

COVID-19 Facebook live update: August 19, 2020

>> Pat: I am Pat Living from the department of health and social services and moderator for this COVID-19 update for Wednesday, Aug 19.

We are joined by Yukon Premier Sandy Silver and Yukon Chief Medical Officer health Dr Brendan Hanley.

Our sign language interpretation is being provided by Mary Tiessen and Andre Bourcier from French language services directed will translate any questions from French-speaking journalists.

Following our speakers we will go to the phone lines for questions from reporters.

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

Premier Silver?

>> Thank you, Pat.

Hello everybody.

Thank you for joining us again on the traditional territory of the Taa'an Kwächän Council and the Kwanlin Dün First Nation.

I am pleased to be here again with Dr Hanley.

Today we are sharing more information about the ongoing efforts, enforcement efforts as well as some phase three changes that are to come.

We are moving quite quickly into fall in the Yukon.

This means that we are in our third season of COVID-19 updates.

We have come so far, and I am so very proud of the incredible effort that Yukoners have done to keep this territory safe.

Each and every one of you have made significant changes, adjustments and sacrifices to help reduce the spread of

COVID-19 and we cannot thank you enough for all that you're doing.

This week marks a major milestone in our COVID-19 journey.

As Yukon schools are welcoming students back for the school year.

The fact that we are able to open schools shows just how well the Yukon is doing.

We are in a position to welcome back students and that is a very good thing.

I want to thank everybody involved in getting us to this point.

Thank you to the parents and to the students for your patience as plans were being developed and issued.

Thank you to the school communities.

The custodial folks, the educators, the administrators, school councils, bus drivers, everybody, for all the planning that you have done to keep students safe while opening up classrooms to education.

Thank you very much.

I want to thank the first Nations governments and communities for working with us on these plans.

I want to thank the bussing companies, and also Mayor Dan Curtis and the city of Whitehorse for adopting, responding, and doing your part to transport our students safely to run from the schools.

Thank you very much.

All of this work is grounded in balancing fan certainty up a global health pandemic and every student's right to a safe education.

I know the Minister of education and her team are firmly committed to making this school year work safely.

School plans are adaptable, and changes will happen as we continue to learn and monitor, and respond to our health situation -- our public health situation.

This work will have been in collaboration with school communities, with our government, and of course the Chief Medical Officer of health.

School operations will also be monitored and adjusted as schools learn more about how routines are working for their students and for their staff.

We are committed to adapting and responding to students' learning needs and public health advice over the course of this pandemic.

We want all schools -- we want the school year to be successful for all students and all students to be successful.

The health of students, educators, and I'll Yukoners is our top priority.

Good luck to all the Yukon students that are returning to class.

I know that this year will be very difficult and I appreciate the resilience and flexibility that you have shown as we tackle what is an extremely unprecedented time that we are in.

Turning our attention to borders, we are pleased to see the Canadian US border restrictions will continue, limiting those who are travelling to and through Yukon is a key aspect in reducing the spread of the virus.

Having the support of the Canadian border services agency is very valuable, and we support the decision to keep the international border closed.

The Yukon's enforcement efforts are continuing.

Vehicles are being stopped before entering Yukon and informed about the current rules.

Since April 29th, enforcement staff have stopped just over 34,000 incoming vehicles.

Of those, 4,139 are from British Columbia, British Columbia residents.

188 residents from Northwest Territories, or Nunavut, and roughly 15,000 have been travelling through Yukon.

So far, 185 decals have been distributed to people with out of territory plates who are eligible to be in the Yukon.

Residents and visitors to Yukon who are required to self isolate may receive a check and call for the 14 day self isolation.

This is to help can -- ensure compliance and we will continue with these because as they have been very effective.

If you're concerned, please again contact our enforcement team at covid19enforcement@gov.yk.ca.

Or call 1-877-374-0425.

If you have concerns that someone might be breaking a legal order, you can also contact our enforcement team at the same numbers and same e-mail address.

All this information is available as well at Yukon.ca.

The enforcement team will follow-up with all complaints to help achieve and ensure compliance.

The team has already received 559 complaints to date.

Noncompliance with the civil -- with the orders under the civil emergency measures act can result in fines or fought -- possible imprisonment.

Six charges so far have been issued.

The complaint line is available to report any violations to those rules so please use this line if you have any concerns.

With that, I would also like to remind Yukoners to be respectful to those who are visiting Yukon and to those that are passing through.

Be kind to people as you don't know necessarily the full circumstances of their travels.

As we move into the fall, we continue to see the impact of COVID-19 and people are seeing these impacts.

We have launched the community well-being survey in partnership with Dr Hanley and the Canadian index of well-being.

This will help us better understand the impact of COVID-19.

So far, we have received more than 3,000 responses and surveys will remain open until September 6th.

Thank you to everybody who has completed the survey and if you have not yet, you can again find more information on Yukon.ca.

If you're able to spare a few minutes, please fill out the survey.

The results will help determine our ongoing government response to the pandemic but it will also help us with longer-term decision-making and ensure the government actions worked -- work to benefit individuals and communities across the Yukon.

Before handing it over to Dr Hanley, I reiterate once again, please follow the guidelines for keeping yourself and you're loved ones and your community safe.

So staying two metres apart from everybody outside of your bubble, stay home if you're sick don't gather in social groups of more than ten in an indoor setting and 50 in an outdoor setting, limit your travel to rural communities.

Be respectful win you do go.

Self-isolation if you're returning from draw will to anywhere outside of British Columbia, Northwest Territories or Nunavut, or if you have contact with anyone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19.

And most of all, continue to wash your hands very frequently.

Thank you very much for your time today, and have a safe and healthy rest of your week.

Thank you very much.

Dr Hanley?

>> Thank you, Premier Silver.

Good afternoon.

Again to reiterate the remarks about the well-being survey, please, each survey answered is an additional piece of valuable information for us to understand not just important information about general well-being for the years ahead, but for the specific effects that this pandemic is having on you and on us.

As of today, all of our 15 individuals diagnosed with COVID-19 have recovered and no one was sick enough to require hospital care.

We continue to have much to be thankful for.

Although we are as immersed in the pandemic world is our rework I agree remain somewhat insulated from the direct effects of COVID-19.

I know many people have come forward recently for testing, and I want to thank everyone who has made that effort.

I recognize that testing involves a decision, then a phone call, waiting for an appointment, getting there then being decided to a decidedly uncomfortable thing put in your nose, then a self isolating while waiting for an answer.

Last week, 322 people went through this and thankfully, all had negative results.

Testing lots of people with symptoms, even mild ones will help us keep COVID contained in our community and keep us ahead of community spread.

And with all this testing, with 15 cases recovered and all contacts identified, we can be confident that we still do not have community spread in Yukon.

From the side of the Yukon border, I like many of you and watching with concern again the rise of cases and many areas of the country.

Particularly in Alberta and in BC.

I have received at least a few e-mails asking me if we can reimpose self quarantine for anyone entering Yukon.

It might seem easy to do so.

Say the word, and down comes the hammer again.

And there maybe a point where the hammer might be necessary.

That epidemic activity outside of Yukon would cause us to reimpose quarantine requirements after lifting them.

But not yet, and not for the future as far as we can foresee.

Despite the high numbers in BC and elsewhere, I think we're in a good position to hold just where we are.

Among the reasons are that most of the cases in BC are still traceable to known contacts so what we are seeing in BC is the usual although augmented patterns of a number of outbreaks occurring where most of the dots can be connected.

Cases are largely occurring -- occurring amongst younger adults and associated with social gatherings.

The numbers of hospitalizations and deaths in BC remain very stable.

BC is maintaining overall control due to their ability to contact raise and test while most of the population continue to do the right thing.

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

We have managed over six weeks in the BC bubble, during which we have had only one new case of COVID-19 in Yukon.

More importantly, we have not had any outbreaks or even clusters of COVID.

We can manage and tolerate additional cases and even clusters and outbreaks so we remain well within our capacity to manage this.

We have shown that we can stay the course, and that we can tolerate the increased risk of opening our doors with BC.

We continue on our path forward to reopen in Yukon, albeit slowly.

We are well into phase three and we are so far able to keep going ahead.

However, with school reopening this week and with settling into another school and fall season combined with increased COVID activity in a number of areas around Canada, I feel we are not ready to lift further quarantine measures as yet.

We will stay where we are for now.

A quick look at social media shows that many Yukoners are enjoying a visit to BC while we have welcomed BC residents to Yukon.

At this point, we likely have many more Yukoners heading out of territory than we have BC residents travelling north.

So much as we might berate or criticize visitors, it is Yukoners who have to mind their travel manners whether travelling within or adventuring out of territory.

We must continue to follow the Safe Six wherever we are, including beyond our borders and away from anyone watching us.

Travelling out from Yukon to BC is a privilege that not everyone in Yukon can enjoy.

Please take that privilege as a precious gift that will break if you mishandle it.

A trip to Kelowna or Vancouver is not an excuse to forget everything we have been trying to learn over the past many months.

If we all remember to mind our travel manners and be careful with where we are and who we are with, then we are at no greater risk than we would be if we were locked down in Yukon.

It is all about washing our hands, staying two metres apart, staying home if sick, avoiding large gatherings or crowds, and wearing a mask if we can't stay a safe distance from those not in our bubble.

Travel wisely, respectfully, and safely.

Whether you're travelling in other parts of Yukon or staying home, being respectful also means socializing in a responsible way.

I know there were lots of parties over this last weekend and some were rowdy or then others.

For many people I know, this is like a last summer weekend, perhaps a last fling before getting serious for the next season.

But we are not immune to the potential effects of unsafe gatherings here.

It only takes one case of unrecognized COVID among us to inflame a spontaneous or crowded party into something that could be catastrophic for Yukon.

We all need our moments to be with each other, to celebrate and feel the warmth of each other's company.

We are social beings.

But each one of us has the responsibility to carry the Safe Six principles into every occasion, every location, and every get together.

To date, we have held a news conference to announce each new case of COVID-19 and beginning today, we will no longer be doing that.

We will update the case count on Yukon.ca Gog and we will issue a news release to media that is also posted as we receive test results.

I will always do my best to respond to media questions and I will speak to the cases in these regular weekly updates.

But as we began to live better with COVID-19, new cases -- and if new cases are going to be part of our ongoing business, we will treat them that way.

However,, when there is something that is new or unusual, of course we will make sure we get the information out in the best manner possible.

An example might be a situation where we have several cases or a cluster, or we need to do a public notification about a public exposure event.

I think this can be viewed as a positive step forward in the living with COVID.

Thinking back event to the H1N1 pandemic of 2009, we announced each case as diagnosed, then slowly we taper off from that focus on just cases alone.

Today, H1N1 as part of flu season and we can vaccinate against it.

COVID may well in a some form similarly eventually become a part and notion of our everyday lives.

On another positive note, today marks the first day for indoor visits at Yukon's five and our long-term care facilities.

While outdoor visits have been permitted for some time now, residents can now welcome designated visitors into the facility.

And they can also designate two additional visitors for outside visits.

They are still strict guidelines to follow.

Screening upon entry, mask and the contact will be permitted.

Specific guidelines and instructions on how to organize a visit are available on Yukon.ca.

This has been a long haul for both residents and their family members.

But we have kept COVID-19 out of our long-term care facilities and we have kept our residents safe.

While there is definitely an excitement in the air, kids got to start school today and most of the territory are getting ready to start tomorrow

My two kids had their supplies ready and their backpacks packed yesterday.

After two months away from their peers, kids are excited more than anything about seeing their friends again.

I know there are still questions on everyone's mind about how well this will work out.

And as the first in the country to start the school year, we also have an opportunity to show how well we can do this and how well we can work together.

As the premier did with his long list, I want to thank again all of those people who participated, the principals and teachers, the staff and departmental employees who have sacrificed so much summertime, born a lot of stress, to do everything they can to welcome our children back into the schools for what will surely be a year like no other.

We all know we are doing the right thing, and that we are fortunate to be aware we are in the pandemic so that we can get children into school in as safe and environment as possible.

The kids are ready for this, and I think they will be showing us how we can adapt and learn from our mistakes and move on.

We will all learn as we go, and adapt and modify plans, and we will solve problems together.

But most of all, we should celebrate after a lot of angst and hard work, that our children get to go to school again.

I want to wish everyone a successful start and a fantastic year.

That is all for my update.

>> Pat: Thank you, Premier Silver.

Thank you, Dr Hanley.

We will go to the phone lines and we will begin with Doug from Shone FM.

>> Reporter: No questions, thank you.

>> Pat: Thank you.

Tim, CKRW?

>> Reporter: Good afternoon.

My question is for Dr Hanley, and I know obviously today we have been talking about schools and going back.

But if you look at social media, again there is still lots of concern from parents.

They are still apprehensive about sending their kids to school.

What do you say to those parents who are still apprehensive.

They may have gone over all of the government plans, and all that stuff.

What do you say to those people who are still apprehensive?

>> Reporter: First, I think I would reiterate what I was just saying at the end here, that, you know, there has been so much work that has gone into this.

We also had to be realistic that undoubtedly, there will be things that we need to tweak and modify as we go.

But I think there is a fundamental principle that as far as I know everyone has agreed on it, that the safest place for kids to be is in school in a face-to-face environment.

We know that this is not a zero risk situation.

We know that we are facing some kind of a risk, albeit a small one, of COVID-19 activity being in schools.

But we also know that we are well equipped to deal with that risk.

We also know that we are probably in a pretty enviable place if we look at many places around the country.

Given our lack of community spread and the possible -- possibility of cases that we have.

As well as having been able to learn from experience across the country in BC and Québec and internationally, so we have a lot of experience together.

We also are fortunate that we are small enough, we can work out things together as we have done.

So I don't think we have crossed every bridge that we are going to, but I think we have done a lot of forward thinking problem-solving, and I am very impressed when I have read through the operational plans of the different schools.

I have had conversations with the principals.

I have discussed this many times with the deputy Minister, with teachers, with other people, with parents.

So I am feeling confident that this is done in the best way possible for our territory, for our people.

I have no doubt, as I said, we will be tweaking as we go but I think we are in a very good situation.

>> Reporter: Political question now -- is this on?

There we go.

Political question now for the premier.

Have kind of been downloaded -- have been alerted to a survey going around from data sciences online, it is actually run by the liberal strategist, kind of gauging the tone of Yukoners.

One of those questions is asking about the potential 11 election, an early election.

Is this something the government is considering?

Are you kind of gauging the interest in Yukoners' up a day for an early election?

>> I am focusing all of my attention right now in school openings.

All of my attention right now on the fall session.

We have lots to discuss in the following legislative session so that is where I am focusing my attention right now.

>> Pat: Thanks, ten.

We will move now to Philippe, CBC North.

>> Reporter: Yes, thank you.

Question for Dr Hanley.

If families can now visit in long-term care facilities act will we see the return of volunteers to those facilities or the hospital?

>> I know it is on the radar.

I can't tell you exactly where that is in the planning, but it is something I can definitely get back to you on.

>> Pat: Follow-up, Philippe?

>> Reporter: It would be a separate question, perhaps for the premier.

Could you tell us how much space -- spaces outside of school has been considered?

Things like teaching perhaps in a large tent or using buildings other than school buildings?

>> Great question.

Basically, school operation plans are unique to each school.

They were prepared by the school community with the guidance of course of Dr Hanley and his office.

And the support of each department.

The priority has always been, in each one of these settings, to create a safe learning space.

And we believe that we have accomplished that with the existing facilities that we have.

The plans are going to be adaptive as Dr Hanley has spoken to.

We are in a great situation compared to a lot of jurisdictions in that we do not have community spread right now.

Even though we are heading back to the classroom before any other jurisdiction, I think as we take a look at the concerns we are hearing, not only in each one of our communities but also coast to coast to coast, the planning and preparation has been done with the schools, the principles, the school community and councils.

Everybody has been amazing.

I think we have thought outside the box in every single consideration, every unique student, every unique family situation.

What schools have done to develop their plans to keep everyone healthy and safe.

It has been amazing work, and we are very proud to develop a system that works for each school.

Thank.

>> Pat: You.

Now to Hailey from Yukon News.

>> Reporter: Thank you.

Question for Dr Hanley.

Are you able to elaborate a little bit on the decision to move to news releases instead of press conferences?

I understand the comparison to H1N1 but it seems like anxiety is still pretty high around COVID-19, especially with kids going back to school.

>> Yeah, I think it is really just an efficiency of getting out information and as I said, I think it is a way that we can normalize to some extent the existence of COVID-19 in our world.

And as I have said I guess for months now, as we look to opening up, we know that we encourage certain risk of a COVID-19 introduction.

We are trying to manage and mitigate that risk by doing all of the public health measures we need to do.

We know there will likely be of occasional cases that appear in the territory.

I think we have shown that we can handle these cases with minimal to no impact to the health of our population.

And that we have to learn that COVID-19 is manageable and we have to take this into our everyday lives as we manage so many other risks in our everyday life.

I think it is kind of, in some ways, practical because we really do need to focus on so many other aspects of work, of public health.

But I think it is also partly symbolic, and that you know, when we don't really have a lot to say about a particular case, we really just want to make sure the information is put out but not well on it for too long.

We don't dwell on details of a particular case anyway.

There is often not a lot to say, because we are always working to protect the privacy of the individual and their family.

And we are really immediately busy with all that is required in a contact tracing.

So really, let us continue to do the work.

We will work as public health usually does, quietly in the background, doing the right thing, informing people and really getting on with the job.

And I think that is just our business.

>> Pat: Thank you.

Follow-up?

>> Reporter: Now follow-up.

Thank you.

>> Pat: Thank you.

Now to Marion, L'Aurore boréale?

>> Reporter:

[Speaking French]

>> Interpreter: The question is for Dr Hanley.

Is there any possibility that schools will open and then you will have to reconsider as the year goes by?

[Speaking French]

>> Pat: Could do but repeat that a newish.

>> Sure, not Word for Word.

[Laughter]

Le question is widely considered going back on school openings, would that be a possibility during the year.

And I was saying of course, it is a possibility but I think it is a small a remote possibility.

We have to be prepared for everything in our overall response.

In my mind, we would have to be in a severe situation, say, widespread community transmission.

Or perhaps a dire situation like a large second wave and the entire country.

That might force us to take more extraordinary measures.

Really, I think what we would trying to do and our work with the Department of Education and with everyone is really to build the schools to be resistant to events.

So we know weekend and I like a Skagway knowing can handle an outbreak.

We know that there might have to be local measures applied, given certain situations.

But, just as we are doing with phase three as a whole, we are trying to build resilience into the system so that it can rest and -- withstand these hits and carry on.

That is our aim.

>> Pat: Merci.

[Speaking French]

>> Pat: Merci.

We will move to Gabrielle, Whitehorse Star.

>> Reporter: In my first question for Dr Hanley is, we talked last week about the recommendation for masks.

It was that masks would be available for students and I'm wondering if there will be masks available for students at school tomorrow?

>> Yes, so the point is to make masks available.

I guess you're asking if they are available now?

I can't update you on the actual situation.

That would have to come back from the department.

But would I be particularly worried if they weren't immediately available tomorrow?

No.

That think again, this is a recommendation, an extra measure.

I think there is going to be enough to get on with just a getting everyone used to some very new ways of doing things.

Getting kids used to these new routines, new placements in the classroom.

So I guess the department can't update us all on whether they will actually be part of it tomorrow.

But certainly, I know they are planned to be part of what the children are going to be equipped with.

>> Pat: Thank you.

Follow-up?

>> Reporter: My second question is about mental health.

I am wondering if there are plans to expand mental health services as we go into the fall and winter?

We know as it gets dark, it is a difficult time for a lot of people and a normal year and this is certainly not a normal year.

Spee.

That is a great question.

>> Yeah, that is a great question.

Thank you so much.

As you may know, mental health has been a particular concern of mine for many months now, since really the start of the pandemic.

Particularly in the early phases and the shutdown phases and the withdrawal of services.

And now we are facing an accumulation of restrictions, even as we are opening up.

We still know that the impacts are still being felt, and we are also facing, yes, what we may-- we know that for some with the return of the dark, there are seasonal pressures with that.

I think the capacity though is there, and I think one of the things I learned among others from recently reviewing some of the mental health impacts and some of the concerns that either caregivers or patients or clients were relaying was, not all of the services were that well-known.

That we needed to do a better job of making people aware of what services are currently available.

And with the coming of the fall, people going back to work and to school, I think there are opportunities to make that available as well.

The other thing I should point out is again, I think this well-being survey will also help us because we will learn more about current impacts, current needs.

And to me, this is an ongoing issue, a back and forth of reviewing services, how well they are being provided, how well those needs are being met from clients' point of view.

Aubrey's Asians in the emergency room following our opioid response, all of these measures are so important to follow and to make sure that people are accessing services as they need them.

>> Pat: Premier Silver?

>> I will just add, Minister Frost and her team at health and social services has done extraordinary work to up the capacity of mental wellness supports throughout the Yukon.

In rural Yukon alone, we went from two workers, two staff or nurses to a component of 22 mental wellness professionals and four mental wellness hubs.

Dr Hanley is correct, the information from the well-being survey is extremely important as we make sure that our services, our programs reflect the need that is identified from our citizens.

I spoke with Premier Moe just last week about getting the mental wellness symposium back online, back on track.

We really want to get all of our premiers together for a conversation about best practices so that we can share what we're doing here and Yukon, our collaborative approach to health care, our changes in the healthcare system, but also take a look to other jurisdictions to make sure we have a dialogue on the national level about best practices and what we can do to share in that information.

So always looking to make sure that our ability, our programs and our services fit the unique circumstances of each one of our communities.

>> Pat: Thank you.

Now to Claudiane, Radio-Canada.

[Speaking French]

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

Could you please repeat in French your message to parents that are afraid of sending their kids back to school, and teachers who are also concerned about what is going to happen?

[Speaking French]

>> Pat: Merci.

[Speaking French]

>> Reporter:

[Speaking French]

>> Interpreter: So you say on one hand that we are in a good position and we are in control but on the other, you're reluctant to change the rules that we have around borders.

And the other measures in place.

Can you please explain why you have these two visions?

[Speaking French]

>> Reporter:

[Speaking French]

>> Reporter: Still not ready to lift measures and rather we stay where we are.

[Speaking French]

>> I will just explain, because that was a bit complicated so I will explain about that.

I think it is my philosophy to not trying to do too many things at once, and rarely, we are always trying to keep a balance.

So we knew that opening the BC border -- the removing of the self quarantine five government a few weeks ago based on my advice was a big step.

It was a big step for us.

It was a welcome step for many but it was a step that people are still nervous about and that is a step that we made at a time when BC cases were low and we have watched cases in BC increase.

So we know we are managing a risk, and as I have said, we have done that I think very well and we have shown that we can do this.

But as we have now another big step this week, that is the kids starting in school, this is another huge leap forward for Yukon.

And we know that it is a time that many are feeling anxious about.

We know we need to kind of get this started, get kids comfortably in place.

So this is why I am saying, this is a time to remain stable with other measures.

Let this happen, get it right and get everyone comfortable.

Then we can consider other parts of face three when we feel confident about where we are.

>> Pat: Thank you.

Thank you, Premier Silver.

Thank you, Dr Hanley.



I would like to thank everyone for their time today.

Our next COVID-19 update is scheduled for Wednesday, August 26th, at 2:00 PM.

