

COVID-19 Facebook live update: August 20, 2021

>> Renee: We are joined by Premier Sandy Silver and Doctor Catherine Elliott the acting Chief Medical Officer of Health.

Close captioning is provided by the National Closed Captioning.

Thank you to Mary Tiessen for providing ASL interpretation.

We will go to media present in the room after speakers and then to the phone line for a round of questions.

You will each have two questions.

I'd like to verify everyone can hear us, if any reporters are having issues please e-mail ecoinfo@gov.yk.ca.

I would now be handed over to Premier Sandy Silver.

>> Thanks Renee.

We are here on the traditional territory of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and the Ta'an Kwächän Council.

Great to be here with Doctor Catherine Elliott for another COVID-19 update.

I want to wish all the students and teachers and staff who are heading back to school in Dawson City and in Pelly Crossing this week and best of luck for the year ahead, and this brings back fond memories for myself of the excitement and the stress and anxiety are beginning the school year.

I'm confident our K to 12 school guidelines and the lessons we've all learned over the past year together with the guidance from the

Chief Medical Officer of Health will allow us to have a very successful school year.

Best wishes on a fruitful year to all the remaining Yukon staff, students, parents and teachers as they had back to class next week.

The territory is adapting to living with the risk of COVID and this work is ongoing and we are currently at a better place than we were at the -- earlier this summer and there have been no new outbreaks and our situation is stabilizing.

Our thoughts are with our neighbours, Alaska and also for Good Hope in the Northwest Territories who are currently experiencing large numbers of active cases. We have three new cases here in the Yukon to report as of yesterday, all in rural Yukon and the number of active cases is at 50 though that number may change today as cases and recoveries are confirmed.

On Wednesday we did report our first case of the Delta variant.

They are two active cases of the Delta variant in Yukon, both cases came from outside the territory, one person is self-isolating and one person is in hospital.

All contacts are self isolating, with no exposure events within the Yukon associated with these cases with -- while this is serious news we must remember we are well prepared, delta has been in Canada for a while now and we know what to do.

And we know that we are -- the key to keeping the community safe is to get tested and to wear our masks in crowded places, where physical distancing is not possible.

The science shows vaccination is effective against known variants like Delta.

If you are actively choosing to not get vaccinated you are leaving yourself and those around you at risk.

Immunization as a very powerful tool that allows us to treat COVID-19 as a largely preventable disease.

This has been communicated clearly in the personal stories that many Yukoners have bravely shared about why they chose to get vaccinated so if you have not already booked your shots you can do so online at yukon.ca/this-is-our-shot.

I want to thank each and every one of you who has stepped up and received your two jabs.

It's because of you more than 80 percent of eligible Yukoners over the age of 12 are fully vaccinated.

We continue to lead the country and vaccination rates and this is a good position to be in as we shift our approach and move to the next phase of living with COVID-19 risk.

Our government has been actively planning our next steps to help all Yukoners and we are very proud to be releasing the new document here which is forging ahead, the Yukon's continuing response to COVID-19.

This document will pilot the way forward as the Yukon readjusts to living with COVID-19.

Our top priority is protecting the health and safety of Yukoners.

Following the end of the state of emergency forging ahead helps

us see we have more flexible tools to utilize for living with COVID-19.

These tools allow us to mitigate the risk of the virus and maximize the overall health.

Forging ahead contains six pillars that will guide how we prepare and respond to future surges and inform our ongoing response.

Pillar number 1 centres on First Nations and community partnerships.

Those partnerships have made all the difference in managing the virus across the territory.

Working together makes us stronger and we will ensure close government to government communication with First Nations and municipal communities.

The other pillars are vaccination, testing and surveillance, surge capacity, social support for vulnerable people and public health measures, the document is available on yukon.ca and you can read more about each of those pillars.

It also highlights two overarching goals; protecting the vulnerable populations and enhancing Yukon's well-being.

We cannot overlook COVID-19 has had an unequal impact on different segments of the population including women and young children, those with the precarious or insecure housing.

We shaped forging ahead with the knowledge that social connection, physical and mental health and economic vitality are fundamental to how we move on with our recovery.

With these goals forging ahead our government can continue to put people first by acting on more targeted measures and providing flexible supports to protect all Yukoners from COVID-19 while minimizing the impact of restrictive broad public health controls.

We are following the science of public health and we are monitoring the situation here and in other jurisdictions.

If the risk changes we will adapt as we have in the past as necessary.

This is still about responding to Yukoners needs.

Before hand things off to Doctor Elliott I do want to remind Yukoners as I noted earlier the risks associated with COVID-19 have changed with vaccination availability.

It bears repeating that this is now largely a preventable disease.

Generally our total number of active cases continues to decrease as such we are moving away for the need for regular updates from our public health officials.

Our government is open and transparent and we will continue to report our numbers and provide updates online at yukon.ca and you can always check there.

We are in a fortunate position thanks to the diligence of Yukoners like yourselves in the in managing public servants healthcare professionals communication specialists that have delivered critical programming services and information including those immunizations as well throughout the course of the pandemic.

We need to keep it up.

With a new and evolving interaction, new tools and protocols we will forge ahead together.

Thanks everyone.

>> Good morning.

I'd like to acknowledge I'm speaking today from additional territory of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and the Ta'an Kwächän Council.

As we take the next steps a critical step that will move us out of the pandemic response towards living with endemic COVID-19 I want to acknowledge where we have been.

We walked together over the past 17 months of this pandemic from the unfortunate but wise cancelling of the Arctic Winter games through a couple clusters and smaller outbreaks.

In June we faced our biggest surge and now we see the case counts are stabilizing.

We are now and will continue to respond as we move forward towards living with COVID.

I'm grateful for the strength and the resilience of Yukoners.

For those who have found creative ways to keep to the public health guidance while running businesses, recreation centres, transportation, government offices and schools I'm grateful for the teacher's students and staff for what they did to keep our schools open when many jurisdictions had to close their schools.

And I'm so looking forward to schools opening and running safely this year. I'm grateful for the sacrifices for those of you, not the least of which are those who were working throughout the

healthcare system, the staff at YCDC, the laboratories and those throughout Yukon hospitals, medical clinics, and all those who may have supported them and to their families and loved ones for the sacrifices they have made.

Today I will talk about the current COVID-19 situation explain some of the important elements as outlined in forging ahead and of course answer your questions.

Let me start with a case update.

On Wednesday, we announced the Delta variant has been detected in the territory.

We announced two infections acquired outside and two are recovering, one in hospital and one in isolation.

All the contacts have been identified and are following YCDC advice.

I would not be surprised if we have more positive contacts in the coming days and these people happen isolating and the transmission risk is not present.

As of the end of yesterday there was 50 active cases of COVID-19 in the territory and 616 people have recovered since this wave began.

Six Yukoners have died since June 1st and eight overall since the beginning of this pandemic.

We are also working closely with Ross River and a rapid response team has been on the ground since Wednesday and vaccination programs have been augmented.

All of this, these events that we've had show us we continue to have some small amounts of COVID-19 spread in people not yet vaccinated.

The rate of spread has declined and the numbers remained stable.

The vaccine has protected us from a much higher case count and even more people with severe illness and more people could have passed away in the summer.

It is our vaccine rates that have kept us protected.

We were among the one of the first populations to have a surge despite a large portion of the population being vaccinated and now other parts of Canada are experiencing surges of cases.

Nonetheless the amount of transmission and severe illness and death even for those who are infected is lower.

All of this shows us the vaccine works and I'm asking all eligible Yukoners, this is the time to get your best shot.

Risk levels are no longer the same for everyone.

If you are not yet vaccinated you are at greater risk for COVID-19, for transmitting to the people you care about and to having a severe outcome or even dying.

Please take your best shot.

As we in the Yukon face surges in the fall we must act wisely, there will be times so we must alter our own behaviour but we must not be fearful because we now have experience and understanding and many of us are vaccinated.

Yukoners will be guided by our recommendations and the strict regulations we have become accustomed to will be removed.

In the event we need such regulations we will work together to bring them in as needed.

And we will use this tool when we needed to reduce COVID's impact.

Some people may be preparing to throw off their public health protections, others will hang onto their masks and follow safe six.

They will be a place to use those tools to protect people who cannot be vaccinated and those who are more vulnerable to disease.

It will still be important to stay home when sick.

And particularly when there is COVID throughout the community.

With our understanding of how COVID spreads these measures will continue to be used.

Among those who are concerned I recognized many parents want to be sure to follow the key steps they need to keep their children healthy and I want to assure you we have the proper measures to reduce the risk of possible spread. These measures including the use of masks which will be required for those five and older in communal spaces such as buses hallways lunchrooms et cetera, regular handwashing and use of hand sanitizer.

Staff and students should monitor themselves for symptoms when leaving for school.

And of course all who work or go to schools who are eligible for vaccination should become vaccinated if they have not already.

I want to move toward what measures we have and how we are going to forge ahead together.

We are well prepared to take this next step from pandemic towards and endemic COVID-19.

While the details are outlined in the principal and pillars I want to focus on some specific measures.

Each pillar is important and key to the path ahead and I urge you to read the document in more detail.

I've discussed vaccination and I want to emphasize our work and partnership with First Nations and communities is so critical.

Our supporting of vulnerable people has been key to our response and will continue to be important.

I know some of you are interested in testing.

We continue to build on our robust and wise testing program with the aim of having the right test for the right person at the right time.

We have several choose including rapid testing in multiple settings and in our rapid response teams we have lab-based testing in Whitehorse General Hospital and we have a key partnership with BC laboratories including the BC Centre for disease control.

We've also begun to use testing for screening in key settings and in hospitals and this will remain important when there are significant transmission.

There are a few select places and situations where it's worthwhile and it's important not to overwhelm the system by mass screening asymptomatic testing and unnecessary use of testing.

Our testing guidance lays out when testing is needed, for the most part it will be business as usual.

Get tested when sick or when asked to do so.

I expect there maybe some changes in this and we will keep you updated.

Testing for COVID is important during surge and for those at risk of severe disease including those not yet vaccinated.

It's also important for those who are ill.

At other times it may become less important as COVID-19 becomes endemic and we will advise on the best approach at each point.

Surveillance is often misunderstood and so I want to talk about it.

Surveillance is all about situational awareness.

It's the close monitoring of trends of COVID epidemiology at home and across the country and internationally that contributes to risk analysis.

We will continue to conduct surveillance and to use this information to assess the risks and inform our response.

This is how we will know as things change when we need to pave it and change and adapt as we have done so many times.

This brings me to surge, as we have seen there are times when

we need to rapidly escalate our response and increase our staff and teams to respond and minimize severe illness and death and we will maintain our surge capacity so we can rapidly and effectively respond.

We have seen disease among our most vulnerable and building their health and immunity and building supports is how we will work to prevent this in the future.

Through social supports treatment and healthcare vaccination, we will build upon our strong people, build our population stronger and have a stronger healthier Yukon.

In closing I ask all of you to be kind and considerate to wisely use our knowledge and experience.

To use the safe six and respect other people using the method where needed.

To follow the guidance and walk bravely and wisely along this path together.

Thank you.

[Speaking Indigenous Language]

>> Renee: Thank you both.

We will now move on to the question and answer session.

A reminder to reporters, please identify which speaker you'd like to answer your question and please remember to mute and unmute yourself accordingly.

We will go to the reporters in the room and start with Jackie from CBC.

>> Reporter: The CDC in the US recently warned of significant declining vaccine effectiveness when it comes to preventing spread among older folks.

And particularly in the face of Delta is that something you are monitoring here given that older folks, seniors in the Yukon were given priority for the first vaccines?

>> The questions related to boosters, booster doses of vaccines and elderly populations, in light of potential waning immunity in the Delta variant, this is under examination.

And we expect an answer from them as soon as possible -- in a few weeks to a month and we will act appropriately according to the recommendation of the national advisory committee and we recognize this issue and we are following it closely.

>> Follow-up?

>> Reporter: You mentioned Ross River, I was wondering if you could talk a little bit more about the measures that are in place and messages you want to get out to folks create maybe elders getting sick or a medevac could you comment on the current situation and the numbers.

>> We have a number of active cases and we have launched a rapid response team and our testing rapid testing on the ground for two days active on Wednesdays, and a vaccine clinic on Thursday.

Our testing numbers were significant on the first day, on the second day they were very low mean the present positivity was very low and therefore we chose to bring the testing back into the community Health centre with a sample collection on-site.

Now that we have more situational analysis we are working with Chief and Council on the next steps.

I am pleased that Chief and Council are active in approaching this.

They have given appropriate advice to the population and we continue to work on this and will respond.

>> Renee: We will circle back at the end as requested.

We will now go to the reporters on the line.

Nina with the Canadian press.

>> I was wondering if you could tell me a little bit about, now that you've moved to the endemic state, what is your main concern right now?

>> As we move out of pandemic towards endemic COVID-19 the things I -- that concerned me the most is the remaining population who are not yet fully vaccinated.

And that risk is solved by people who are eligible to become vaccinated.

I'm confident we have good situational awareness and capacity to respond any appropriate tools and if there was another concern it is that people as we come in to the fall and be open the schools and do the things that keep us healthy and safe that people are wise and they care continues to exist and we do not become fearful but instead use the tools we have.

>> We always balance between two different approaches, one is response to cases and outbreaks as we saw earlier but when asked what our biggest concern it is all outlined in the forging ahead documents.

They have done an extraordinary job to prepare us for what we are entering into in the next few months and the pillars outlined not only concerns but the conversations and equity put in place as we work as a community with public health so our concerns are First Nations and committee partnerships, vaccinations.

Surge capacity as the doctor has mentioned, those social supports for vulnerable people is Pillar five in the public health measures are outlined in Pillar six.

The team has done extraordinary job to give a notification to the public what our obligation and responsibilities are.

>> Thank you.

Do you have a second question?

>> I was wondering if Doctor Elliott could tell me what the rate of is for the Delta variant and how many people do you think or out there who may not be tested because they don't identify the symptoms?

That's one of the problems with the Delta variant, even when people are infected they don't really know because they don't recognize the symptoms as much.

>> I appreciate there are people concerned about the Delta variant.

We are monitoring the situation closely.

Delta is more transmissible and therefore the tools we have remain important including vaccination, testing and wise use of the safe six.

We see the Delta variant as the dominant variant and we expect to see more cases in Yukon.

This will not be a surprise.

We are ready for the Delta variant.

Although we have less room for error we know we have the tools in place to keep ourselves safe.

And the people who are vulnerable to COVID-19, it remains the same group so first and foremost those who are not yet vaccinated and those who are vulnerable to severe outcomes are first and foremost those who were elderly.

And we need to protect these people by ourselves becoming vaccinated and by making wise decisions in terms of how we interact.

The Delta is yet another challenge.

I will never forget the day I stood before the people of Yukon and introduce the concept of COVID-19 being in Yukon possibly and how uncertainty we had at that point.

We have so much experience, we have the knowledge and the partnerships.

I also want to confirm that the two cases have been contained and we will continue to advise you if things change but I will not be surprised to see more cases of the Delta variant, or potentially exposure announcements associated with various cases and we need to use our tools and be wise.

>> Thank you.

>> Renee: Will move to Haley with Yukon news.

>> I want to clarify with this document does that mean the plan is still to end the state of emergency on August 25th?

>> Yes.

Our daily case counts have been decreasing and are vaccination up takes are decreasing.

These are very positive science so as we announced three weeks ago now I guess if these trends continue we will be in a position to move on the state of emergency on August 25th.

The new document will provide the guidance as we do so but regardless of whatever happens we do remain very focused as a government to protect the health and safety of all Yukoners and we have a number of tools used to manage the pandemic.

A state of emergency can be lifted and we still have the civil emergency measures act if needed.

>> To have a second question?

>> I do.

For Premier Silver, the context is during an election, earlier this week we saw the leader of the federal level -- Liberal Party suggest the party was in power and they would need to be vaccinated to travel on planes and trains.

Do you have any concerns from a northern contacts were travelling on planes can be a necessity.

>> Only where politicians don't take recommendations from public health.

You know, I need to give credit to the leadership across the country.

We have been sophisticated in political conversations but at the same time all these things are based upon the basis that public health has to offer in terms of how we can protect our citizens so as a Yukon government that's what we will continue to do.

We have excellent conversations with the federal government about vaccines, vaccine verification, I note that there is an urging from the federal government to the provinces and territories to be coordinated when it comes to certification.

We lead the way in our digitized storage of our medical information and those types of investments and public health are extremely important as we grapple with and consider new federal regulations and regional guidelines to make sure we keep the advice.

>> Renee: We will now move to Luke CK RW.

>> Reporter: No questions.

>> Renee: We will move to John from CK RW.

>> Reporter: I believe my question is for the premiere.

The forging ahead documents says that YG will work to maintain capacity in the health and social services system.

Does not include the governing hiring more doctors and nursing?

A lot of facilities are already short staffed as it is.

>> Staffing shortages is not a new situation during COVID and into the endemic, Doctor Elliott outlined that we had some

concerns in Ross River and what we have the ability and capacity to do.

People are working extremely hard in the public health field.

I see it when I visit Togo and team Fox and just in the conversations we have with not only public health officials but emergency measures folks and the communication teams.

The level of professionalism here in Yukon and all those agencies and departments is world-class and we will always be struggling to make sure we have the proper amount of funding and the proper amount of doctors and nurses, I was very confident in the team's we have.

>> Thank you.

Do have a follow-up?

>> Reporter: I..I'm sorry, my notes are gone.

Vaccine hesitancy has been a bit of a topic and I'm wondering what steps are the government taking to improve vaccination rates around the territory?

I know the state of emergency is coming to an end but is there anything being done to try to help people understand why the vaccine is something they should receive?

>> As a government we lead Canada in our vaccination rates in the ability to get out to communities and we are grappling with whatever jurisdiction is grappling with, there is three distinct groups and there's a small percentage of the population who have preconditions and I won't talk too much but there is a small percentage that can't get vaccinated.

There is also hesitance that can get vaccinated and our -- all of our thoughts and effort are going towards identifying those people and making sure the vaccines are as available as possible.

We must work with leadership and every single community, I don't necessarily mean elected officials, they've been doing impeccable work.

And the alternatives to public health measures, they've been excellent in helping and asking the proper questions to the public health officials on our weekly updates with them.

They need to continue.

We also need to make sure the vaccines are available when and where and it is the stories of leaders in the communities.

Sometimes there's a need to hear from the leader of the family as opposed to the leader of the government and how can we make sure we partner with all the leaders and the communities.

The faces of all the individuals across our territory have been instrumental in helping the government and communities get vaccinated.

If you have concerns about your own personal health I know a lot of people have allergies to certain things.

But have you had that conversation with the doctor about what that means for vaccination?

This is again part of the plan forging ahead, it's working with partners and making sure we utilize all of our resources and communications and public health throughout all the communities to make sure we do everything we can to partner with amazing

leaders and help lead Canada and the world and our vaccination efforts.

>> Renee: We will move to Chuck

Are you with us?

We will circle back.

Chuck Tobin with the Whitehorse star.

>> Reporter: I would like to know a bit more about the boosters Doctor Elliott.

Are we going to move to a place where people will be getting boosters and how quickly.

I believe the boosters need to be administered after -- eight months after vaccination and when do you expect the boosters will be required if they will be?

>> A booster shot is a shot that a person receives after their initial series so after they are fully vaccinated, in terms of the time period it's the time period which may vary by population or by people's background between when we see the immunity decrease and a booster is appropriate.

There is a lot of noise on this and throughout the pandemic we've seen a lot of noise on things before the officials release the scientific statement.

The evidence review is underway and we are awaiting the evidence review by the National immunization evidence review body and we will be administering boosters based on the scientific evidence that we should receive within a month or so.

We look forward to doing that and following the guidance.

The expectation is they will outline for which populations and which time periods are most appropriate.

>> Thank you.

Do have a follow-up?

>> I do but I lost it.

[Laughter]

I guess I will leave it at that.

Thank you.

>> Renee: We will move to Julie-Anne at CBC.

>> I just have one, I want to backpedal to what the premier said regarding disseminating false information and snake oil salesman.

It's more of a clarification question.

Did you suggest or say community leaders are disseminating false information?

>> That's not what I said.

>> Reporter: Thanks for that.

The other question is, Doctor Catherine Elliott said or alluded to -- they said there could be some surges in the fall that the territory could face.

Do those include the Delta variant if there are any projections for a Delta variant surge the fall and if so, where.

>> If I had any knowledge I would be a different person and not a human person.

What we anticipate is based on what we know of importation risk but also I want to emphasize what is driving our epidemic is person to person transmission and that's what is keeping our case counts a stable and present.

I want to caution people from looking across the border all the time.

Our biggest risk for a very long period and shifting to the concept its person to person in Yukon is a change and our case rates are currently stable.

We do search in a number of places corresponding when with the Delta variant is becoming the dominant and it also corresponds when people have reduced public health measures, large gatherings and social events et cetera.

We need to be cautious with pointing everything to a single variants but we know it's more transmissible.

I expect we will see the Delta variant here.

Our goal as we move ahead is the health and well-being of all Yukoners and the prevention of severe illness and death.

We do that by having people vaccinated and I think that's a really important points.

I -- we will see cases and clusters and outbreaks, maybe even a surgeon the fall and we will move and adjust each step of the way.

Thank you.

>> Renee: We will move to Vincent from radio Canada.

[Speaking French]

>> Andre: Can you please repeat in French how the arrival of the Delta variant is changing our response to the pandemic at this point.

[Speaking French]

[Speaking French]

>> Follow-up?

[Speaking French]

>> Andre: Game and we had the federal election can we have a feeling of what is your expectation and the major questions that you will want the candidates to address during the election?

[Speaking French]

[Speaking French]

>> I am part of their coordinated efforts as we grapple asked Doctor Elliott mentioned from those earlier days where the nation and individuals in the nation did not know a lot about covariate or how it was going to spread and how we all got together and really work tirelessly to figure out supply chain management back in the early days, form asks all the way through to working internationally.

It's extremely important for whoever wins this election federally to commit to listening to the specifics of each region.

>> Renee: That concludes our COVID-19 update for today.



Thank you to primo silver and Doctor Elliott and thank you to all the media on the line and in the room and everyone who tuned in.

Stay safe stay kind and have an amazing Friday.

