

COVID-19 Facebook live update: March 10, 2021

>> Pat: Good morning.

I am Pat Living with the department of health and social services in your moderator for the COVID-19 update for Wednesday, March 10th.

We are joined by do you can premier, the honourable Sandy Silver and the Yukon's Chief Medical Officer of health, Dr Brendan Hanley.

Once again, our sign language interpreter Mary and Andre Bourcier are joining us.

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

We will call you by name in you will each have two questions.

Before we begin with our speakers I would like to verify that everyone can hear us?

If any reporters are having an issue, please e-mail ecoinfo@gov.yk.ca.

Premier Silver?

>> Thank you, Pat.

Thank you everybody for joining us today.

We are coming to you from the traditional territory of the Kwanlin Dün and the Taa'an Kwächän Council.

Very happy to be here today with Mary and Dr Hanley and Andre.

Again this week, we have no active cases of COVID-19 in the territory.

Great news.

We would not be in this position without this tremendous effort of Yukoners to stay safe and protect each other.

Again thank you very much for your efforts.

Practising the Safe Six plus one are still the best things you can do to protect our territory as we continue vaccine rollout so again, thank you.

We are now in the second week of the General clinic here in Whitehorse and we continue to hear positive feedback about how it is operating and helping people get immunized.

Thanks to team Fox and of course the two other teams.

Our teams have been back in those communities for the second shot as well as if forever you missed your first shot, you can get it this time as well.

I want everyone in the communities to know that there are plans in place to ensure that everybody receives their second shot, even if they just received their first shot within the past few days.

We have enough vaccines for everyone who wants one in we will be sending staff and doses back to each community to deliver the second shot so that you're all fully protected.

I strongly encourage everybody to get their shocked.

Check out online at Yukon.ca to book your appointment.

At the end of Monday, we have 15,500 -- 15,572 Yukoners that have received their first shot, and also 8,840 have received their second shot.

Yukon is leading the country and immunizations and it is so great to see the numbers grow every single day.

We're closer to our target of population immunity.

I know Yukoners and businesses are eager to hear what will happen next.

Our approach to managing the pandemic continues to be guided by the recommendations of Dr Hanley and his team.

We continue to follow the path forward plan, the phased approach to lifting COVID-19 restrictions in the territory.

Last week we provide an update to the plan that provides more details about our next steps.

We have learned so much over the past year filled with so many ups and downs.

So many unexpected developments.

We could never have guessed that the arrival of a safe and effective vaccine would be ready here today, and early in the brand-new year.

The updated plan better reflects our current situation and most importantly lays out a clear plan forward for transitioning to the next phase of pandemic response.

As Dr Hanley has said, the vaccine is our pathway out of this pandemic.

The rates of uptake -- rate is very promising in we feel very comfortable announcing some changes that we can look forward to as spring approaches.

The first update concerns the education of our grades ten to 12 students here in Whitehorse.

I have spoken with Dr Hanley, and Minister McPhee and confirmed that these students will be able to return to full-time in class learning next month.

This will involve planning and organization in the coming weeks.

Dr Hanley and his team in educational officials will be working with principals, school councils in Whitehorse as well as the teachers Association of Yukon to ensure students can return to full-time learning as soon as it is safe to do so.

I want to thank Minister McPhee and her team at the Department of Education, as well as all the teachers and staff at our schools across the territory for their absolute, tremendous work throughout this pandemic.

We have not seen the impact on other jurisdictions in Canada have, even though we have been affected drastically.

It speaks to the wonderful team of people looking to support students every day.

Thank you very much.

We know how eager people are to spend some time together and reconnect after a long and difficult year.

As the vaccine rate continues to increase, that is the most important thing we are playing -- paying attention to.

The case count as well remaining low.

We hope to be able to make adjustments to allow for larger gatherings and coming weeks.

Students are set to enjoy spring break next week and I know Dr Hanley and his team are definitely keeping an eye on that.

I encourage all students and families, I know the weather is getting nice and the sun's back.

We really need to get over a couple more hurdles here.

We need to continue following the Safe Six plus one over the break.

You know, God forbid that we see increasing gatherings and having to be worried about those.

Before it is time.

The longer spring days and the increased daylight as I mentioned, it is absolutely good news for our mental health.

It is good news all around and the opportunity to spend more time with friends and family.

We are getting close they are as well so again, good news coming on increasing our bubble sizes.

I know a lot of Yukoners have friends and family in other parts of the country and are looking forward to the opportunity to spend more time with them this year.

I'd like to see Dr Hanley speak this week and we have a conversation as well about his hopes for lifting travel restrictions in late spring, early summer.

This is very encouraging.

I have also spoken to fellow premiers about travel bubbles.

We all recognize the importance of individuals being able to visit with friends and family especially as people are immunized and it is safer to do so.

At the same time, Wayne to appear in the territories that mandatory self isolation has been absolutely critical in keeping us healthy and safe.

Together with the Northwest Territories, the North is leading the country and vaccinations.

The recent approval of the AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson vaccines is very great news for southern Canadians.

If the current trends continue, I am hopeful that we will be able to look at travel bubbles in May in June.

What we are able to adjust in the coming weeks and months will depend upon things continuing upon the same trajectory that we have been saying recently with case counts going down across the country, and vaccination rates increasing both here in the territory and in our neighbouring jurisdictions.

We also need a better understanding of the impact of the vaccine on the new virus variants.

That is still a concern but we are cautiously optimistic about what we are seeing.

I will leave it to Dr Hanley to elaborate in more detail on conversations that he has been having with how the medical community is thinking about the current situation.

But for now, we have been doing what we have been doing for a year now.

As soon as we have information to share we are giving that information and giving time for people to adjust and react.

This is really good news for Yukon but we really need to keep up our diligence with the Safe Six plus one in need to get people vaccinated.

For now I am very happy to share this update with Yukoners and want to reassure you that we will continue to share information as soon we have it possible to share.

When we are ready to reintroduce travel bubbles for example, we will tell you in advance so you can start making plans.

In the meantime, again I know I sound like a broken record, please get vaccinated.

Please continue to practice the Safe Six plus one, and make sure that you can talk with family, and friends and business associates about hesitancy and direct them to the most up-to-date information on Yukon.ca.

You know, we are seeing an end of COVID and a brighter future on the horizon, and the path forward still has many unknowns.

When I and to COVID, -- we will be dealing with COVID for a pretty long time.

One thing we know for certain one thing is certain -- is we will get through this if we continue to do what Yukoners do which is to continue to support one another as we have.

So please continue to beat Yukoners.

Continued to check in on each other, be patient, keep up the good work, be excellent to each other.

Thank you very much.

[Speaking Indigenous Language]

>> Pat: Thank you, Premier Silver.

Dr Hanley?

>> Thank you, Premier Silver, and good morning.

It was just over eight year ago, March 7th, 2020, that we announced the famous and heartbreaking news of the cancellation of the Arctic winter games.

On that day, COVID-19 hit us like an emotional tsunami.

It seems hard to believe that only a year has passed since COVID-19 so disrupted our lives in Yukon.

As the past 12 months have gone by, I have witnessed their remarkable strength, kindness, and generosity demonstrated by Yukoners.

We have banded together in a time of uncertainty, adapting to ongoing changes and showing a tremendous amount of resilience.

And we have done so together as a territory.

Our goal has been to contain cases to a minimum in order to prevent large outbreaks in to prevent those most vulnerable to the disease.

Let's continue to build on our current momentum and take the steps we need to move forward to a new post- pandemic Yukon that incorporates all the lessons learned from having lived through this last year.

First we need to strengthen our COVID protection.

A solid protection against COVID-19 will allow us to go to step two which is to gradually reduce restrictions within the territory.

Reinforcing the foundation means we must for now continue to follow existing health measures while the vaccine campaign is underway.

The risk of transmission from any future introduced cases drops.

Every additional person vaccinated helps to prevent spread from any case that does make its way in.

In this current phase, we are taking care to do those things that get us all safe and vaccinated.

These are the ways we set the foundation upon which we can slowly open things up.

Having reinforced the foundation we can then gradually reduce restrictions.

Enhanced protection which is the focus of step one, in other words, will allow us to reduce some of the restrictions that have constrained our day to day lives.

Step two marks our transition into a new phase of our recovery.

While there is not a definitive date of when this phase will occur, we have worked on establishing some benchmarks that we will need to make this transition.

Vaccinations is a key portion of enabling this transition in our aim is to work towards as high-end uptake of vaccine as we can get.

Our goal remains 75 percent of the adult population.

The closer we can get to that goal, no more confident we can be in our measures.

We are more than halfway there and it will take time and the combined efforts of many of us to continue towards our goal.

I guess I have been talking too much lightly.

The list of possible measures is laid out in that path forward document.

For the coming spring and summer we have identified a number of steps to help some of our initial plans.

As the premier announced we are planning for a spring day -- spring resumption of full day in class learning for grades ten to 12.

Although kids and teachers have adapted well and made the most of a difficult year, I have continued to hear from parents the kids are challenged without days.

We know students do better overall in a face-to-face learning environment.

Now that routines are well rehearsed and the worldwide experience of schooling in the face of COVID has grown substantially, I feel confident that we can do this safely.

Should we face significant outbreaks in schools associated with a surge of COVID activity we will continue to have contingencies for online learning in place.

In addition, we are working with Yukon University to support a return to face-to-face learning for September, 2021.

We will release guidelines for summer camps in outdoor sports.

I understand many of you're missing the sun filled days on the out fields in along with the initiates of showed by Yukon sports associations I hope to encourage more participation INAC don't -- outdoor activities such as softball and soccer this summer.

Our focus will also shift to revising our current recommendations regarding social bubbles and gathering sizes.

These decisions will be guided by our rate of vaccination in the territory in the weeks ahead.

The faster we can achieve a high level of immunity, the more likely we will be able to ramp up our reduction of current restrictions such as how many people you can see without needing to take precautionary measures.

Finally, I know that Globetrotters Yukoners tend to be, and many have begun to get to stir crazy.

As much as we all love Yukon, we miss seeing family and visiting the outside world from time to time.

Many of us have friends and family outside and many are aching to sniff the ocean air or tuck into the latest cuisine with loved ones.

At the same time there are those from outside our borders who are longing to come up and visit.

With that said, we are once again exploring the possibility of opening up to other jurisdictions, by modifying or removing quarantine requirements in the coming months.

Last year's BC bubble was a great success and we kept it going as long as we could.

Until the risk of importing cases from BC became too high to tolerate.

As an interim measure, before we can relax were stretch ends entirely, similar arrangements such -- showed once more be possible should COVID activity declined to acceptable levels in combination with vaccinated populations.

Wherever we go in the weeks to come, we will need as always to take time to get there.

Opening the doors widely and pretending the pandemic is over would be foolhardy when variants are on the rise in COVID activity is still high in much of the country.

But moderate, incremental measures should become more and more feasible with time with declining COVID activity and increasing vaccine uptake around the country, and eventually, around the world.

Even when we achieve the goal of vaccinating a majority of our population, a number of our people will remain at risk.

Children and youth are my at least away from getting a vaccine and we know that some people will not come forward.

But we don't abandon those who are not old enough or not accepting a vaccine.

We will do best when our measures are based on the overall public good and how protected we are as a community, rather than pursuing measures based on individual benefit.

As we have said from the beginning, we are all in this together.

I know that as we receive our vaccines, the day-to-day threat of COVID-19 may not get -- be as imminent and other parts of the country.

However, this may not be the case had we been more relaxed with our measures.

If our current public health measures were reduced at this point where nearly half are eligible vaccinate -- population is still not vaccinated we might still be putting ourselves at a substantial risk.

Eventually we hope the vaccine will do most of the heavy lifting in our fight against COVID-19.

However, until we do that, it is necessary the precautions remain in place in Yukoners seek vaccination.

In our path forward we will continue to track closely COVID-19 activity in Canada.

, old conversations with leaders and work on developing an approach to developing a gradual turn ever wiser to the things we always used to take for granted.

We have so much to look forward to in the coming months.

That is all for my update.

Thank you.

Remember to take care of each other, remember the Safe Six plus one, and stay well.

[Speaking Indigenous Language]

[Speaking French]

Thank you.

>> Pat: Thank you.

We will go now to our phone lines in we will begin with Luke, CKRW.

>> Reporter: Hi I have a question for Dr Hanley.

I saw that the state of Alaska was beginning to vaccinate the general population and they are going as young as people 16 years of age.

I am curious with students returning to full-time classes here in Yukon, if there is consideration of getting people that and vaccinated as well?

That.

>> Thank you, for the question.

So Alaska is using a combination of products for vaccines.

We have a single product so far, Moderna, and it is only approved for 18 years and up.

We don't have approval for 16 and 17 -year-olds for Moderna, whereas in Alaska they are using the Pfizer product which does have the 16 and upper global.

That is a gap, we realize that, and we are anxiously awaiting on phase three additional trials Moderna is undertaking with the 12 to 17 age group and looking for timelines around that.

The best toy to address the young people's need for a vaccine would be to do that with the modern our product if the approval works in a timely way.

Right now the priority is definitely 18 plus.

Of course as I said in my notes, we are very aware of the needs for children and youth.

That is a secondary priority, to be frank.

But it is important of course eventually to cover our children and youth.

So more to come as we get more information on new approvals for Moderna based on their trials, in other products in the pipeline.

>> Pat: Thank you.

Another question?

>> Reporter: No thank you.

>> Pat: Thank you.

John, CKRW?

>> Reporter: Hi.

So this goes to Dr Hanley on the premier, you ever his best to answer it.

Now that Canada has approved the Johnson & Johnson shot and the data has come out saying it is good for more rural communities because of the transportability due to the lack of refrigeration needed and that is a single dose, is the government of Yukon considering getting the Johnson & Johnson shot up North?

>> Thanks, it is a great question.

And yes, we have flagged interest in this vaccine because as you say, it has a number of potential advantages.

It is a one dose vaccination.

Secondly it is a frigid stable vaccine.

So much more amenable to transporting around two remote populations.

I think it would be a very good fit for some of our rotational workers, for instance those who come in and out of territory to work.

It is under consideration.

What we don't have yet is an allocation schedule for Johnson & Johnson, and that's from the company.

There is no date as for when supplies will be available.

So it is not a final decision.

I think ultimately it will be an advantage for us to have more than one product but if the timing works better for Moderna in terms of covering these other populations, then that may become our first choice.

>> Pat: Thank you.

Second question?

>> Reporter: I did, but I no longer do think you.

>> Pat: Thank you.

Haley, Yukon News?

>> Reporter: Thank you.

The questions I have our related travel bubbles.

When we refer to travel bubbles, does that kind of infer the bubbles that have existed before with NWT or BC, or are we looking at potentially the bigger bubble?

Just wanted that clarified.

>> Yeah, I think-- I mean obviously, we have experience from the bubbles that we had, the arrangements at least that we had initially with the northern territories, what was a reciprocal bubble which became a one-way bubble as you might say, and with BC it was always a one-way arrangement because BC always had open borders.

I think there are a number of possibilities and again, it just depends on what is happening with COVID activity and how one connects to the other.

So for instance, if we were to have a northern bubble, we would be able to sustain that from the other territories' point of view if we then had an opening arrangement with BC.

Last year there was intense interest in also having arrangements with Alberta, for example, so in my mind, it is all on the table.

It depends how they all connect with one another on many of the, I guess, other logistical considerations.

But from a public health point of view in terms of making lives easier for Yukoners, if we are comfortable with the importation risk, then I would be supportive of either similar arrangements to what we had last year or other arrangements with other jurisdictions.

>> Pat: Premier Silver?

>> I don't have too much to add, other than we won't take offence that you're not in the room today.

You normally are.

[Laughter]

>> But too, it will be different than last year because there are different variables.

We have a vaccine this time around and Dr Hanley and his team are watching the epidemiology and concerns of the variance.

It is plural.

We are looking at doing our best to have less restrictions, but again, doing it in the safest way possible.

>> Pat: Thank you.

Haley, another question?

>> Reporter: I do.

My second question, we have referred to Alaska opening up, being the first US state open up vaccinations to its whole population.

I am curious, it is probably a long way off, but is the government looking for some opportunities at the border with Alaska may open before Canada opens its international border with the states?

Is there consideration that that might be something taking place in the Yukon?

>> Very good question.

And Dr Hanley -- Dr Hanley and I were talking about that this week as well.

It is definitely a conversation for the next Council of the Federation and we brought it up in the past.

The law has changed in the last several months.

A lot of focus about the Canadian health transfer and I am very eager to get back to the conversation of okay federal government, what are we doing as far as different countries?

What is the approach?

Are you looking at you know, Alaska as part of the lower 48 but it isn't?

So it is really in their hands.

I can feel Minister Streicker right now thinking about what these ramifications are for our internal border as well because it is kind of a hand in glove conversation, we will have to consider what we do with our borders to allow for people moving around.

But it is definitely a conversation that we have been putting forward to the Council of the Federation now that spring is turning into summer.

>> Yeah, the only thing I would add to that is, although-- we are very close as we are with other northern jurisdictions, but we have a close relationship with Alaska.

My counterpart in Alaska as well.

But it has to be recognized that they still have a long way to do -- to go.

They are literally in that battle between COVID cases and the potential for a another surge and vaccines.

They have fabulous vaccine uptake, as you know the best in the US.

But they do have some challenges ahead.

Yes this is definitely a conversation that we are following and interested in.

>> Pat: Thank you.

Tim, Whitehorse Star?

>> Reporter: Hello, thank you.

First question is I therefore Dr Hanley or the premier.

While this is great news, the changes that are coming, it is pretty much an about face from what you have been saying for a number of weeks so I was wondering if either of you could expand how this decision-making process happened, and such a great turnaround?

>> Thanks for the question.

I am trying to figure out where that about-face happened.

I think-- I know that what we have said is we will continue to follow COVID activity.

We have been planning this path forward for a number of weeks, and we continue-- I would say my phrase of the week is cautiously hopeful, that we are not over this yet.

We still have significant importation risk, we still have high variance activity and increasing variant activity in the country.

At the same time, we're in this era of rapidly increasing vaccination that gives us a comfort level to start making some predictions.

We hope to have some idea of timelines to talk about what we think we can do safely within a reasonable timeframe.

I think it is just putting a little bit more flesh on not plan on a direction that we have been working for, for months.

>> Yeah, I think I share Dr Hanley's...

Little bit of, I don't know.

I don't think this is an about face at all.

Even two weeks ago at our announcement, quoting verbatim from Dr Hanley, we will know more in two weeks.

That was about how the variants are spreading and clustering in all parts of the world but also on vaccination rates.

We have been very clear these are the things we are looking at.

We have been very clear in the pathway forward what things can change based on these things, and I am perplexed that this might look to you as a change in direction.

But to us, it has been a slow and steady process the whole way around.

>> Pat: Next question, Tim?

>> Reporter: Yes.

Regarding the rates for the regions released on Facebook the other day, any explanation for why a couple of their regions are probably below expectation as far as their uptake of the virus?

In particular the central region which figures show is about 44 percent.

>> I'm going to hand this off to Dr Hanley because I think he answered it very well this week actually.

>> So...

And again, I really-- I think I said yesterday, I had not really paid much attention to those numbers even though I know there was an intense desire to view them publicly.

I will be much more interested in how things are looking after this current round.

Because you're really comparing some communities that haven't had their second round that haven't had -- already had two rounds.

We know and we have had that experience even this week that many people who were not ready with the first round are coming forward for their first dose on the second round of community visits.

The other thing is that there are so many variables, and how they play out in very small communities, you know, you could have a few people coming forward or not and that can make a substantial difference to percentages.

This is why we have always been very leery, I would say that premier has and I have as well, of kind of pitting one community against another.

This is not a competition.

But is an overall aim to work together to get two goals.

But there can be factors such as, how is transport arranged to enable people to get to the immunization facility?

What is the influence of social media, or influencers in different communities, either one way or the other.

Where are people getting their information from?

What is the timing like clean there have been examples where it just happened that there were a cluster of people that were not present in the community at the time.

So there are so many different variables, but we are-- as these visits are happening right now and as the third visits are being arranged, we are also in literally daily conversations, multiple conversations through my team in through other government departments as well, community services, and...

Other departments through communications in liaising with community leaders and liaising with people in the communities in understanding some of these factors that are particular to one community and in addressing those factors, and providing that information.

The community engagement process I have emphasized from the very beginning, that we do this by understanding where community concerns are coming from and addressing those as we go.

So this is a work in progress.

The community visits have overall been a great success and we are continuing to see increasing uptake around all of the communities.

>> Pat: Thank you.

We will move now to Claudiane, Radio-Canada.

>> Reporter:

[Speaking French]

>> Interpreter: The changes in education, what makes you feel comfortable at this point to authorize school for grades ten to 11 to go back into their classroom next month?

[Speaking French]

[Speaking French]

>> Reporter:

[Speaking French]

>> Interpreter: So what are the factors that you will consider when you will look into opening up borders, either with other provinces or with other territories?

What are you going to consider to eliminate your decision?

[Speaking French]

>> Pat: We will move now to Philippe, CBC Yukon.

>> Reporter: Thank you.

I wonder how long they mobile teams are continuing their work in communities.

Do we know yet how long that campaign the last?

>> I will take a stab at that.

So right now, there is planning for a third visit, and it is almost like a transition you could say for the visits.

These are not going to be the big teams doing the third visits, because by and large we are talking about smaller numbers of people that will need either their second dose or potentially first dose.

So it is almost like this, I would say incremental arrangement.

Really the aim is a handover to the community health centres.

The nurses they are trained to vaccinate her's who gave immunizations all the time.

The thrust of these initial visits of course have been dealing with large numbers and with the particularities of the Moderna vaccine.

But now that we are much more familiar with what it takes to move Moderna around and we're dealing with diminishing groups are numbers of people, it becomes much easier to do that planning.

It might be to do a third visit and leave a couple of vials behind to take care of those first doses' need for second dose, and so on.

I think what we are really seeing is a progressive handover to the community health centres for ongoing vaccination needs.

>> Pat: Premier Silver?

>> I will add, but not in that, Tomorrow is the first day for walk-ins in the clinic here in Whitehorse as well.

Another important milestone when it comes to getting that overall population vaccinated.

>> Pat: Thank you.

Second question?

>> Reporter: No thank you.

>> Pat: Thank you.

Then we move to Laurie at L'Aurore boréale.

>> Reporter:

[Speaking French]

>> Interpreter: The question is about return to classrooms for higher grades.

Given that we are going into spring break, are you afraid that spring break might derail the plans to have students back in classrooms?

[Speaking French]

>> Pat:

[Speaking French]

>> Reporter:

[Speaking French]

>> Interpreter: Could you please tell us a bit more about what we could hope or expect of -- if outdoor sports are more permitted than they are right now we?

[Speaking French]

>> Pat: Thank you.



I would like to thank everyone for their time today and advise there will be no COVID-19 update next week.

We will continue to share information as necessary including any information on public health issues through regular media.

The next update will take place on March 24th at 10:30.

Wednesday, March 24th, at 10:30 AM.

