

COVID-19 Facebook live update: August 4, 2021

>> Good morning.

I'm Pat Living with the Department of Health and Social Services and your moderator for the COVID-19 update for Wednesday, August 4th.

We are joined today by the Minister of Education, the honourable Jeanie McLean and Yukon's Chief Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Brendan Hanley.

Our sign language interpretation is provided by Kevin Klein, and our French translation by Andre Bourcier.

Following we will go to the phone lines for questions by reporters.

We will call you by surname, and you will each have two questions.

Minister McLean?

>> Thank you so much, pat.

And thank you for joining us on the traditional tare I have to of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and the Taa'an Kwächän Council.

It is really good to be here this morning with Dr. Hanley.

Thank you so much for joining me today.

This is my actual first news conference since the pandemic started in terms of the weekly updates.

So really happy to be here with all of you today.

As you know, effective today, we have lifted some of the restrictions that have been in place here in the territory based on the recommendations from Dr. Hanley.

Mask use in indoor spaces is no longer mandatory, but it is strongly encouraged.

Particularly when people are in crowded or closed quarters and where it is difficult to physically distance.

It is important to keep in mind that private establishments have the right to request that their clients wear masks before entering the space.

This includes retail shops, grocers, bars and restaurants, recreational centres, public or private transit.

We encourage everyone to respect these requests and either health or safety protocols that are in place.

Self-isolation is no longer required for those entering the territory.

Bars and restaurants can also return to full capacity for bar and counter top service.

I understand Dr. Hanley will have more to say in a moment about group sizes at bars and restaurants.

Despite these changes, the following measures remain in place: Contact tracing information sheets at bars and restaurants, gathering sizes remain the same.

Social gatherings are limited to 20 indoors and physical distancing are limited to 100 outdoors with physical distancing.

Organized gatherings both indoor and out are limited to 200 with physical distancing.

Unvaccinated individuals should stick to six and keep their circle small.

Mask use will continue at airports and in offices at health and allied health professionals including physicians, dentists, and massage therapists.

Gathering limits remain in gyms, recreational centres, and fitness studios.

Again today's changes are based on recommendations from our chief medical officer with eight out of ten Yukoners fully vaccinated and case counts decreasing now, the restrictions are no longer justified, and we have a responsibility to lift them.

Our daily case counts have been decreasing and our daily vaccine uptakes are increasing.

This is what we need to see.

And thank you so much, Yukoners for doing your part.

If these trends continue, we will be in a position to lift the state of emergency later this month.

But regardless of whether that happens, we remain focused on protecting the health and safety of Yukoners.

As the premier discussed last week, we have a number of tools we continue to use in response to the pandemic and will continue to actively manage the situation.

We are simply adjusting our approach.

Testing, rapid response teams, critical social support workers, and expanded vaccine access are just some of the tools we are using

as part of our new paradigm, as part of the new paradigm we are in.

We will continue to follow the recommendations of the chief medical officer of health as we have throughout the entire pandemic.

If the risks change, we will adapt as necessary.

The availability of vaccines has completely changed the landscape when it comes to COVID-19 and significantly changed the risks we are facing as Yukoners.

We have one of the highest vaccination rates in the world.

Seven months ago today we delivered the first vaccines to some of the elders and staff at whistle bend place.

Today more than 81% of adults are fully vaccinated and nearly 65% of our youth aged 12 to 17 are fully vaccinated.

That is a remarkable achievement, Yukoners.

And I want to thank all of the folks that have worked on the vaccine rollout along with our community partners.

The vaccines have saved lives and every person in the territory that steps up to take their shot is helping to protect themselves and all Yukoners.

The vaccines are still available, and we have enough for everyone that wants one.

The mobile clinics are touring the communities again.

They are in Pelly Crossing today, Carmacks tomorrow, and Dawson City on Friday.

Next week they will be in Ross River, and Old Crow, and in Whitehorse the clinic is open Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9 to 4:30 p.m. and on Wednesdays from noon to 7 p.m.

You can book an appointment online at Yukon.ca.

Walk-ins are also welcome.

Our vaccine rates are the highest in the country which I have already mentioned, but I know we can get them even higher.

The more people that get vaccinated, the safer we will all be.

So please if you haven't already taken the step to get your shot, please do so.

This is what we can do.

I know the day that I received my vaccine, I knew that I was doing my part to keep Yukoners safe.

And I knew it was my path to being able to gather again and to see, we got to visit our little grand baby in June for the first time.

And that's what it means to me personally.

So I think, you know, it is a really important step, and one that we can all take.

I want to thank Yukoners, though, that have spoken out about how catching COVID-19 has helped them overcome vaccine hesitancy and who have urged others to take their shot.

Some of these folks that have spoken out are really close personal friends of mine.

And it has been a really difficult couple of months watching them struggle and to see them now recovering is a miracle I think for some of these individuals.

And so I take it very personally.

And living in a small territory with so few people, it is personal.

So I really encourage Yukoners to listen to some of those stories and to take them to heart because it is important.

As I said of course vaccines save lives.

And the more people that get vaccinated, the safer this territory will be.

And I think that it sends a message to the rest of Canada.

Look what we have done as Yukoners.

So thank you for allowing me those moments to talk about some personal things.

But today I am really pleased to provide an update on our planning for the upcoming school year.

This past year has been a challenging one to say the least.

And I want to thank all of our educators, support staff, administrators, families, and students for your resiliency, creativity, flexibility, and dedication to continuing, to continue learning throughout the pandemic truly thank you.

We had a good and successful year last year.

Together we learned a lot about the virus and how best to mitigate risk and eliminate any potential outbreaks or exposures in our schools.

Thanks to your continued efforts and Yukoners' willingness to roll up their sleeves and get vaccinated, we are confident that we can safely return students to the classroom in the coming weeks.

I am pleased to share with you that schools will return to near normal operations offering full-time in class instruction with some measures continuing to be in place to keep our schools in as low risk settings.

From the outset of the pandemic, our response has been guided by the recommendations of Dr. Hanley, the chief medical officer of health.

And this year is no different.

With our back to school planning well underway, we continue to work closely with Dr. Hanley and his team to ensure our students can return to learning in a safe and healthy environment.

We have been working on updated guidelines for schools, student transportation, and licensed childcare centres available in the coming days.

I want to assure you that our response is being developed with a vision of working together and supporting each other to feel safe and comfortable in this new way of living and learning.

And I will take personal, I will be personally involved in many meetings to come in the weeks to come with our partners to ensure I am hearing the concerns of Yukoners and that we are planning together.

Students will not be required to wear a mask in the classroom this year.

But all students age 5 and older including staff should wear masks in all indoor settings outside of the classroom.

Such as common areas and hallways.

As the premier and Dr. Hanley said just because masks are no longer required doesn't mean you are not allowed to wear them.

If wearing a mask makes you feel more safe, more protected, then by all means please wear a mask.

We need to continue looking after each other and ourselves with kindness, patience, and compassion.

Personally I will keep my mask handy in case I am interacting with someone who prefers that I wear a mask.

And I will ask them if they would feel more comfortable or safe if I'm wearing a mask.

Again operating from a place of kindness, patience, and compassion is where I think we should be and treating each other in that way.

Physical distancing will no longer be required but it will be required in crowded places like entries and exits at the start and end of each day.

Just like outside of schools, we encourage people to be mindful of each other's personal space.

Hand and respiratory hygiene practices are still encouraged to help reduce potential spread and as always anyone who feels sick should stay home and get tested if they have systems.

We are updating the traffic light assessment tool and will be making it available before the end of the school year.

I am sure many of you have questions about what busing looks like this year.

And I am pleased to share that school busing will be at normal operation with the added measure of required mask use for drivers and riders aged 5 and older.

Bus roots -- bus routes for the new school year are now available to view at Yukon.ca and all registered riders should have received their seat assignment last week.

If you think you are registered but did not receive your route information, please reach out to the student transportation officer.

If you are new to the Yukon or missed out on registering for this bus year and you need a seat, please I encourage you to reach out to the transportation officer today to reserve your spot by emailing, student.transportation@yukon.ca.

They are utilizing the Yukon pass and are required to follow the guidelines established by public transportation.

As we transition into the new school year, I also want to remind all drivers to reduce their speed and be mindful of school coming into effect.

I know it's coming up fast.

Please be aware of your speed in school zones.

I am so excited that students can return to school with some normalcy this year.

But as we prepare to return to the classroom, it is important to understand that we will continue to see cases in our territory.

Continued learning for all students has been a priority since the beginning of the pandemic and we will ensure there is flexibility over the course of the school year to ensure learning continues going forward.

We have seen that clusters and outbreaks are mostly affecting people who are unable or choose not to get the vaccine.

So the best way to protect everyone is for us to get our vaccination rates to as close as 100% as possible.

As I mentioned more than 64% of Yukoners aged 12 to 17 are fully vaccinated which is amazing.

Last week we announced expanded availability for vaccines, so anyone born in 2009 is eligible for the Pfizer vaccine even if they have not yet turned 12 years old.

This is a very important step before students start returning to school in two weeks.

And I urge you to please take your shot today if you haven't already.

The vaccine is helping to protect ourselves, our communities, and vulnerable family members, friends and neighbours who cannot receive the vaccine.

This includes all of our students under the age of 12 who are returning to school early learning and childcare programs this month.

Through the tremendous efforts of educators, support staff, and administrators, Yukon was one of the few jurisdictions to keep K to 12 schools open operating between the 2020, 21 school year.

We have shown we can keep our schools open and safe for students when we look after each other and keep one another safe.

This allowed many students to benefit from the academic, social, and emotional supports that come with in person learning and the school environment.

We also recognize that COVID-19 has impacted students, staff, and families in many different ways and we have not yet fully realized all of the long-term impacts for sure.

We checked in with students and staff and families at the end of the school year through our third learning during COVID survey to gauge how they were doing at the end of the 2020, 2021 school year with a particular focus on mental health, accessing supports, and potential lost learning.

This feedback will help us identify longer term impacts and assist us in putting the necessary supports in place.

Together with the new guidelines from Dr. Hanley, the survey results will help inform operational plans for each individual school while there is much to consider as we continue our back to school planning.

I am confident that the lessons we have learned over the past year together with the guidance from Dr. Hanley and the team will allow us to have a successful school year.

So we will have more information to share in the coming weeks, and you will be able to find your individual operational plans on Yukon.ca and those plans will also be sent to all parents and individual households.

Thank you.

>> Thank you, Minister MacLean.

Dr. Hanley.

>> Thank you, Minister MacLean.

Thanks for your very heartfelt words as well.

And I think that really speaks from the heart.

Good morning and bonjour, everyone.

I want to talk about a few things today and of course we will reflect on the schools later on.

This is another landmark day today as we continue our transition from pandemic to endemic COVID-19 and a significant phase of our COVID-19 journey.

And I acknowledge that while some people cannot wait for these further removal of restrictions, others are looking at COVID's rising activity in some of the provinces and wondering whether this is the right time.

As always, we have to find the most balanced way forward recognizing where restrictions can no longer be justified by the evidence and refocusing our efforts on measures that are more effective and less onerous on the population.

The fall and winter season ahead of us will be challenging to navigate as we anticipate the return of many viruses in addition to COVID-19.

The pandemic has many twists and turns to throw at us yet.

And we will likely see introductions of delta and other variants.

We may see other outbreaks, and we may even see fading immunity in our population.

But with an ongoing strong public health response and be with the new tools we have at our disposal, we will be able to meet and overcome these hurdles as we always have.

For status of cases.

As of the end of yesterday, there were 61 active cases of COVID-19 in the territory.

481 people have recovered since this wave began in June.

Six Yukoners have died since the wave and eight overall since the start of this pandemic.

As of yesterday, a total of 59 people have been hospitalized.

Of whom 50 were either vaccinated or partially vaccinated.

14 people have been medevac'd out of territory for further care of whom 12 were unvaccinated.

And most of these patients are still presently in hospital care down south.

In our situation, 85% of our cases are those who were unvaccinated or partially vaccinated and 78 of the cases, about 14%, are fully vaccinated.

I know that all eyes are on the delta variant at the moment as we watch cases rise dramatically in some U.S. states and see rises in delta variant COVID cases in many of the provinces.

How large an impact the variant will have in areas with higher vaccination rates is still uncertain.

For example to the surprise of many fearing a rising surge, cases in the UK have actually been dropping over the last few days, likely a reflection of high rates of adult vaccination comparable to what we have in Yukon.

In fact UK first dose adult uptake is 88% and 73% are fully vaccinated.

Compare that to 86% first dose and 81%.

So more than a full 10 percentage points higher Yukon fully vaccinated compared to the UK.

Where we can be more certain is delta will thrive and is already thriving in areas with low vaccine coverage such as Florida and many of the southern states.

As explained last week, our projections for Yukon indicate the risk over the next few weeks to months of delta importations is low based on Canada's high vaccine rate and low overall activity.

Nevertheless sooner or later delta will come into the territory.

Perhaps it already has.

What impact it will have depends on several things.

First what will the population uptake of vaccine be at the time?

Second, will it appear in an area in Yukon with lower or higher vaccine uptake?

Third, will it find a chance to take off in a situation where unvaccinated people are carrying?

Fourth, will it hit once against a largely vulnerable population?

To minimize the impact of delta introductions, we must continue to keep gatherings safe by limiting numbers of unvaccinated people who gather closely with others, by smart use of masks, and by continuing to work hard to decrease our pool of susceptible people by increasing vaccination rates.

So what does this exactly mean for Yukon?

What we are seeing with gamma we could see again with delta and perhaps worse.

Just as with the gamma variant, delta coronavirus will quickly infect as many people as possible and can easily do so in highly concentrated groupings of those who are unvaccinated.

Just like gamma, we will also see vaccinated people infected but to a much lesser degree and with much better outcomes.

We may also see vaccinated people transmit the virus to others and recent studies suggest that may happen more than we thought.

So prudence even among fully vaccinated people is definitely warranted.

Until we learn more about how the delta virus behaves and what kind of impact it will have in the provinces.

As we watch other countries beginning to feel the effects of delta and there is talk of a fourth wave, we have to realize we still have substantial pockets of low vaccination rates within our population leaving many susceptible.

Until we reach at least 90% of our population, our eligible population being fully vaccinated and until that degree of uptake is uniform around the territory, we must be prepared to handle the risk of substantial further outbreaks.

Even as we phase out further restrictive measures, we must all do our part to limit the future spread of COVID introductions.

What does 90% of eligible population mean?

Well, by the end of July, about 11,000 Yukoners overall of all ages had not received any vaccine.

Our overall uptake, our total population is 74% first dose, 69% fully vaccinated.

So if we estimate the under 12 population as about 5,500, that leaves about 5,500 people over 12 who are unvaccinated and that could be vaccinated.

If we could reduce that pool by half or more, we could substantially reduce the risk of delta virus or other variants having a large impact.

So we should aim to get 4,000 to 5,000 people more people vaccinated to close in on 90% of our over 12 population.

For the time being we will be taking a more cautious approach.

Caution must be taken for those who are not yet eligible for vaccine or for those who remain unvaccinated by choice.

By far our best for example against any variant is two doses of vaccine and we are so fortunate to have so many opportunities to get vaccinated.

Don't be fooled though.

Given the many opportunities to get vaccinated that there is no hurry to make a vaccine appointment.

Do not delay because this virus will keep looking for susceptible hosts.

As we move from pandemic mode to endemic mode, we are shifting the approach to that of managing a vaccine-preventable disease.

Our goal is now shifting from one of overall containment to one that is focused on reducing the impacts of COVID by limiting its spread and avoiding as much severe illness and death as we can.

So do the right thing, Yukoners, and get vaccinated.

And please.

Some of you are late for your second shot.

One shot is not enough as we are saying -- as we are seeing to completely protect you.

Please make your appointment now if you are over overdue.

While effective today, mandatory masking and quarantine requirements after travel will no longer be enforced.

We have walked through these lifting's and the rationale a few times now.

For the easements on the masking mandate and the quarantine requirements, these are based on the reality that they are no longer defensible measures for a highly vaccinated population such as hours -- such as ours.

Does this mean we are taking on added risk?

No matter what we do, we are always taking on risk.

The risk of carrying on with broad, restrictive measures would be high risk to our well-being and high risk to our ability to adapt to the on reality -- to the ongoing reality of COVID.

The risk of lifting quarantine measures for all is that we increase the chance of COVID coming in.

That is true, but again our projections for the time being is that the risk is small.

On average, we would expect one introduction every few weeks compared to the several every week that we would have had during previous and have had during previous waves of COVID in Canada.

What about mask mandates?

We are seeing them lifted in many areas across the country but as Minister MacLean said, it does not mean you should throw away the mask.

Rather keep it safely in your pocket or purse and use it when required by an establishment or when you are entering an indoor

space where there might be the three Cs, closed spaces with poor ventilation, people in close contact, or crowded spaces.

Let's get smarter about when and where we use masks and keep this happened at least through the coming months.

Note again that mask usage will remain in place and continue at airports as well as in offices of health and health professionals where vz distancing is not possible.

Our recommendation is that mask use will be required in those clinics and allied health professional circumstances such as Minister MacLean referred to.

So I am talking about doctors offices, dentists, optometrists, massage therapists, chiropractors, et cetera -- chiropractors, et cetera.

I get that some feel until we get back to allowing more people to gather in the bars, the limited judgments that we are recommending now may have limited effect on profit lines.

On the other hand these are further cautious steps to what we would all like, the ability to gather freely in our favourite establishments.

We have heard feedback directly from bar and restaurant owners, and we have moved up our recommendation to remove the six to a table restriction so that as of today, you may have unrestricted table size.

However, the other restrictions for now do remain so there is still no mingling or dancing allowed.

Physical distancing and wearing a mask where requested before entering an establishment also remain in place.

In fact I urge Yukoners before entering any business whether you are getting a beer at a bar or going to a retail shop on main street, ensure you are well aware of the rules these establishments have in place and follow them accordingly.

And of course any questions about current recommendations, make sure to go to Yukon.ca and a number of guidelines are being posted today.

The Minister of health and social services, Minister McPhee reiterated this morning on CBC radio the new tools we will use as we move out of emergency mode.

And I thought these are worth repeating from what I was talking about last week.

And I know the Minister's intention is that all these pillars are in partnership with our communities and First Nations.

And first of all vaccination as an ongoing strategy.

An active vaccination strategy to address hesitancy and to continue to reach our susceptible individuals with outreach and innovation and collaborative.

Partners.

Again a goal of 90 to 95% of eligible populations at the moment down to 12 years old.

And then reaching out to younger children if and when they become available.

And this again is our corner stone of prevention.

The other pillars, testing and surveillance so developing a new testing strategy that is based on our current reality as well as the current technologies.

Social supports for vulnerable people both continuing the investment in preventive social supports so we improve the resiliency of people to infection and uptake and surge social support.

So when people are infected or need to self-isolate that they have augmented supports in place to facilitate that.

And then overall surge capacity to our healthcare system and to our public health system so that we are readily available to meet increased demand in the face of an outbreak or a surge.

And then what I call focused public health measures.

So as we move away from these broad overarching tools just equipment -- just equipping people with tools.

So guidance on what to do when sick including avoiding work and gathering places, tools and helps for assessing when to wear a mask as I was referring to using things like the three Cs for indoor spaces.

And then advice on physical distancing, safe six, reducing gathering sizes, and that might be flexible as we encounter waves and surges in the months ahead.

So as elsewhere in Canada, I'm sure every parent wants to know what back to school will look like this year.

And I thank Minister MacLean for outlining clearly as she said that my office has through this pandemic closely collaborated with the department of education to ensure that school staff and students and parents are well-prepared.

And well-prepared again for this upcoming year.

And we do anticipate that schools can return to near normal operations while keeping the school as a predominantly low risk setting for possible COVID-19 infection.

And there will be further direction and guidance as Minister MacLean noted.

But for the time being these following key pillars for Yukon schools are what we are recommending to support that low risk environment.

And again vaccination number one.

And I know not everyone can get vaccinated at this time for the students but those eligible in the 12 to 17 age group as well as staff are strongly encouraged to get vaccinated.

Staying home when sick.

Another huge preventable tool and this will be essential to a safe school year.

So before your children go to school, parents and guardians need to assess their children for any symptoms before leaving home.

And the safe advice goes for staff.

And even if symptoms are mild perhaps passed off for the flu, a cold, allergies, it is important that symptoms are taken seriously

and this includes a test when symptoms appear.

We will be re-evaluating our traffic light guidance to make sure that it remains pragmatic for the coming year.

This before -- what I was going to say.

We will be re-evaluating that traffic guidance.

But for the time being what I would say is if your child has that simple runny nose, I do advise keeping your child at home at least for a day and stay tuned because as we review and revise that traffic light guidance will come before kids are back in school.

A third is ventilation and cleaning practices and schools will be advised and uninstructed to ensure that all ventilation systems are working properly and our information is that they are at this point.

We want to ensure good air flow and ventilation within the school.

We know how that ventilation is increasingly important in reducing the risk of spread for something.

Physical distancing.

In communal spaces, it will be important that physical distancing is integral.

And that is looking at hallways and lunchrooms, areas like that common spaces to prevent possible crowding.

However, we will be moving away from strict metrics of physical distancing.

Hand hygiene and of course frequent hand hygiene I believe has

helped to prevent seasonal illnesses and will continue to prevent illnesses as we adjust to living with COVID-19.

So we need to really carry that on and instruct our children to carry out proper hand hygiene meaning watch washing your hands with soap and water or using classroom hand sanitizer if that is not available.

And last and certainly not least masking.

Masking will remain an important tool within our schools.

And it is recommending for all students aged 5 and older as well as staff to wear masks while in indoor settings outside of the classroom.

And that is including again hallways going from class to class, common areas, and on school buses.

And similar to what we produced last year, there will be exceptions for of course kids participating in physical activities, eating and drinking and other practical considerations.

So, yes, I know that there is uncertainty when it comes to sending kids back to school just like there was last year.

And we are all watching the delta variant and know that children need to be in as normal an environment as possible to support successful learning, social health and cooperate -- development.

And now we have experience and vaccines, two powerful tools that we did not have this time last year.

And we have been very successful with our schools throughout this pandemic.

And I am confident we will continue to be successful.

Of course we will continue to work closely with the department of education and ensure that the schools remain a safe place for staff and children.

So that is it for today.

Let's stay together, stay patient, be kind.

Thank you.

>> I'd like to thank you both.

And we'll now go to the phone lines.

We will begin with Hailey, Yukon news.

>> Thank you very much.

I have a question for Minister MacLean.

We heard this week there is a number of parent at hidden valley elementary school are upset because they weren't informed by the school when a sex offender was convicted who was working at the school.

I was wondering if the school should have notified parents that this took place.

>> Thanks, Hailey, for the question.

This is a matter that is before the courts right now and we are determining further investigation.

So I will not be making any public comments about that at this time.

Thank you.

>> Thank you, Minister MacLean.

Hailey, do you have a second question?

>> I do, yes.

I realize there is a lawsuit before the courts.

But I have to ask again why wasn't there a way that parents could have been notified despite the lawsuit?

It seems like some important information to know to talk to children and see if there could have been any more victims or students affected.

>> Same answer as previous, Hailey.

Sorry I'm not able to discuss this in a public forum at this point.

Thank you.

>> Thank you.

We'll move on to John with a reminder this is a COVID-19 update.

John?

>> Hi.

Now, in the list of businesses that came out in yesterday evening's media release regarding who can issue their own recommendations for masking, there was nothing when it comes to personal services.

There was retail shops and grocer, bars and restaurants, recreation centres, but barber shops and spas and such were still left out of the memo.

I am just wondering are they included and just weren't included in the information?

What's the guidance for them?

>> Yes, thank you for bringing it up.

The expectations are the same really for personal care services as for other premises.

And so again we strongly recommend mask use and really the continuation of mask use within these facilities.

This is another area and I would line it right up with what I talked about those allied health professional settings.

Where physical distancing is not possible.

So similar to optometrists and physiotherapists where you need to be in that close range.

So I do strongly recommend and if we omitted them, then that's an oversight.

So we will make sure that's added.

It is also of course they are also regular lated facilities even though masking does not fit in under the public health and safety act.

They are otherwise facilities that come under all of those other regulations too to ensure that principals of hygiene and sanitation are followed.

>> Thank you.

John, do you have a second question?

>> No.

Thank you.

>> Thank you.

We'll move now to chuck, Whitehorse star.

Chuck, are you with us?

We will move on and come back to chuck.

Move to Brenna, Canadian Press.

Sorry, chuck.

We've -- hello, chuck.

We've moved on.

We'll come back to you.

>> Okayy doaky.

>> Brenna, Canadian Press.

>> It is more of a clarifying question around bars and restaurants open.

At full capacity mingling is not allowed but I'm just looking at information on the Yukon website.

Is says no physical distancing at bar counters.

So can you clarify what is going on at bars and restaurants?

>> Yeah, thank you for that.

There was a previous recommendation that there must be 2 meters spacing at bar counters.

And we realized that was both onerous for the establishments to seat customers at the counter.

But also no longer necessary in our view.

So we removed that separation specifically at bar counters so that normal reasonable seating to allow people to eat in normal circumstances.

So that physical distancing really applies to seating at the counter.

It does not apply to physical distancing -- to letting go of physical distancing within the general --

>> Are able to be lifted now.

>> Yeah.

Well, of course it is always looking at a variety of measures and the COVID case activity is one of those measures and we are in a what I would call a long tale of COVID activity.

We are certainly past spike activity having about half a dozen cases per day most of which are clearly linked to other cases or what we call EPI linked or have cases to known links and clusters.

So we are not seeing widespread random community spread type of transmission.

So I feel confident that we are in a better place than we were a few weeks ago.

We will, we are likely over the coming weeks to see this kind of continued pattern.

Probably a very slow tapering.

So that in itself is a pretty strong indicator.

And of course we then, that enables our public health capacity and our healthcare capacity to recharge a little bit as we go forward.

Which is another indicator.

The importation risk as I described based on our modeling of incoming travelers and vaccine status and overall COVID activity in Canada is another one of our indicators.

And yes, our ability to have a public that really works along with us.

So even as we move out of mandates in to more of a guidance approach.

We know and we have seen sort of really, you know, people by and large just want to do the right thing but have that chance to have more individual control.

I do think we are in a strong place to be moving this way.

I also think it is actually a good thing to be moving cautiously through these relaxing of restrictions while we have COVID activity because I think sometimes we get into this real all or none mode.

If I look over the last year and a half where we either have activity or we don't.

And the population might react accordingly.

And I think this is probably more of a reality of the future is that we will have COVID activity in the community.

We need to adjust.

So having actual cases reported day-to-day allows us to find that right place of using our own risk assessment and being cautious as we go through these removals of more of that territorial level mandates.

>> Thank you.

Chuck, Whitehorse star.

Chuck?

>> Sorry, I'm here, I'm here.

Sorry.

Can you hear me now?

>> Go ahead, please, chuck.

>> Okay, okay.

Here I am.

Dr. Hanley, I just wanted to get a clarification first of all.

So masking in an optometrist's office, the dentist's office, that will not be mandatory but strongly recommended?

Or will it be mandatory?

>> It will not be mandatory.

Of course we have healthcare providers who do follow and always do follow the advice that we provide whether that is to physicians, to community nurses, and to allied health professionals so we provide the advice for how to set up their business establishments and provide guidance which is also publicly available on infection control within those premises.

So there is an expectation and high compliance rate.

And that guides how as practitioners they use masks and other infection control measures as well as their staff and as well as how they see patients and what patients are expected to wear or visitors.

While it is not mandatory from a Yukon Government approach, there is this strong guidance on how to set up a facility and is it, there is an expectation of clients to wear a mask, then the accomplishment can determine in the case of noncompliance whether that client will be served or not.

>> Thank you.

Do you have a second question, chuck?

>> Yeah, actually.

That was a clarification.

I have a couple questions here if you want to.

This is another clarification.

I don't want to mess this up.

So in the return to school, students will not be required to wear masks in the classroom.

But they will be required to wear masks and maintain physical distancing in the public spaces such as the foyer and the hallways on the buses.

Is that correct?

>> Yeah.

And that will be provided as written guidance.

That is the gist and it will be reflected in the written guidance on the website.

>> I'm fine.

>> Okay.

We will give you one more, chuck, because you had two clarifications but one more is it.

>> Okay.

This is just an odd one.

I was listening to some news this morning and they were saying that they were starting a third round of vaccinations and I think it was Spain but it was a European country and it was described as a booster.

Are we looking at booster shots here sometime in the future and had --

>> Yeah, thanks.

I am sure you heard first Israel and now Germany is and there is another European country.

It's not Spain but anyway.

You're right.

So there is a future to booster shots.

We don't know what it is yet.

You may have heard the World Health Organization today really put out an urgent request that booster shots not be contemplated before September to allow at least some of the rest of the world to catch up with the opportunity to have their first doses.

So there are many considerations.

At one point there will be waning immunity that will require some people to have booster shots potentially all of us potentially at different times depending on age or immune status or even the interval between doses.

Canada as yet has not arrived at recommendations for booster shots.

I think that will be an eventuality but we just don't know the timing yet.

Right now our focus is on first shots and those overdue for second doses.

>> Thank you.

We'll move to Julian, CBC.

>> Hi, yes, hi.

Sorry about that.

So I just have a couple of questions here of course.

And they sort of revolve around the updates in the schools.

So I am wondering, you know, it was sort of alluded to the fact that there could be some anticipated outbreaks in the territory whether that's delta or other variants, et cetera.

So I just wanted to ask what the plan is to stem possible outbreaks in schools if one should arise.

>> Do you want to start?

>> I can start.

And Dr. Hanley can join in for sure.

We will continue to work with the Commander-in-chief medical officer as we have all along to assess the risk to schools and larger populations.

And we will ensure our number one priority is always the safety of our children and Yukoners overall.

And so we will continue to work with our school administrators, our school councils as well to ensure that the right plans are in place.

And yes, it is inevitable that cases will come.

Potentially in to our school.

Last year we had a really great year.

And I think following the close advice of the chief medical officer, we can have another year like that.

That's what I'm hoping for as the new Minister of education.

But I can maybe turn it over to Dr. Hanley to speak more about what that would look like if we were to see a larger outbreak in a school.

Thank you.

>> Yeah, thanks.

Of course we have had plans in place for the beginning of the pandemic for what happens if there is a case in a child who attends school within the classroom.

What happens if there's transmission within either the school or the classroom.

And what happens if there is an outbreak.

So there are different levels and the most common level, what you usually see with a school is that cases in schools reflect what is going on in the community.

That's a bit of what we saw just at the end of the school year where we had the on set of the wave and some cases associated with children.

We had no evidence of any transmission in a classroom or an organized school setting.

What we did see was a possible transmission between kids in the unorganized social activities just at the end of school.

And so we did well.

We do have those protocols and the protocols involved.

Immediate isolation of a student for testing, notification of the families.

Of course that children being pulled from school during the infectious period.

And the close work that YCDC really take charge of this in terms of identifying any possible contacts.

Sometimes there might be no contacts within a school.

Let's say a child was identified but not identified to be infectious during their time in school.

Or if they were infectious than determining who is at risk of exposure.

Is it confined to the classroom or a potential wider exposure?

So all of that evaluation takes place and we have very specific guidance for how that occurs.

And there would be go there is transmission in aal skidoo, declaration of an outbreak.

And that outbreak could be limited to a small area, a classroom, could be wide for the school.

Certainly our efforts would be with the ability to do this and to quickly respond.

I anticipate we would be able to keep the schools going.

That has always been our intention even in the prevaccination era.

>> Thank you.

Julian, do you have a second question?

>> I do.

I am just wondering whether vaccination for staff and students will become mandatory.

And also too why masks aren't mandatory for kids in class.

If you can elaborate on that point.

>> I'll start.

Yukon Government currently does not have any mandatory COVID-19 vaccine policy in place for staff including our healthcare staff.

It is clear though that vaccination provides a strong barrier against COVID-19 as.

As an employer, the health and well being of our employees is a top priority and of course for our children in the school.

So we are strongly encouraging folks to get vaccinated but at this point we do not have a mandatory vaccine policy.

>> Okay.

Dr. Hanley?

>> I would just say that I completely agree with the Minister.

I think, you know, the most we can achieve with the least coercion is always a the way we should go.

At the same time I have asked my team and department to look at the range of policy options that, you know, and what it would take.

We know this is occurring in some of the provinces.

And there may be opportunities to look at what are the other immunizations that are important for children to have as they enter school.

And there are provinces that have policies in place, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Ontario for a long time.

And again a range of policies from kind of a mandatory with exemption process to simply a declaration of status of

immunization because then there's a chance to have a conversation about vaccine and to try to make sure questions are answered and there is every opportunity to have vaccine.

I do think that there are possible options.

I don't think this is something to rush into.

There are many different considerations.

But I think it is important to set up an expectation that we do everything possible to prevent another vaccine preventable disease being transmitted within a school setting and that includes COVID-19.

>> Thank you.

(Speaking French).

[Speaking French]

>> So, Dr. Hanley, could you please repeat in French what are the recommendations you have for the beginning of the school year and what you are expecting to see in the coming school year as a normal way of going to school for the students.

[Speaking French]

[Speaking French]

[Speaking French]

[Speaking French]

>> Is it true -- thank you.

I won't ask you to answer that in English because you both spoke to that in great detail.

[Speaking French]

>> So, can you please explain why there will be no obligatory vaccination and why we are relying on personal compliance to the measures you have suggested at this point?

[Speaking French]

[Speaking French]

[Speaking French]

>> This is also what I have explained in English.

>> Yes, I was just going to say that.

Thank you.

(Speaking French).

We will move now to Jackie, CBC.

>> Hi.

My questions are for the Minister.

I have heard from a number of concerned parents at Hidden Valley.

I know some have written to you --

>> Jackie, I'm sorry.

I'm gonna shut that down.

Minister MacLean has already spoken to that question.

Do you have a question related to the COVID briefing this morning?

>> Minister, what do you say to concerned parents and --

>> Thank you very much.

I'd like to thank everyone for their attendance today.

The next COVID-19 update will take place on Wednesday,
August 11th, at 10:30 a.m.