today.

I have to tell you, I continue to be grateful to be in Yukon not only for our low levels of case activity and the modest degree of normalcy throughout these past few months, but most importantly I am grateful for our community that has stuck together in a time of crisis.

With a variety over strict of measures continuing in a number of provinces, Case numbers rapidly picking up, and variants of concern sweeping through certain areas, it has become a race against time for many jurisdictions. In this race, the new virus tactic is a variant of COVID.

On our side of the battle, we have at least two key weapons.

The ability to apply public health measures which we

know are effective, and a vaccine.

As we watch much of Canada, and for that matter, most of the United States and many parts of Europe, Asia, and Africa, you can see that most jurisdictions are attempting to apply the right measures of restriction according to actual or anticipated spread of COVID and burden on the healthcare system.

It is clear from watching around the country there is debate about how strict and how long the lockdowns or circuit breakers should be.

The difficulty is in getting the right balance, especially after months of varying degrees of restrictions.

And it is all the more challenging with variants of concern as they are more transmissible, more severe, and affect younger people.

The B117 variant is about to dominate in many areas.

And now P1 as well as behind outbreaks in several parts of the country, particularly in BC and Alberta.

I wanted to take a few moments to review some key features we are learning about these variants just in the last couple of weeks -- very direct.

Variants and vaccines are both game changers.

Although in opposite directions.

Variants are driving the worsening trends we are seeing around the world, while vaccines are still hour to get out of this pandemic.

So we cannot talk about next steps and lifting measures without being very conscious of the risks that COVID-19 brings to Yukon.

Variants are doing exactly what they were predicted to do, perhaps even more so.

They are increasing rapidly, and that affects our susceptibility to a VOC or variants of concern making its way here and leading to rapid spread.

Are enough of us vaccinated to prevent this?

Not yet.

We have made great progress overall but the uptake has slowed and we will have almost half of our younger adults still susceptible.

So what do variants of concern do that we are worried of.

At least four key things.

They spread more easily from one person to another.

It is now clear they cause more severe illness.

They have much more affinity for younger people, and they can reinfect people previously infected with COVID.

Some variants may be more resistant to vaccine.

Put these features together and you have the situation we are seeing down south.

Many young people affected through contact in social settings, unusually high numbers of people getting seriously ill and ending up in ICU.

The enhanced ability for variants to spread means that the virus typically affects everyone within a closed, shared space.

Households, restaurants, bars, and workplaces are some of the settings where these variant outbreaks are occurring.

All three of the current variants of concern are therefore more transmissible than traditional or previous COVID.

P.1, which is responsible for ongoing outbreaks in BC and Alberta is rapidly transmissible and, as happened in Brazil, has an ability to reinfect people who previously had COVID-19 infection.

The P.1 variant is definitely a threat we are very concerned about at the moment.

We can be confident that our current vaccines are effective against the B117 variant which so far has -- is dominating over the other VOCs.

The evidence on the P1 variant is not clear enough to say as yet how effective the current vaccines will be

against its spread.

Remember that vaccine is not our only weapon, just our newest.

Public health measures continue to work well against these variants and where breakthrough infection occurs, we then must rely on accessible testing and skilled contact tracing.

It is so important to test early and often when any symptoms occur.

That is how we will limit the damage that variants could cause.

So our best strategy against these variances adherence to public health measures foreign now and increasing our protection our vaccination -- through vaccinating as many Yukoners as we can reach.

While the rest of the country grapples with a rise in new variants in a definite third wave, it of course has been quite difficult -- different for us here in Yukon.

I know at this point many are anxious to move on in just open up.

But I think most recognized that we have been able to maintain an environment here where our measures have allowed us to avoid the surge is that most of the rest of the country have had to live through, along with the lockdowns that have had to be imposed in response.

Early on in the pandemic, just over a year ago, we assessed and recommended as rapidly as possible those public health measures we thought would best protect Yukoners from COVID-19.

Our goal was to contain the infection to sporadic introductions and to limit the spread as much as possible.

The containment approach, relying on testing in case a densification, rapid and thorough contact tracing, while introducing the Safe Six plus one half together created our success so far as a territory.

Our success has also been in part because of Yukoners being receptive and supportive, taking social responsibility, and truly embracing the public health measures we have in place.

I know the ebbs and flows of this pandemic have caused some levels of distrust, but I am heartened to see the number of people who are continuing to take public health measures variously.

With our current public health measures, we have been able to sustain sufficient measures and have reduced our importation risk, interrupted the possible spread, and ultimately maintained a strong control of COVID-19.

As a result, we are not in the same position as other jurisdictions.

We have been able to contain rapid spread, prevent large outbreaks and community spread, because of the adherents of Yukoners to the Safe Six plus one, along with the 14 day self isolation period upon return to Yukon from anywhere outside our borders.

That measure is not being followed -- had measures not been followed so vigilantly, we would not be where we are.

Part of planning for any pandemic and planning during a pandemic is looking to the future, anticipating what may come next, and how we can respond to it as the pandemic shifts and changes.

Our COVID-19 response unit team has been doing just that and we have resurgence plans in place should we need to take more drastic steps.

Of course no one wants to go there but if we have to, we are ready.

If we are tired, and who isn't, and let down our guard, we are putting ourselves at risk.

I get how tired everyone is of hearing about COVID-19. Of having to wear a mask, of not being able to hug

friends and family, not even seeing family, and always having to remember to wash our hands.
Not a bad thing after what -- after all, that last one.
It is hard especially with endless winter days not to plan a vacation in the sun or travel at will.
It is hard not to be able to walk into a long-term care facility or the hospital anytime you want to visit a loved one.
We are all tired.
But we have to face the reality that we are not through this yet.
I think we are getting close, but Canada and most of the world has a rough period to go through first in we can't be completely insulated from the harsh reality.
There are three vaccine goals, and to be truly secure we need all of those populations well vaccinated.
As of the end of the day yesterday, 23,404 Yukoners had received their first dose of vaccine.
12,136, their second dose.
Vaccine teams are again back in rural communities this weekend into next week, providing both first in second doses to those community residents who want them.
To review our uptake measures by age, they have moved slightly in younger populations but not fast enough, in my opinion.
So looking by age categories, as of April third, 18 to 29, 52 percent first dose uptake.
And in the 30 to 39 age group, 63 percent.
Up from 61 percent.
In the 40 to 49 age group, 69 percent first dose uptake.
That is up from 67 percent.
In the 50 to 59 age group, 71 percent.
Moved up by 1 percent in the last week.
Similarly, 60 to 69 has moved up to 79 percent from 78 percent last week.
You're doing okay?

>> We are good!

>> Okay.

And in the 70 plus, staying at 87 percent.

Our overall estimated uptake for the Yukon population, and this is uptake of the eligible population, the adult population, is 68 percent.

We have talked about 75 percent of eligible Yukoners vaccinated as some approximation to give us overall production as a community.

Again, we don't know the exact number.

There are so many variables in play.

As a physician and as the person responsible for public health of all Yukon residents, I would like to see that number reach even higher especially among certain populations such as our elderly and vulnerable.

For the time being, we continue to work to vaccinate all those who want to be vaccinated and continued to answer questions, engage with people, and provide information to those who are more unsure about the vaccine.

Again, I think we can be optimistic about relaxing restrictions as vaccine uptake increases, as warmer weather approaches, and if we can get to the other side of this third wave and variants surge.

No matter how much ice and snow we have now, spring and summer will get here in so will the end to this pandemic.

We are all looking forward to enjoying the Yukon summer and even to rediscovering places beyond.

Let's stick together for the next few weeks, keep up with the vaccinations, and I promise we will get there.

Thank you.

>> Pat: Thank you, Dr Hanley.

We will now go to the phone lines and we will start with Luke from CKRW.

>> Reporter: Hi, Dr Hanley.

I was wondering if you could confirm, for the Yukon residents that had acquired the B117 variant has recovered, and the person that was out of territory has also recovered, is that correct?

>> Yes, that is correct.

>> Pat: Next question?

>> Reporter: That's all I have.

[Inaudible]

>> Pat: Stephanie, Yukon News?

>> Reporter: No questions, thank you.

>> Pat: Thank you.

Philippe, CBC?

>> Reporter: Yes thank you.

We have seen some organizing of a protest this weekend against COVID restrictions.

What would be your message to those people specifically?

>> Loco...

-- well...

Reflecting on the last few words I made, to hang in there and to stick with us.

We know it is by sticking together that we have done well.

I know that I am not going to convince everyone that that is the case.

I think also that people have to be careful where they get information from, and there is a lot of misleading information.

There is very misleading information about vaccine and vaccine effectiveness.

There is misleading information about lab testing and reliability of lab tests.

There is misinformation even about perceptions of whether the pandemic exists or not, and there are various conspiracy theories.

I think all of these can play on people's minds, a

special -- especially when they are stressed and especially when we are in a situation where information is changing all the time and evidences accumulating from day to day and week to week.

And sometimes we have to adjust and tweak our messages and sometimes we have to change what we have been saying.

I think that Paul plays into some peoples scepticism, and distrust.

And I think all I can do is do what I can to let people know what is going on, what's my opinion is up the situation based on the best information and evidence, and if you're looking for your own drink -- your own information, which you should, just be sceptical and look for those authoritative and reliable sources of information.

>> Pat: Thank you.

Philippe, follow-up?

>> Reporter: I simply would ask as well, when people book a second shot, is there a danger in booking too early?

If people don't wait the four weeks.

>> Thank you, Philly.

That is a great question.

You know, there is...

For the modern a shot, the recommended interval as you know is a 28 day recommendation.

And then we have extended that to a window of 42 days or six weeks within our context.

And as you know, and ACI confirmed today comfort with up to a four month interval.

But there is a danger, as with any vaccine, outgoing too early with the second dose.

The danger being that you may not get the boosting effect to the same degree because you haven't had time for that first priming effect to occur.

So the minimum interval for Moderna by the manufacturer is 21 days.

We try to steer people to 28 days.

There have been some exceptional circumstances where it made more sense to go at 25 or 26 days rather than waiting for an uncertain second dose because of people's travel itineraries or circumstances like that.

So my message is that it is much better later than earlier, and I would far rather someone receive their second dose at three months than three weeks.

And especially no earlier than three weeks.

And we have even actively encouraged people who have mistakenly booked before 28 days to come back and revoke if at all possible for a later interval.

>> Pat: Thank you.

Marion, Radio-Canada.

-- Mary a -- Mario.

Before sorry yes, our question-- I will ask in English but if you could say a word in French as well, you can answer in English and then maybe just a quick word in French.

We got this question from readers.

People are wondering, and I know you're still working on rote -- measures that you will recommend to the next government, but would you be open to letting fairly vaccinated residents reentered the territory without the 14 to isolation, but with the testing and isolation until the results of the test?

Is that is -- is that something you're open to?

>> Thanks, Mary a.

-- Mario.

It is a really good question and it is on the table.

I won't say what the answer is because I don't know what the answer is at this point.

And I think there are, you know, there are different possibilities and options that have been looked at

around the world or within the country, by the federal expert groups here.

So we are definitely looking at what the options and alternatives might be, and whether having differential approaches for vaccinated versus unvaccinated makes sense.

Definitely more to come on that.

That is one of the areas that we're taking a very close look at.

[Speaking French]

>> Pat: Thank you.

Do you have another question?

>> Reporter: Just as a follow-up, because you know with the elections and everything, what will the process be when we have the new government in place?

Like, how fast-- the work that use -- are saying you're doing right now, to come up with these recommendations, what will that process look likely are you hurrying to get this stuff out?

[Laughter]

>> Yeah, of course I won't speak in detail to the political process.

That will play out as it must.

But of course, it will take some time for swearing in of the new government.

So the caretaker mode will continue for some time after that, depending on the due process to take place.

I think people want to know...

I feel not in a hurry to make changes, but I think people need to know what we will be recommending and what the timetable will be for those changes.

So I think that's where I would like to get information out as soon as practical.

So clearly people want to know what the future is ahead of us, even though right at the moment we may not be in the best time anyway for making radical

changes just because of the surge of variants I have been talking about.

[Speaking French]

>> Pat: Thank you.

Now to Tim, Whitehorse Star.

>> Reporter: Good morning.

My first question is whether we can get any updated information as to the current vaccine, the modern one, is it going to require a couple of doses or something a year every year?

Is there any new information on that?

And also how well it will handle any potential outbreak of some of these variants if they arrive here.

>> Thanks, ten.

We don't know that duration.

Recognizing that with new vaccines, that question always has to come with time and I think we're pretty confident that, six months and more, the vaccine is durable.

I think it is going to be durable for longer based on the robustness of the immune response and a high degree of efficacy.

But we have to see that play out with time in the real world.

So I am optimistic that it will be durable but what does that mean, does it mean a year or two years?

I would anticipate that boosters would be needed and the advantage of course with the mRNA vaccines is that the booster might be different, because it might be adjusted to variants which is partly an answer to your second question, or part B. of your first question maybe I should say.

The...

What we know about the B117 variant is that it appears the mRNA vaccines are a good match for the B117 variant.

So we would be quite confident and that is one of the reasons again for pushing highly vaccinated population as even against the most common variant right now, what is likely to be the dominant variant, B117, the vaccine shows good production.

We don't know as much against P1.

It would likely be at least partially protective but if we did see a vaccine resistant variant by marriage, and I think given the global situation that that is quite likely at some point, then we would have to look forward to a booster that would be adapted to that variant.

>> Pat: Thank you.

Do you have a final question, Tim?

>> Just...

I think Dr Hanley has touched on it for the most part but, so we should not expect her have much hope of seeing the end of this vaccine rollout anytime soon?

It maybe a sort of cause a permanent thing?

>> Yes.

So I mean, I see this first effort, the initial rollout to get everyone their first in second doses, hopefully close to everyone.

The next part of that really will be getting our children immunized when the vaccine becomes available for children.

Then I think we will have, as I have said before, I expect we will be living with COVID for years to come.

I think all indications are that it will become an endemic infection.

I think just as it will be with us for years to come, I think it will be added to the armamentarium of regular vaccines both for children in for adults.

I think that is the likely future.

>> Pat: Thank you.

I would like to thank everyone for their time today and advised that the next COVID-19 update will be

Wednesday, April 14th, at 10:30 AM.

Next week's technical topic, barring any changes, will be based on requirements for self isolation, why we need to self isolate, the importation risk and what self isolation might look like in the future along with any updated info on vaccines and variants.

If you have questions you would like to see e-mail, e-mail hhs@yukon.ca or post a question to the HHS Facebook site.

