

## COVID-19 Facebook live update: June 9, 2021

[ Please Stand By ]

>> I'm Pat Living with the Department of Health and Social Services and your moderator for today's COVID-19 updated.

We are joined by the Minister of Health and Social Services, Tracy-Anne McPhee and the Chief Medical Officer of Health Doctor Brendan Hanley.

Sign language interpretation is provided by Mary Tiessen and Andre is providing French language service.

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

Minister?

>> Good morning everyone and happy to be here with Doctor Hanley on a traditional territory of the Kwanlin Dün and the Taa'an Kwächän Council.

Thanks for listening in today and for tuning into this update.

Before I began I'd like to take a moment.

On behalf of our government and all Yukoners, we expressed condolences to those of London, Ontario as well as the Muslim communities throughout Canada.

We are all devastated by the news of this horrific act.

This kind of hate and discrimination cannot be tolerated.

We stand in solidarity with Muslim Canadians and with YUKON's Muslim community through their difficult time.

Here in the Yukon a number of new cases of COVID-19 have been detected this last week.

There are currently eight active cases in the territory and one Yukoner that has tested positive outside of the territory where they will remain.

Doctor Hanley will have more to say in a moment but this provides a stark reminder we are not out of the woods yet.

Variants of COVID-19 continue to be concerned -- concerning and will continue to spread mobile weight vaccination rates.

Vaccinations are not a "silver bullet" when it comes to COVID-19 but they do provide considerable protection.

You've heard the premier, Doctor Hanley and I all say the more people that get vaccinated for safer our territory will be.

While getting vaccinated will not guarantee you will not become infected it will dramatically decrease your chances of getting seriously ill are of dying if you become infected.

It will also reduce caress of spreading COVID-19 with will help your friends and colleagues and neighbours.

And help them stay safe and by extension keep our whole community safe.

Just like wearing a mask getting vaccinated is an action you can take as an individual to protect yourself.

It also protects the health and safety of others and of all Yukoners. Our immunization rates continue to be strong. More than seven nine% of eligible Yukoners have received their first shot. But we need to catch up when it comes to second shots. We are at 71 percent and we need to gather numbers up. We lifted some restrictions on May 20th and we would need to get our second dose. Our youth vaccine is rolling out in the territories. The first dose clinic is open in Carmacks and one will open in Dawson city tomorrow and its Taseko when on Friday. The clinic is also open in Whitehorse. Most other places in Canada are waiting on more supply and people need to wait for months to receive second shot. We need to seize this great opportunity we have to keep our community healthy and safe. Remember that doctor Theresa Tam and that she public health officer called the Yukon "a model we are all looking towards for success". That is high praise but we need to take that responsibility seriously. Please go to Yukon.ca/this-is-our-shot and if you have any questions about the vaccine please get in touch with your doctor or local nurse. I want to thank everyone who has already received vaccines for helping protect our communities across the territory. I also want to thank the entire vaccine volunteer team helping Yukoners take their shot. Vaccine saves lives and each one of you is making a difference. I'd especially like to congratulate Yukon aboriginal women's Council which was announced as a finalist this week in the Public Health Agency of Canada's vaccine community innovation challenge. The Yukon aboriginal women's council is receiving \$25,000 to implement their projects, called "protecting Yukon's Health". The project is designed to build trust and relationships with Indigenous women by providing culture reassurance about taking the Yukon -- COVID-19 vaccine. Trusts will be built with the help of a website that showcases testimonials in traditional languages of Indigenous elders in communities across the Yukon. This is a fantastic initiative and I wish the Yukon -- the women's Yukon aboriginal women's council the best of luck as they now compete for the \$100,000 grand prize. Once you are fully vaccinated you must follow safe six plus one. It also remains important to get tested if you experience any symptoms related to COVID-19 and you can find a list online at YUKON.ca, if you have these symptoms please self isolate and arrange to get tested and don't go to work. Paid sick leave is available through our rebate program for employers including those who are self-employed. It remains vital to get tested so we can limit the spread of COVID-19 especially when it comes to the variants of concern.

And if you haven't already please arrange to get your vaccine.

As I said we won't be able to continue lifting restrictions until we get our vaccine rates of higher.

And the one exception is what the premier mentioned last week.

I'm pleased to say starting June 18th on back -- unvaccinated children under 12 who were travelling with fully vaccinated family members or caregivers will not need to self isolate when they enter the territory.

As Doctor Hanley Canada task the risk of transmission among this age group is quite low.

I know this will be welcome news to many Yukon families who want to visit with extended family the summer or he maybe introducing new family members.

The weather has finally arrived.

And we are poised to have a great Yukon summer.

I encourage everyone to support our local businesses as they provide us with really great service.

They have been through a lot and they are ready and willing and need our support.

Before I handed over to Doctor Hanley, I know that many students have recently or are about to graduate.

I want to congratulate our graduates across the territory.

They are so much hard work that goes into each school year and I know the pandemic has made that more challenging for many of our students.

I commend your perseverance and resilience.

You have so much to be proud of.

Thank you to all the families and educators and staff that have supported the students through another very strange school year.

It takes a whole community to raise a child and it takes dedicated communities to educate -- educate them.

Congratulations.

Thank you for the opportunity to be here this morning.

>> Pat: Doctor Hanley?

>> Thanks Pat and thank you Minister McPhee.

I will start with a case update since our situation has changed dramatically compared to a week ago.

A number of new cases have been announced as a minister refers to.

I will provide some important details.

As far as the outbreak at Victoria Goldmine we remain with just the three confirmed cases.

Close contacts remain in isolation.

The mine continues to operate.

We have been working closely between our office the Y. CDC communicable disease team the medic and nurse on-site and the medical consultant company overseeing healthcare in the mind.

We are now working with those workers who are due to leave so those not identified as contacts can leave the mine safely and with direct instructions as to what they need to do.

So what happened?

To many of the situation maybe a bit of a shock.

First in outbreak in a mine and now a bunch of cases in Whitehorse and even outside Whitehorse.

How could this happen in such a short time?

This needs exploration and that's what we shall do.

As well as consider the lessons we can learn from what we know so far to guide us on the continued path forward.

As challenging says things see.

Thanks would be much worse if we didn't have the number of people vaccinated.

First as a reminder case 85 is a Yukon resident who was infected and diagnosed out of the territory and will remain out of territory.

Case 86 and 87 at two of three individuals linked to the Victoria Goldmine outbreak.

We called the situation and outbreak over the weekend because we had evidence there was transmission of COVID infection on-site.

Contact tracing remains underway to control and prevent possible spread throughout the mine.

We are pleased all tests on the mind for contacts have come back negative and we continue to work closely.

In a mind with over 327 people on site the fact this outbreak is so far confined to three cases is remarkable especially given we have learned these cases are due to the P1 variant.

This success is for a number of reasons.

Our teams at Y. CDC, the COVID response unit and CMO HL office have been working closely with all Mayans and the iridium medical company that oversees healthcare over the past year and a quarter.

Victoria gold and the other Mayans have enhanced protocols including working, self-isolation screening of workers increase sanitation testing protocols and close communication with Y. CDC.

Does have allowed us not only to prevent other potential interrupt -- introductions of COVID but identify and contain this outbreak.

We have been working to offer vaccine to all personnel working at the mine.

The vaccine uptake has clients to levels we estimate are around three quarters fully vaccinated or roughly equivalent to the Yukon adult population at the moment.

I'd like to acknowledge the work that all partners including the Victoria gold Corporation have done to ensure the mind staff can work and safety and the mind can continue to operate even with an outbreak in progress.

Advanced work has paid off and with no further cases identified so far.

As of this morning we have three confirmed cases in Whitehorse along with a further probable case in Whitehorse and probable in rural Yukon bringing our total to eight active cases in territory including our out of territory resident.

This brings the total confirmed case count to 90 with the tall 12 probable cases awaiting confirmation.

Our team is investigating the source of origin.

We were prepared that cases would continue to be detected within the territory and although we are only beginning to put all the pieces together we do have the knowledge and experience and process in place to manage these investigations.

If you have been at these locations or if you are feeling symptomatic please seek testing.

You should always be self-monitoring for symptoms even if vaccinated.

New or worsening cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, a fever, feeling feverish, chills, fatigue or weakness, muscle or body aches, undue loss of smell or taste, a headache, even gastrointestinal symptoms or just feeling very unwell.

If you are unsure please take the self-assessment tool online or call 811 for further information.

I won't go through all the exposure notifications but they are posted online and it's important to have a look and what's important is not just the location but the time so you don't need to worry about potential exposure.

Let's reflect on what might be happening.

We've identified some settings on the public exposure notice remembers of the public could have been exposed or where transmission of COVID may have occurred.

One obvious question is if there is a connection between the outbreak of Victoria gold and the cases we see in circulation outside the mind.

That's a question we all have and we are looking for possible links as well as an explanation as to how infection got in to the mind.

Over the next few days we will understand more and we may well uncover more cases.

Be prepared for a higher case count.

What about the role the vaccination?

With Yukoners over 70 percent fully vaccinated should this be happening and I said the answer lies in whether the remaining 30 percent or so are evenly dispersed through Yukon and throughout all sectors.

For instance they could be people sharing a common household or particular age or social group.

That's information we are trying to understand.

And that's also why I have continued to plead, the more people we vaccinate the better. The ability of COVID-19 and our present circumstances relies on the answers to three key questions, is this due to one or more highly transmissible variants?

More than likely.

As we have seen in the mine cases.

We will see more transmission than we might have with last year's COVID strains. Second are there settings in which we may have had intense transmission of the virus, are there circumstances where there was many people in one place with lack of masking and physical distance?

That is information we are looking into.

Third are they groups are high proportions of unvaccinated people.

So we can facilitate transmission of the virus.

These are questions we will be answering as we continue the investigation.

We noted in yesterday's media release two of the six Yukon cases were in hospital and I can say three of seven are in hospital.

And that's a remarkable proportion given a low rate of hospitalization we have witnessed.

We are all wishing well to these individuals and know they are being well cared for.

It's important to note they are younger than one might expect.

Two are between 40 and 50, one in their sixties.

These examples remind us this is not a benign disease.

It's also worth noting that our three patients in hospital are not vaccinated.

Of the four cases not in the mine site nine are vaccinated -- none.

I know there maybe questions about the individuals at the mine and their vaccine status.

Let's talk about it.

And how breakthrough infections can incur.

Infections and fully vaccinated people are rare but they do occur.

And they will occur more easily when conditions favour transmission.

That's why reducing the chances of exposure is still important for those who are fully vaccinated, in the words of one eminent epidemiologist if you wear a flameproof suit does not mean you can walk in to the fire?

Not something most experts would advise.

When someone is very infectious and if the setting is indoors, and not well ventilated infection will occur more easily.

But for COVID-19 and for most of the variants we know so far your chances of infection are vastly reduced and even when infection occurs your chance of severe disease or a passing it to others is considerably lower.

Vaccination works even with variants and remains are key to end the -- and the pandemic.

We've always said we will continue to have cases, even clusters or outbreaks and we are in a place where we can begin to normalize COVID-19.

A place that we are prudent but not fearful.

Perhaps as we work through this pandemic we will get used to living with this virus.

It is clear given ongoing low testing numbers and a lack of attention to these measures we have been quite comfortable and to use a common pandemic word complacent in recent weeks.

It has probably felt with no active cases up until now we have a security blanket around us.

Getting ready for lifting restrictions means we need to observe whatever measures are in place at the time.

For the moment that means the safe six, the gathering limits and rules and regulations that apply to workplaces, recreational facilities bars and restaurants.

As we work through this outbreak and get back to low activity and as we continue to increase our percentage uptake we can renew the path forward and look at next steps. We must get to 75 percent second dose as a minimum.

The higher the vaccine uptake the more secure we will be.

80 percent plus first dose and second dose, ages 12 and up would be ideal.

Though our first threshold is 75% second dose.

Meanwhile when symptoms occur it is so important to remember what feels like the flu or a cold could be COVID.

When you are sick or you have a headache or you run down it's better to get a task then disregard and spread the virus to those who maybe unvaccinated and more vulnerable than those who are vaccinated.

We must keep testing as we work towards this new way of living with COVID and have shown the vaccine people can get infected especially if you were unvaccinated or have had one dose, testing is important to identify disease that could get away from us before we know it's even there.

As Minister McPhee indicated some changes will be made to the current self-isolation guidance for children under 12.

I know for many of you who have begun planning your summer vacations and trips to get together or see family in person rather than on FaceTime, for those with children under 12 it has been a bit more difficult to plan those adventures.

As the premier and I first mentioned last week we happen exploring the recommendation that children under 12 should not need to self isolate if they are travelling with a parent or caregiver.

This change comes into effect on June 18th.

Well children under the age of 12 are still unable to get vaccinated so our modelling team took a look at the data on children in this age group.

We determine given the continued decline of case activity, their risk of a child in the circumstances acquiring infection is very, very low.

Even with variants around children do better than adults and their role in passing on the disease is lower especially in a population with local but activity and high vaccination uptake and I'm there for comfortable with this recommendation.

I hope this allows parents to breathe a sigh of relief and provide a bit of an extra incentive if you still need one for those unsure they should get vaccinated.

I know how important travel is to many who live in the Yukon so no longer exclude those who have a young one is a gift we can give to the Yukon people.

When the time is right it will allow friends and family to visit our beautiful territory if they have young children and enjoy Yukon summer as this will apply to both Yukoners and those travelling here from other parts of Canada.

Before brushing to book flights let me remind you nonessential travel in Canada is still not advised.

We are heading in that direction as the current waves begin to -- the current waves crashed or decline.

Please do your research and find out what you can and cannot do in a different jurisdiction and please be courteous whether you Roman Yukoner out of territory. Rules and restrictions maybe different and we must respect them.

When you return to Yukon you must follow the current process in place and if you or your child is presenting symptoms seek testing.

I hope this will decrease the complexities of trying to plan a trip back home.

As of June 18th we will have further guidance available for travelling with children under the age of 12.

[ Speaking French ]

Please take care of each other.

>> Pat: We will now go to the phone lines and will begin with Steve from CBC.

>> Reporter: I know you said you are exploring what happen in regards to how these cases came to be but can you go into what you and/or the Yukon government know or respect -- expect or suspect and terms of these cases?

How did they come in to the territory including those world cases.

Can you name which community has that case and is it related to the mine or Whitehorse cases, please?

>> Thanks for the question.

On the latter point we don't announce world cases as to location unless there's a public exposure notification and as these cases have just come to our attention since the end of the day yesterday we don't as of yet have further indication of the need for public exposure.

You are asking good questions and those are the same ones we have and we don't have the answers.

We would very much like to know the source of the infection to the mind, how did it enter the mine.

And wise that imports and, it may help to identify any other transmission or is in the mind that would not otherwise have been identified.

The second thing is whether the cases we see, as I said outside the mine are related.

Is there one introduction that has led to all of these cases?

We do know in other mines, plant they have at times had multiple introductions.

I think this could be different in terms of infection causing different outbreaks.

Clearly that is information we're interested in and I don't yet know the answer.

We are continue to do that backwards tracing and ongoing investigation.

Sometime a new case comes up that helps us link so we're working on the answers to that.

>> Pat: Do you have another question Steve?

>> Reporter: I know you said you were looking at the modelling there and that's one of the ways she determined it safe to allow unvaccinated kids to travel more freely without self-isolation.

Can you further explain how that is a good thing to do right now?

I'm thinking of what kids under 12 do, they go to school which is wrapping up sooner but they will go to summer camps and they would be with their other peers that are unvaccinated so how is this safe considering you saw the issues with the outbreak in Yellowknife recently with that outbreak that forced schools to close.

>> Yes.

We do risk calculation and we look at what are the -- is this a risk we should take on because of other advantages or consequences such as the ability of a family to stay together.

And not have to have encumbrances upon them when they returned to territory associated with self-isolation.

Is it pragmatic, does it make sense given any additional risk this might take on.

As eyes say some of it will lie in the details because we expect this is a travel nest and the kids are an estimate -- nested in that caregiver family that is vaccinated.

If the kids are being dropped off and going to a camp where there is a potential for exposure that doesn't count, let's say.

It really is to make sure there are appropriate measures to reduce exposure and exposure opportunities for kids as they travel with fully vaccinated parents.

If they are handed off to someone who is not vaccinated that does not count.

There are some conditions on how this will occur but it's all under that context of exposure reduction and a typical case might be someone travelling with a baby and a 5-year-old or kids that are staying in a cabin somewhere with the family.

Providing those opportunities for family travel but in a safe way.

I think it also relates to anyone fully vaccinated if you are going out for a few days for an adventure holiday or an urban dining experience, exposure reduction being sensible about where you go is an important part of that travel for the time being.

There risk calculations that we do, when you model the potential for exposure given the declining rates of infection across the country end up being minuscule.

And most negligible for kids to inquire infection.

>> Pat: We will now move to Tim from the Whitehorse star.

>> Reporter: Good morning.

First question, I noticed on social media there was more than one dominant -- 1,000 comments to opposed asking if there was a flu going around Whitehorse.

Are the numbers at the doctor's office or factory anything like that?

>> Not based on our surveillance data but that's good to hear.

I am hoping any time on that anecdotal information, because we have heard, I would say although not through healthcare provider officers but through other channels like that anecdotally people with bad colds.

Even though it does not appear absenteeism rates at school have gone up we are hearing similar stories.



I am hoping the question people ask is could this be something else and if the symptoms are there, people think about getting tested and fast our way to detect these signals of otherwise undetected infection in the community.

>> Pat: Your next question Tim.

>> Reporter: I wants to ask briefly about the three people in hospital.

How severe is there condition?

Are any of them on a respirator?

>> I'm being a bit careful about delving into individuals but I would say the three cases are stable.

And I don't have up to date information as of today but I do not as of yesterday -- there is no indication of anyone being at that level of severity.

>> Pat: We will now move to Haley from the Yukon news.

>> Reporter: My first question Doctor Hanley you had identified the three people in hospital were not vaccinated as well as the cases at the mine.

Are any of the cases identified so far this past week vaccinated people?

>> To be clear there was the president Mr O'Connell who talked about vaccinated people at the mine site having infection and that is true, there was to watch while partially vaccinated and one fully vaccinated who did have infection.

So that is -- that stands as is.

And that's why I want to talk about that.

Under what circumstances can people with vaccine get infection?

There is much higher breakthrough rates with one dose of vaccine than with to watch while of course and their stopwatch while doses plus two weeks but even someone fully vaccinated, if they are exposed to a lot of infection or in high transmission circumstances we can see those cases.

The good part of that is these people almost never get into trouble in terms of serious disease or hospitalization which is what big data has shown us.

So -- and even here, some of the Canadian studies are validating that.

The protective rate is extraordinarily high but people can still get infection under those more intense transmission.

>> Pat: Next question.

>> Reporter: My other question is a bit of a clarification so I apologize.

I want to make sure, is there a case 89 and 90 or are those the probable cases?

I want to make sure I have the right number.

>> It is a bit of a challenge because we've had a flurry.

But we have 90 is confirmed.

When we publish a number that means a confirmed case and so there are two further probable cases that we will expect confirmation on.

>> Pat: We will move to radio Canada.

[ Speaking French ]

>> Andre: Doctor Hanley can we see these new cases as a test case of vaccination and if so why would it be the case?

[ Speaking French ]

[ Reporter clarifying question ]

>> Andre: Are the new cases we are seeing right now some kind of a test of the collective immunity that we were trying to achieve with the vaccination campaign?

[ Speaking French ]

>> Pat: Another question?

[ Speaking French ]

>> Andre: Given these new cases, have you set a new limit of what good happened given we have remove some of the restrictions we've had in the past?

[ Doctor Hanley clarifying ]

>> Reporter: Yes.

[ Speaking French ]

>> Pat: Thank you.

Marion?

[ Speaking French ]

>> Andre: Originally you had the objective of vaccinating 75% of the population with watch while doses to achieve a collective immunity.

Given some people cannot receive the vaccine are you changing this objective trying to increase it in terms of how many people can be vaccinated with watch while doses?

[ Speaking French ]

>> Pat: Another question.

>> Reporter: Yes.

[ Speaking French ]

>> Andre: Are we planning to vaccinated children less than 12 years old at the start of the school year.

[ Speaking French ]

[ Speaking French ]

>> Pat: May I ask you to repeat that in English since it was for children under 12?

>> Were there plans to vaccinate young children under 12 before the school year. I said we don't have plans in place.

The vaccine, they are not yet regulated for that age group and the studies are not yet completed.

We maybe several weeks away from the studies and the submissions to Health Canada.

It's not possible and I doubt we would be able to commence vaccination in the short time before school return and I don't think that's a necessary step rate now.

When it is available it a be welcomed and it will be an additional step of safety and security for our kids but our kids can go back to school with full confidence and we are working with the Department to make this happen on schedule in late August.

>> Pat: We will now move to Nick from the Canadian press.

>> Reporter: Doctor Hanley this is something we're just are talking about in BC here but can you share your shots on what happens next?

BC people potentially taking booster shots, just like flu shots, and do think -- COVID cases will become a reoccurring yearly issue potentially?

If that makes sense.



>> I think there is still much to learned and I think it's clear that the challenge of global vaccination is huge and will take potentially years to accomplish.  
And we will be in a situation where we will likely be seeing new variants and this disease is not going away, it's even harder to predict the end of the pandemic.  
We are well-positioned for future opening and the ability to live our lives close to normal but COVID will become part of our lives.  
I anticipate we will be looking at repeat vaccinations and potentially something like the flu vaccine where there is a new formulation every year based on what circulating.  
That's really only what we think at the moment and, you know, over the next few months, first we will know more about how long this present vaccine last and we know more every week about how different variants respond to the different vaccine products and we have new vaccines in the pipeline as well which may have different characteristics including one Canadian project anticipated for fall and beyond.  
Lots to know and learn as new variants come on the scene and new vaccines as well and new studies and durability of vaccines.  
We don't really know yet but it'll be around.

>> Pat: Do you have a second question Nick?

>> Reporter: That's it for me.

>> Pat: We will now move to John was CK RW.

>> Reporter: It has been -- there maybe some international border restrictions being relaxed to fully vaccinated Canadians, namely with the US.  
Doctor Hanley do you have any information or advice on how that may proceed for Yukoners who maybe eager to get out to Alaska?  
Have you learned any of this were counterpart on the national scale?

>> I will say it is early.  
Those conversations are beginning to happen.  
There is of course a great intestine and how this might happen.  
We know people want to travel.  
There are families separated as well as internationally.  
There is talk of the phased-in approach where fully vaccinated Canadians or people travelling into Canada would be able to forgo self-isolation.  
I think this is early but I think we will probably see these conversations rapidly accelerate which is about all I can say because we don't really have the specifics yet or even timelines.

>> Pat: Minute -- Minister McPhee?

>> The conversation is ongoing between governments and across the country and with the federal government they will ultimately take into account the advice of the medical officers of hello from across the country and conversations are happening at both of those tables but we await more advice from the medical profession and the public health experts but the conversations are ongoing and will be informed by those and that advice from medical professionals in the conversations that are happening throughout Canada about moving around and ultimately with the Americans and our border here in Canada.



>> Pat: Do have a second question John?

>> Reporter: Almost K., thank you.

>> Pat: I do like to thank everyone for their time today.

The next update will take place on Wednesday June 16th at 10:30 AM.

