

COVID-19 Facebook live update: January 18, 2022



Good afternoon Yukon. I'm Renée Francoeur with Cabinet Communications and the moderator for today's COVID-19 update.

We are joined today by Premier Sandy Silver, and the acting Chief Medical Officer of Health, Dr Catherine Elliot.

Thank you to Mary Thiessen for providing our ASL interpretation, and to André Bourcier for providing our French translation.

Following the remarks from our speakers, we will go to the media on the lines for a round of questions.

I'll call you each by name.

You'll each have two questions, and then we'll follow up with another round time permitting.

Before we begin with our speakers, I'd just like to verify everyone can hear us.

If any of the reporters are having problems, please email ecoinfo@yukon.ca.

I'll now hand it over to Premier Silver.

Thank you very much, Renée, and good afternoon, everybody.

It's great to be here on the traditional territory of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and the Taa'an Kwächän Council.

I'm pleased to be joined again with André and Mary, and of course, Dr. Elliott, to update everybody on the current COVID-19 situation, and to help provide more clarification on some of the new public health measures that we introduced.

Omicron is a variant that has changed the game when it comes to responding to COVID-19.

To say the least, this variant spreads at an alarming rate, as folks know, and we are seeing it surge right across Canada.

Omicron is highly contagious, and also incubates very quickly as Dr. Elliott has mentioned before.

This current phase of the pandemic is extremely dynamic.

There's things changing very quickly, and we need to respond very quickly as well.



Last week, we received new recommendations from Dr. Elliott around the need to strengthen public health measures in response to increased-- rapidly increasing cases that we continue to see here in the territory.

The Yukon is experiencing unprecedented numbers of COVID-19 cases that do pose a serious threat to our healthcare system.

The impacts of Omicron on other jurisdictions absolutely provides us a glimpse of what may happen here in the days and weeks to come.

An increase in hospital admissions combined with staffing changes and challenges will cause a significant strain on our healthcare system.

So to prevent our system from being overwhelmed, we need to take immediate action to reduce the number of close contacts amongst individuals.

The more contacts that you have, the greater risk of spread.

This is why it's so important to limit your contacts.

This does not mean that you cannot see anyone at all.

But it is best if you limit your contacts to only one other household.

These new temporary measures that we've introduced based upon Dr. Elliott's recommendations include limiting all private and public gatherings to two households up to a maximum of 10 people.

This includes recreation, team sports, group fitness classes, group recreation and leisure activities, and also at bars and restaurants, at your table, which are still limited to six people per table as well.

Postponing all indoor organized events, including funerals, and weddings, and also restricting-- requiring bars and restaurants to close no later than 10 pm.

So, Dr. Elliot will speak more in the details of these measures in a moment.

We recognize that these massive measures will make life more complicated and more challenging in the days ahead.

And we absolutely do not make these decisions lightly.

We have seen in other jurisdictions that Omicron, that wave hits very hard, and we are bracing for that impact.

These measures are temporary, and they are intended to reduce the acute impacts in our hospitals, in our community centres and health care professionals throughout the territory.



They're working with us so we continue to provide the services that Yukoners rely upon.

Now following the public health recommendations, limiting close contacts and getting vaccinated are essential to protecting the health and safety of all Yukoners in this new phase of the pandemic.

The higher our vaccine rates, the more protection that we have as a territory, and the less that we will need to use strong public health measures in the future.

So again, and again, I know I sound like a broken record, but it's very critical that we get vaccinated if you're not already.

This includes getting your first shot if you are under 12 years of age, getting your second shot if you haven't already, and also getting your booster if it's been more than six months since you received your second shot.

You know, talking with many Yukoners I know a lot of you agree that getting vaccinated is not necessarily just about you.

It's about your friends, it's about your community.

It's about your family.

It's about all Yukoners and protecting those who are most vulnerable, including our youngest Yukoners who cannot receive a vaccine.

We are happy to see Health Canada has authorized a new drug for people with COVID-19 that will reduce the likelihood of hospitalization or death.

We are working with the federal government to receive an initial allocation of this medication as soon as possible.

This new drug will help when people who are in high risk of contracting COVID-19.

But let me be clear, there's still no substitution for vaccination.

So please go get vaccinated and encourage those that you know to do the same.

The vaccines are our best way out of the pandemic.

So as we deal with this latest and most intense wave, I want to remind everyone that your government is here to support you.

Our paid sick leave rebate program is still available.

And it provides up to 10 days wages for workers who are sick, self-isolating, or caring for other household members due to COVID-19.



Employers and those who are self-employed can apply for the rebate.

The Yukon Emergency Relief Program is also available to support businesses and organizations that are impacted by these measures.

And we know that many have been and will be continued to be impacted.

This program provides funding for eligible fixed costs for businesses and non-recoverable financial commitments for events that have had to either cancel or significantly alter themselves because of these public health measures.

Yukon businesses and organizations can contact the Department of Economic Development to start an application.

And they can do that in two different ways.

You can email, and the email address is e-c-d-e-v that's standing for ECDEV, obviously, ecdev@yukon.ca.

Or also by phoning area code 867-456-3803.

Our COVID-19 support programs, they are the gold standard across the country.

We're very proud of the work that Minister Pillai and Minister McLean have done over the years in these pursuits, and we continue to provide them and we will continue to provide them as long as they are needed.

I absolutely want to thank all of the businesses, the organizations, the parents, and the families that continue to quickly adapt to ensure that Yukoners are kept safe and protected.

I know it's trying times and things are happening very fast and very furious at times.

But we very much appreciate your attention to the details, as they are going to be extremely helpful as we move past this latest wave.

Nearly two years in, COVID-19 continues to throw curveballs.

And we need to continue to support each other as we deal with these curveballs.

And we all have a role to play in keeping our territory safe.

And we all need to take precautions, obviously to prevent COVID-19 from spreading in our communities.

And that obviously includes practicing the safe six, masking up and getting vaccinated as well.

I'll leave it at that for some opening comments and pass it off to Dr. Elliot.



Thank you very much, everyone.

Thank you, Premier Silver.

Good afternoon, everyone.

Bonjour.

I want to start by thanking all of those across our community, our businesses, schools, arts, sports and recreational organizations, volunteer organizations, government and health care who have once again pivoted to adapt to a changing pandemic.

It is truly remarkable what we can do together.

This is an interesting time where we are combining our tools that we know work well, such as vaccination, with new tools on the horizon, such as a treatment that's just been authorized by Health Canada.

This is a time where we all are buckling down and doing what we need to do.

Let me start with a status report.

Here's what's happening around the territory today.

As of today at 9 am, no people are in hospital in Yukon due to COVID 19.

The average new daily case count is 51 for the past seven days, and 31 over the past three days.

You'll note that there is a decline noted in the case counts which we expected and it's related to the changes in who requires PCR testing.

And the total number of people with COVID-19 is of course higher than these numbers.

The number of new cases reported this morning is 27.

So there are now 306 active cases in the territory.

Over the course of this pandemic, we've had a total of 2747 Yukon cases and 2490 people have recovered.

15 Yukoners have died.

I'd like to move on now to schools and our recent shift in approach for exposures testing, and in person and remote attendance.



With the introduction of rapid antigen tests, as well as the current number of active COVID cases in the territory, we are moving away from individual case and contact management towards self-management, school-based illness surveillance, and management of outbreaks should they occur.

Similar to our recent shift in the testing strategy, this is a logical step.

It uses our resources where they're most effective.

And that is at the prevention of disease and helping those who are most at risk of severe outcomes.

COVID-19 continues to require us all to adapt in order to respond in real time to the evolving nature of the virus and which steps we need to take.

And so here again, we are at a point of transition.

This means that the government will no longer be issuing school exposure notifications and we are shifting to school based surveillance.

This is a process which is accomplished in partnership between YCDC and Yukon schools.

And it helps us identify respond to and manage illness within the schools.

Some schools may experience high rates of absenteeism and this is to be expected during this time, and something that we will monitor and investigate where necessary.

This process has been a successful tool for many years in assessing the public health risk of school operations when a disease could be circulating in a school or in a school community.

For their operational needs, the schools themselves will be monitoring staffing and other indicators, and will make decisions based on what is needed to keep schools operating within their COVID operational plans. While most of our schools have transitioned back to in person learning, some are pivoting to remote learning, based on how many staff are available. To help keep families updated, there will now be a daily snapshot of the school situation on yukon.ca [Yukon.ca/school-operations-covid-19]. Parents will be informed directly of any changes to their school's operations. We expect other schools to shift to remote learning for short periods due to similar circumstances. If a student or staff member receives a positive result for an at home test, they should self-isolate for the appropriate number of days as provided in the rapid test instructions, and follow the directions provided on the management of household contacts. They would also normally contact the school to notify them of their absence and this should continue. And this is the time to note whether support is needed for remote learning.

At that time, people are welcome to let the school know that their absence is due to illness, and if they choose, can indicate it's due to a positive COVID-19 test.

There are a number of measures in schools that are designed to prevent the transmission of disease.



Students are required to wear a mask when in classrooms, when seated at their desks, in hallways, and in common areas.

Activities between schools are suspended until further notice, and a number of other measures have been undertaken.

Again, I want to thank everyone for their efforts to support our children's learning.

And I want to reassure everyone that Yukon schools remain on par with the rest of the Yukon.

These operational plans are based on hard data and scientific evidence that go into the recommendations that I make.

And they will help to mitigate the transmission of COVID-19 in the classroom settings.

Thank you for being kind to one another and enduring throughout this pandemic.

I do. I just want-- this one will be for Dr Elliott again. I want to refer back to those numbers you gave out earlier that there's currently no one hospitalized at the moment with COVID or omicron. That kind of belies your statements you've been making for the past few weeks about we need these restrictions to save our healthcare system from being overstrained. If no one's in the hospital at the moment, it doesn't look like there's any strain on the capacity.

Tim, thank you so much for this question, because this is one of the biggest challenges of public health. If you prevent something from happening, then it didn't happen, and everyone can say, well, it wouldn't have happened anyway. And if you don't prevent it from happening, the criticism is you didn't react soon enough. So, this-- yes, currently, there is no one in hospital from COVID-19, and I'm very glad and grateful for that. There are a number of people, some with risk factors for severe disease at home, who are sick with COVID-19, and those who are most at risk are those who are not up to date on their vaccinations, and those with severe immunocompromised, and the elderly. A number of chronic conditions also put people at risk. The other thing is the case count, which looks a little bit low today compared to what we were seeing a week ago, two weeks ago. This is because our testing strategy has changed and we are prioritizing testing for those people who are most at risk. The third factor that is really important in Yukon is these numbers jump around every day. So one day we have zero hospitalizations, another day it's one, and the next day it's two. And that's how we want to keep it. Zero, one, and two are numbers that we can manage really well here in Yukon. So we keep a close eye on this. We are still in the upswing of this of this wave and we expect it to be so. At this point, we hope that it will crest and start to decline in the coming weeks and months. And those are the things we are watching. Thank you.

Thank you. We'll now move to Amy at the Canadian Press.



Hi there, I have a follow up question to that one. At what stage-- what number of hospitalizations would you consider the hospitals to be overwhelmed? Just for reference, would it be, you know, a dozen, or 50, or-- what-- kind of, give a general sense of when you would consider COVID to be overwhelming hospitals?

So, I'll take a stab at this as well. Like, our rural system, compared to the provinces, is very small. And so to go from zero people in beds to four is an extreme change in Yukon. It's not only that, but it's also if we do get overrun, where would we go? Is the next question. So it's also epidemiology in other areas. It's also the people that are running our healthcare system, the nurses, the doctors, the admin staff, all doing their diligent work of staying at home if they are symptomatic, or if they've been tested positive. It's not just the count of is it one person in a bed, is it two people in a bed. And again, this is the profound nature of the change that we're seeing from the medical professionals right across Canada. Omicron brings its own new information with it and new concerns, but this is not our first wave, and the medical team, the healthcare professionals, the team are extremely well suited to adapt and to move very quickly, and that's what we're seeing. We've learned from other waves. We know when things start to get of concern, and Dr. Elliott spoke to that. We also know, because of Omicron, how quickly it's spreading. How many people have to be away, and being tested, and that is another strain on the system. And we also know what's happened right across Canada. We're kind of in a little bit more fortuitous situation in the Yukon by being able to watch what's happened in Prince Edward Island, what's happened in Ontario, what's happened in British Columbia, especially in northern British Columbia. With all of these factors, you know, this is what we're paying attention to, more so than just an active case count, or more so than-- what is it? Two beds and then you change? Or three beds.

Thank you. Amy, do you have a second question?

Yes, I do, thanks. I'm just wondering if you can clarify, you mentioned, you know, you're hoping to get the antiviral as soon as possible. Is it fair to say within the week? Or can you have a bit of a timeframe, and given the indication of when the next shipment might come?

Yeah, I don't have those details right now. It's been a really fluid conversation even today, and I know that the Minister responsible has been communicating with the nation-- with the Federal Government. I don't have an update on timelines right now, But we did get an indication of the size of the initial batch, and then from there we'll see how the supply chain moves. But as Dr Elliott mentioned, you know, there's been a supply chain issue already, for lots of things. This is no different, but we'll get that information out as soon as we possibly can.

Thank you. We'll now move to Chris at CBC.

Hello, thank you. I guess my first question has to do with this school snapshot that was raised does not appear to be online at this point. How often is this going to be updated, and what sort of information is it going to contain?



Thanks, Chris, for your question. So, the school snapshot is being put up online. Work is underway with the Department of Education. And I can get back to you on the timelines and how soon that will be up. If you're not finding it at this point, we can get someone to reach out with the exact details of that. And it's really meant to be a snapshot to help parents who are planning ahead. In terms of--you know, parents were asking questions like, well, can we predict a day or two in advance, you know, if our school is close to going to online learning? You can't always predict, but you can have a sense of where things are at. And it's a real effort in terms of the Department of Ed trying to get the information transparently and clearly to parents. As I'm not representing the Department of Education in any way, I think it's best if the details we can get back to you from the Department of Education.

Yeah. And I'll just add, Chris, there's been information flowing about the new Yukon order under CEPA, and enabling the Minister to be able to respond to the needs of individual communities. And I think that that's important to mention here as well as we pivot to a community by community basis, the order enabling the Minister to be able to be making flexible decisions outside of a Yukon wide policy to shut down schools, plural. And so more information on that is coming out as soon as possible as well. I know that the Minister is involved in stakeholder conversations, and, you know, garnering the best practices and the best information from school councils, from administrative staff, and are currently working to, again, be as flexible as possible in this new scenario that we find ourselves in.

Thank you. Chris, do you have a second question? Hello, Chris, can you hear us? Do you have a second question? I'll circle back. I will now move to Morris at the Whitehorse Star.

Hello.

Hello, we can hear you.

Okay. Sorry. So, my second question is just, given that the government, by its own admission, has-- you know, you're-- you're-- you're testing less. By your own admission today that, you know, the numbers-- the case count looks low, you're actually reducing, it seems, the capacity for the government to collect accurate information about the number of cases and what-- what's happening. How is this school snapshot going to be of any use to anybody if the data has been changed by the government?

I wouldn't necessarily say that we're testing less, Chris. I would say that, you know, with the amount of rapid tests that we have out here, there's more tests happening now than probably ever. But at the same time, you know, how YCDC, how the government uses the information to



make sure that we keep ourselves safe, that's been changing. And it's not only changing here, it's been changing rate across the country, and it's been working as well. And we understand the concerns of individual parents who say, you know, they really rely on certain numbers to know whether or not, or how much they're going to do with their kids in the school, or outside of the school. We understand that, but we also understand that the new variant is here, and it's pretty much, you know, it's spreading around all of Canada right now. And so that's should be the number one concern right now. And as we keep on having questions about-- about active-- or rapid testing and active cases, we really try to push people towards the boosters and the vaccinations as well, and an understanding that we are still tracking this virus, and the government is doing a great job of tracking it. And an understanding that we are still tracking this virus and the government is doing a great job of tracking it and understanding how it is moving, and the YCDC will inform folks of outbreaks as they have in the past with their testing strategy.

But we are not going it alone here, with a new testing strategy in the Yukon.

This is the reality of Omicron, this is the reality of a fifth wave, in some places even a sixth the wave. In delta and all of the different variants that have come in the past.

And each system, learning from the past but also understanding the new, unique circumstances of a variant that is highly transmissible and that basically acts differently.

And again, you know, kudos to Yukoners.

We have an overly-- we have a well vaccinated population.

We saw with the boosters, a lot of people going in December and there were some problems in getting the shots.

We see that that has declined a bit, so there's open spots right now, but all of these factors play into...

It's to a new strategy when it comes to how we interpret and use the information that we get from testing.

>> Thank you, Premier Silver.

I think you explained it really well and I just-- if I might, just add a couple of things about surveillance or tracking of disease and disease patterns.

We're using the tracking that is appropriate for this variant at this point of time.

Let me just expand a bit about that.

At this point, we have a variant that spreads rapidly from person to person.

So from one person to the next, what we call generation, or the next few people or person who they infect to the next, to the next, to the next is only three days.



And so, tracking has to be that fast, and with Delta it was more in the lines of five, six days.

So it is a very quick moving variant, and what that means is that surveillance based on absenteeism or how many kids are absent today is appropriate to track and follow the pattern of this disease in schools.

It's more appropriate than waiting for somebody to get tested and then for that test result to be confirmed and the interview to happen, et cetera, et cetera.

That was appropriate with more appropriate with Delta but now as we move into this really fast pace, we need to pull that system that is very quick, which is the absentee system, up while we scale down on the other system.

Because to recognize a serious situation where there's an outbreak or a large number of people infected, we need to do that rapidly and this is the appropriate system for that type of surveillance, for that type of disease.

I also want to remind all parents that the best-- and caregivers and family members and members of the school community that the most important thing to do to keep people safe is to get vaccinated. To have children, youth and adults completely up-to-date on their COVID vaccines. That is the best way to keep our communities safe.

Thank you.

>> Thank you.

We'll now to Morris at the Whitehorse Star.

>> Reporter: Hi there.

This question is for Dr Elliott.

Sports organizations are expressing confusion over what constitutes recreational versus organizational activities.

Can you explain how the restrictions apply to each, please?

>> Yes, and I know there's been a lot of questions about this.

I think really keeping that rule of thumb in mind, and then there is a lot of work on the details as well.

The rule of thumb is the two household rule.



I know in my Q&A, I had some wording to help explain this.

Let's see if I can pull that up while you're-- while I'm talking here.

So I think when we look at organized sports, one of the first things to consider is indoor versus outdoor.

So outdoor, there is not a big change in the changes.

When we look at indoor, it's about two households in a unit.

So, that does mean that team sports will need to be postponed at this time for this period.

But people can recreate with one other household in, in small groups.

So that basically covers the gist of it.

I know it's a lot to ask.

I recognize there's a lot of people rely on the sporting activities, indoor sporting activities for health and well-being and the important role they play in our fabric of our society.

And this is why following this data and making this as short-lived as possible is important.

I know more Q&A's are being developed and being put online regularly.

>> I don't think I can say it any better than that.

Other than, you know, we-- This was a tough one, obviously.

And, you know, considering just completely shutting down sports and a conversation about, you know, gyms are booked, sports facilities are booked.

At least having an opportunity to have some sport was important for mental health.

I think that that's really where we went as well with the conversation with the Chief Medical Officer of Health.

And she mentioned it as well how important it is for society, it's important for kids.

We want to continue to provide as many opportunities as, as we possibly can.

And we know this is tricky, but a lot of organizations have to decide, are we just going to shut things down?

well, the times are booked, the ice is there.

If we can get families out here and there for some activities, I think that that's extremely important.

And I know that it's hard, you're gonna have a lot of conversations about, how can we possibly have hockey with just two families? That type of thing.



It's gonna work for some and it's not gonna work for others.

We get it, we really do.

But at the same time, we also recognize that if we all adhere to this-- hopefully it's weeks, hopefully it's not that long.

And the good news is, again, we don't have anybody in the hospital beds right now.

That's really good news.

I look at it as we have a shield over us.

Cause we know the arrows are coming, and we are doing what we can to make sure that the timing we saw in other jurisdictions, as we go through that timing and we're seeing it, that we've done what we need to do so we don't have to do more measures later on.

And I get it, it's tough. This one's a tough one.

For sure.

But it definitely wasn't a decision that Dr Elliott and her team took lightly.

>> Thank you.

Morris, do you have a second question?

>> Reporter: Yes, to your point, Sandy, so it's very difficult now for sports to take place at all.

How do you address the issue of mental health specifically for children deprived of organized sports?

>> Yeah...

Yeah, it's affecting everybody.

It really is.

I wish I had something really eloquent to say that made people feel better.

It's not words would be cheap at this point.

We have a mental wellness summit coming up that's going to be really important.

We need to learn as a society after COVID.

We really do.

There's so much we need to do as we pivot and change to a new normal.



This is weighing on everybody's minds, what does that new normal look like?

I know we've used terminology in the past that the light's at the end of the tunnel, just need you to dig deep.

It seems like we keep asking folks to dig deep and, and sometimes it feels pretty overwhelming.

It feels like there is no light at that end of the tunnel and sometimes that light turns into another train. But I really do see us getting past this very quickly and it's not only because of the modelling we see in other jurisdictions, it's because of Yukoners.

It's because of the leadership that we've seen. I had a great conversation with a few business owners today, talking about talking to their staff about the team and what that means.

You know, and we're all digging deep.

I don't have an answer for that question right now but I know that the efforts are being made.

I also know, it's almost like when winter ends, people get more energy.

When pandemic turns to endemic, I think we will see a resurgence of energy as well. And everybody coming forth with the "we can't go back, we need to move forward, here's how we do it."

I think I have a lot of faith in Yukon because from First Nations leadership, municipal leadership, business owners, people that volunteer their time for sports and coaching, we got amazing leadership right across in every community and we will have some really good ideas moving forward based upon what people saw, what people went through over the last few years.

So hopefully we get a time in the very near future where we are not always reverting back to putting that shield up and we're actually moving forward on the input we have been seeing from so many great leaders in the Yukon.

>> I think-- thank you, Premier Silver, and I think it, it is a great question.

How do we take care of our mental health right now?

There are a lot of sports and recreational activities that have been able to move online, and that's not the same as being a person.

I'm not suggesting it is.

But it's certainly something that a lot-- keeps a lot of people going and I'm so grateful for the amount of work and effort that's gone into those-- those pieces.

Others are finding other creative ways to maybe moving outdoors, which seems like a possibility today.

About two weeks it didn't.

For some things, not all.

The others are really just knowing that we need to stick together right now.

It's really important to lend a helping hand when you can, and that it takes all of us.

Knowing that people are really doing the best they can in a tough situation in order to protect the wonderful lives that we have here in Yukon, with all of their challenges and lovely moments as well.

And I think that's really what it takes to keep us going.

We've done this before and we've managed it, and we will manage at this time.

So thank you.

>> Thank you.

Are there any other reporters on the line I might have missed?

Okay.

I'm going to circle back around for one more round of questions.

And we'll start with John Kennedy at CKRW.

>> Reporter: Hi, I only have one additional question.

It seems Yukoners are starting to lose faith in the Yukon government's ability to handle the pandemic.

And based on some of the answers we've heard here today, it seems like the Yukon government itself is giving up on the pandemic.

What can you say to justify, I guess, your response to various initiatives that have been ongoing throughout this pandemic such as not collecting rapid test data or giving out information regarding hospitalizations only during updates?

Why is that not being issued during regular case counts issuing?

How can you prove to Yukoners that the government is still in this fight?

>> My goodness, I completely disagree with--

I don't know where you got from our words today that we're giving up.



I heard Doctor Henry being asked a very similar question and I was amazed at a question for her as well.



We're seeing a shift, we're seeing a switch, we're seeing governments right across Canada using their experience to work with an unprecedented variant.

We are seeing businesses and parents rally, we're seeing amazing resilience in Yukon.

Yes, we're hearing concerns, absolutely and we're addressing them.

And the good news about living in a smaller jurisdiction is you can have these conversations, you know, with people very readily.

You know, the chief medical office being able to keep attuned to the needs and concerns of every community, that doesn't happen in the rest of Canada.

I would say if anything, we are doing everything we can to be in a situation where we have nobody in the hospital right now.

I don't know, John, what you're going to write about, but I'd be very-- I'm very pleased taking a look at the last two years of, you know, the shutdowns in other jurisdictions compared to here. Being front-end loaded with vaccines compared to other jurisdictions.

Not having to close down as much as other jurisdictions, and I hear that all the time when I talk with Yukoners.

How absolutely lucky we are to live in the best place in Canada, maybe even the world when it came to COVID.

I hear that all the time.

Now, I'm not saying everything has been done perfectly and that we haven't made any mistakes along the way.

Nobody is saying that.

But I'm also full of resolve and full of energy, and so have the leaders I have talked to about-- we're gonna get to the end of this.

So I disagree with the beginning of your statement.

>> Thank you.

We'll now move to Haley at Yukon News.

>> Reporter: Hi, thank you. Question again I think for Dr Elliott.

I heard that some folks are being turned away from organizations, meetings like Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous due to the new restrictions limiting to ten people.



I am wondering if that's a good idea to be turning people away from those programs right now? If there is any consideration to make an exception are to make those kinds of support groups essential, I guess?

>> Haley, Thanks for that question.

Throughout the pandemic, the goal really is that balancing act of keeping the things that are essential and critical, the things that are necessary, going.

This includes supports for mental health and wellness throughout the territory.

The specifics of your question, I will have to look into and get back to that specific group.

But certainly, you've heard, last week the Minister of Health and I stood up here and talked about the importance of addressing really challenging issues of substance use in the territory and this is an area where we are working together to promote health and well-being, and so every time there is a different type of restriction or a new restriction, there are things that come to light that we need to figure out how to make things work for people.

And we often will look to the groups and the creativity of those organizations which has been incredibly astounding, as well as those organizations supporting people across the country and connecting with our colleagues across the country to hear about their innovative practices.

It is about really keeping people safe and ensuring that infections don't occur amongst people who are most vulnerable, and then making wise decisions along the way.

>> Now to Tim at the Whitehorse Star.

>> Reporter: Yes, thank you.

My question is for the Premier. Just curious as to-- you can give me a yes or no answer on where you and your government stand on the thorny question of mandatory vaccines? We've all seen what Quebec has done. Most other jurisdictions in the country seem to be rejecting it. So where does the Yukon stand?

>> Mandatory vaccines-- in which context are you talking to?

>> Reporter: Making it mandatory to be vaccinated, or facing fines or jail time?

>> Oh--yeah, we're not considering that.

>> Thank you. We'll now move to Amy, at Canadian Press.
Thank you, Amy. I'll circle back at the end of you're still there.
Chris, at CBC.



>> Reporter: Hi. Excuse me, I know that this is a difficult thing to pin down. But we're starting to see-- the WHO is saying some countries are starting to see the peak of Omicron already. It looks like the Western provinces are either there now, or about to get there soon. I guess, Dr Elliott, do you have any idea, even a rough guess? Or some kind of model that indicates where Yukon might be in terms of actually reaching the peak Omicron?

>> Yeah, thanks, Chris. And I think it's really important for all of us to know that these waves, they go up, they peak, and they do come down. And, you know, we expect based on what we've seen in other jurisdictions across Canada, and what we're starting to see across Canada, and what we saw first in South Africa and in some places in Europe, that this wave will be more narrow, or more short lived, than previous waves. That's our hope right now. The evidence from South Africa is there, but it's a very different population. Many people have been infected before and very few are vaccinated, compared to our population. And there's, of course, social, cultural, seasonal differences that are significant in disease spread. So, you know, I think when I look into the future, I look to the places that are culturally and socially closest to how we are, and also from a restrictions perspective, and I'm looking to BC, that were maybe a week or so behind BC, depending on how things go. But there's certain pockets in every big province that have different-- really significant differences, and we had, we don't always follow those patterns. And then if you look to Quebec and Ontario, we're further behind. So these are pieces of the puzzle that we are looking at. But I would say that we're-- you know, we're not looking at a wave that's going on for months and months, and day to day we're monitoring and we'll pivot as soon as we can. Thanks.

>> Thank you. We'll now move to Morris, at the Whitehorse Star.

>> Reporter: Hi, there. So, it's been mentioned that there's quite the contrast between, as an example, curling practices where only two households can practice together, yet they can go dining together afterwards. How do you explain that discrepancy, and what would you recommend as far as dealing with a situation like that?

Yeah, again, I think that's why it's important that the message is it's two households. You know, limit your gathering to two households, whether you're curling, doing a pottery class, going to dinner. You know-- and you might-- yeah, you might go into a building where there's other people at-- in their two house limit, but, you know, those buildings that you're going into have all the safety mechanisms in place to help make sure that we reduce the spread. You know, bottom line, Morris, you know, we're in a critical period here in the territory. As we brace for the impact of the Omicron variant, we're in the midst of it right now. And we've seen what other jurisdictions across Canada and the world are experiencing, and we know what's coming.



These new public health measures are necessary. They're necessary to limit the strain on our healthcare system, and to prevent it from being overwhelmed, and they're being done with the least social disruption as we possibly can do. We're limiting close contacts and we need people to get vaccinated. These are the most important things that Yukoners can do right now. So we're reaching out to Yukoners and saying, look, like, please, you know, as much as you possibly can, limit those gatherings. We'll get over this, and hopefully, again, with the modeling we know, and with the happening in other places in Canada, we hope that this will be a very short wave. If folks aren't going to do these things, well, then we'll see what happens, right? But from the conversations I've been having, with a lot of Yukoners, we are in it together. And I'm again, I have so much respect for the business community that has been just under peril for two years now solid. And the work that that Ranj, and Jeanie, and others have done, the ministers with the business advisory council, to make sure that we have the best programming possible in Canada here for Yukoners. It's great to know that. It's also cold comfort for all of us who just want to get over this. The best thing we can do to get over this right now is to limit the close contacts. We're trying to make it as simple as possible by having a two household limit for wherever you go. And again, the most important thing, if you're going to if you're going to write about this press conference, write about how important it is to get your boosters.

>> Thank you. I'll circle back to Amy, at Canadian Press for final question if you're still on the line, Amy?

>> Reporter: No more question for me, thanks.

>> Thanks Amy. Looking at the time, that concludes our COVID-19 update for today. Stay tuned for more on the time and date of the next one. Thank you again to our speakers, to the media, and everybody who tuned in live to watch over Facebook. Stay kind, and stay positive, and stay safe.