



COVID-19 livestream transcript Wednesday, March 16, 2022

>> Good morning. 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 Dr. Catherine Elliott, the acting Chief Medical Officer of Health. Thank you to Mary Thiessen for our ASL interpretation and to Andre Bourcier for providing our French translation. Following the remarks from our speakers, we will go to the media on the phone lines for a round of questions. I'll call you by name and you'll each have two questions. Before we begin, I'd like to verify everyone can hear us. If any reporters are having problems please email ecoinfo@yukon.ca. I will now hand it over to Premier Silver.

>> Thank you very much, Renée. And thank you, good morning everyone, it's great to be here, broadcasting live from the traditional territory of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council. Thank you to Dr. Elliott and her team for joining me here as well. It has been two weeks since our last update. As we continue to monitor from Omicron wave and also lifting of public health measures, there will be fewer of these updates as we move forward. I'm happy to report that health indicators continue to trend in the right direction. This doesn't mean that we can forget about COVID-19, as you all know, but the risk has decreased in recent weeks and there is no longer a need for temporary health measures that have been put in place. As of this Friday, March 18, we will be lifting the requirement to wear masks, along with the requirement to show proof of vaccination to access designated sites. Now, it is strongly recommended that you do wear a mask particularly when you're in a crowded area or where it's difficult to physically distance, but masks will no longer be required. As I said before, I continue to plan on wearing a mask in crowded places. It is still a way to, not only protect yourself, but also those around you from COVID-19. This will come as a relief to some but keep in mind that businesses and other venues, they still can request people to wear a mask before entering a space if they so choose. They can also continue to request that patrons show proof of vaccination if they so choose. We continue to provide proof of vaccination credentials for those who are vaccinated and the vaccine verifier app is still available for download. We recognize that these are extremely important tools to support individuals and businesses and organizations to make informed decisions. We also know that each business and organization will do

what they need to do, will take the steps that they feel are necessary to protect their staff and their patrons. Please respect these requests and any other health and safety protocols that are in place from business to business. We must support each other and continue to lift each other up with kindness and understanding, because that's what we do as Yukoners. As of Friday, our government will also be lifting the state of emergency. We will continue to monitor the situation and we are fully prepared to return to a state of emergency if necessary, but it is no longer necessary at this time. Similarly, last summer, we were in a good spot when we lifted the state of emergency. When the Delta wave arrived, we quickly responded. We at that time reintroduced the state of emergency to help protect the health and the safety of Yukoners. We remain nimble and responsive to what is happening in the territory. We have seen how quickly COVID-19 and its variants can infiltrate our lives and cause us to readjust. We have introduced temporary measures as they were necessary. And we kept them in place only for as long as necessary to protect health and safety. We will continue to follow that approach. I want to pause here to thank Yukoners for taking precautions and for following the public health measures over the last few months and years. I know it has not been easy. It has taken a toll on each and every single one of us. Your efforts to help our territory have been seen. You've helped our territory prevent the most severe outcomes from the pandemic. And for that, I'm truly grateful and I can't thank Yukoners enough. Students and educators across the territory have been enjoying a well-deserved spring break. Dr. Elliott and her team have been working very closely with the Department of Education to update guidelines based on our current COVID-19 situation. For the time being, mask use in our schools and for staff and educators in early learning child care centres, will remain in place. Students and staff in Yukon schools must continue to wear masks in all indoor school settings including classrooms, hallways, and also on the school buses. Now, this will allow Dr. Elliott and her team to assess the impacts of families returning from March break. Starting next week, some measures will be relaxed. Schools can resume inter-school activities. Schools can participate in sports and recreational events, including arts and drama, with schools and with students and schools outside of their own school, which is great. Early learning programs will also be available to welcome visitors. Once again, providing that they wear masks and follow the existing guidelines for these settings. Additionally, provided that the COVID-19 situation remains stable, starting April 19 of this year, after the Easter weekend, schools will be able to resume out-of-territory field trips. Again, I want to take pause here to thank everyone learning and working in our schools, and all of our school communities for your flexibility, your resilience, your innovation as well and your patience. Thank you very much. We are in the position we are because of your caring and informed efforts. Thank you very much for doing the work to protect those around you. As of Friday, the last remaining public health measure is the vaccine

requirement for employment by the Yukon government. Now, as you know, employees that have not yet attested to the vaccination requirement have been placed on leave without pay. I want to, again, pause here to thank all of our employees for your service. The government provides a range of programs and services that make all the difference in the world in the lives of Yukoners. And every contribution, every contribution is appreciated. As we announced earlier this month, we plan to start welcoming back many of these employees next month. We have been working with Dr. Elliott and her team to identify how we can safely reintegrate unvaccinated employees into our workplace. It remains essential that we protect the most vulnerable and those working in high risk settings. We will continue to require vaccines for those who work in high risk settings. That includes long term care homes, residential substance use programs, hospitals, shelters, group homes for children in government care, correctional centres, public health centres and public health clinics. This requirement will continue to apply to employees, contractors and volunteers working in these settings. In non-government, high risk settings, we will continue to require employers to implement policies for employees, contractors and volunteers, to be vaccinated as appropriate for their settings. This requirement will apply to current workers, as well as any new workers in these settings. Now, we are taking this step to protect the health and safety of vulnerable people accessing services in high risk settings, along with the staff that serve them. I will pause here again, and I thank everyone working in these settings for their efforts over the past two years and their commitment to keeping the most vulnerable Yukoners safe. All of these employees who do not work, all those employees who do not work in these vulnerable settings will be allowed to return to work as of April 4. I know that this will come as a relief to many employees and their families, and I want to thank them all for their service, their patience as well over the past few months. This measure was introduced to protect the health and safety of our workforce, as well as the Yukoners we serve each and every day. I know all of our employees are dedicated to the work that they do and take pride in delivering the programs and services that Yukoners rely on. We are looking forward to welcoming these folks back. Now, moving forward, you can continue to find the most updated COVID-19 information online at yukon.ca. We continue to monitor the situation closely, to provide updates as necessary. I want to thank everybody for watching today's update. As always, be patient, be kind. We are all travelling at varying speeds when it comes to the pandemic and forging ahead. But we are definitely all in this together, and I thank everybody for their attention and their diligence over the last years and months. Thank you very much, I'll turn it over to Dr. Elliott.

>> Thank you Premier Silver. Good morning everyone. [Indigenous language]. I trust you're having a wonderful spring break so far, perhaps some people have been able to

travel, see family, to visit, or to hug loved ones that you haven't seen in a long time. Some have been able to gather with others in new ways or dance and enjoy live music, and that's wonderful. That's okay. For many, it is a difficult time and with the lifting of measures, it can cause uncertainty for many people. It's a time to make this change and people each go at their own pace, and that's okay. Please be mindful that other people's comfort levels may be different than your own as we move into this new kind of everyday. Here's what's happening around the territory today. There are currently 47 active cases in the territory, and the number of new cases today is eight. The most recent reports show 127 hospitalizations due to COVID-19 and a total of 23 deaths since the pandemic began. Yukoners have asked for a little bit of more information about those who have died and what we're seeing in the territory. What we're seeing here is, as it's been seen across the country and around the world, that the most important risk factor for disease is not being up to date or not being vaccinated at all. In Yukon, we've seen we're just as vulnerable to COVID-19 severe outcomes, as in other places. Over 90% of the Yukon residents who have died of COVID-19 were among people whose vaccinations were not up to date when they became infected. That means that either they hadn't had two doses of an mRNA vaccine or, if they've had two doses, they were more than six months from that second dose. That booster is so, very important. Almost 70% of the people who died were not vaccinated at all. That means they'd had no vaccination or it hadn't been 14 days since their first dose and when they got infected. Every one of these deaths has been a tragic loss of life in the territory. This is why I hope that everyone continues to keep their vaccines up to date. Vaccination continues to be the best way to protect yourself, your family and your community from severe illness due to COVID-19. Many people who are vaccinated have acquired COVID-19, as there have been so many infections in this Omicron wave. That's what we expected. Given the number of infections, very few people have had severe outcomes, and very few have died. For those who do get COVID-19, it's important to know when to seek help. If your symptoms are not improving, or if you need medical attention during this time, please see your healthcare provider. Call 811 to speak with a registered nurse, or call 911. I also want to advise that there is a positive person in Copper Ridge Place with COVID-19. We've seen many such cases in our long term care facilities, as throughout the territory. And, as is routine for all situations and facilities, the chief medical health officer physicians, our team and YCDC, are looking working closely with continuing care to manage the situation. We have closed one unit, where this person lives, to visitors right now, to allow people time to recover and to investigate. And the families have been notified. We recognize that this is hard for patients and it's hard for families and we will keep this time as short as possible and open as soon as possible. I'm really so grateful for the partnership that we have with continuing care, and for the staff at Copper Ridge Place who have worked so hard and

are dedicated to this situation. And though we're moving out of the worst of the Omicron wave, it's clear from the case activity and the information I've provided today that the pandemic is here for a while yet. We see this in the case activity. Case activity is a really important thing. And, I know I've been asked so much about this. How do we know how much COVID-19 is circulating in the territory? When, where, and how much? These are the questions we ask every time we do a risk assessment. We do this formally every week, I do it every day as I see new information coming in. This is determined by reviewing our surveillance indicators. Talked a lot about this in the past, but just to remind you, we look at the case counts, the percent positivity. We look at the outbreaks, we look at the severe outcomes, we look at how many people are staying home and away from work and school because they have symptoms. We look at these numbers and indicators in Whitehorse and we look at them in communities. These help inform our next steps. So now, at this time, case activity is at a stable and manageable level, with still a considerable amount of transmission that is stable and not climbing rapidly, or climbing at all. This case activity is reduced, compared to earlier in the Omicron wave, as we saw in late December and early January of this year. And it's at a manageable level, it is stable. And we continue to have excellent protections in our vulnerable settings. Protections in these settings are important because of the vulnerability of these groups to severe illness and to dying from COVID-19. We also continue to have protections in settings where we have our young people. And these are important because we have an obligation to protect our young people. Many of the very little people, those who are under five, have not had the opportunity to be vaccinated, and our vaccination rates among our children and youth, although they are good, could be better. We've all had the opportunity now to be vaccinated if we are five or above. And the time has come to start moving from the enforcement of measures to discretionary use of protections that we have come to call the public health measures. The time for each of us to use our own discretion as we move toward this new kind of every day. I want to talk a little bit more about what that means. While public health measures will become discretionary on Friday, it means we're no longer required to wear masks in public settings. Protections will still be mandatory in certain settings. That's right, there are certain settings where masks are required, and other measures will still remain important, such as being vaccinated. These include-- and, the measures will be different in each setting. But, they include measures such as healthcare settings, clinics, hospitals, long term care facilities. You'll see that some measures will still remain required on airplanes and in schools. And this is how we protect the most vulnerable, when there remains considerable case activity. Some workplaces and businesses will continue to require masks, and that's okay. And, while masks will not be mandatory in public settings anymore, I'm going to strongly recommend that people use masks in places where it's hard to physically distance. If you're in a crowded place at a store or a

large group event, this is a great place to wear a mask, I know I will. Businesses and other organizations can still require masks for their patrons or their staff, and even proof of vaccination for patrons if they choose to do that, so please respect that. And some people will choose to wear masks because, maybe they have a condition that makes them more vulnerable. Perhaps they plan to visit an Elder or a grandparent. Perhaps they don't want to get or spread COVID. Or maybe because it's just good manners in that situation, and that's okay. At the end of the day, masks are one extra layer of protection that each of us can use to protect ourselves and those around us. I also want to take this opportunity to talk a little bit more about testing availability. Free, at-home rapid tests are available in Whitehorse at both Centennial Motors and at the Visitor Information Centre, as well as in many Yukon communities. If you are experiencing symptoms, at-home rapid tests are a simple way to find out whether you are positive and you have COVID, in as little as 15 minutes. Remember, these are a red light but they are not a green light. We all know stories of people who have had one or two, or maybe even three, negative tests, only later to find out that they've had COVID. So, remember how to use your rapid test safely. For those who live in Yukon communities or, for those who are higher risk of negative outcomes of severe outcomes related to COVID-19, you are eligible for a lab-based PCR test, and this includes those who are pregnant, those who live or work in a congregate setting, somebody who is more at risk for severe disease because of a health condition. Someone who has been assessed by their health care provider and that provider has requested testing because of their medical assessment. Someone who is responsible for directly caring for patients or vulnerable people, and someone who is not vaccinated. Lab-based PCR tests are available through community health centres, at the COVID-19 Testing and Assessment Centre in Whitehorse, which is located beside the motor vehicles office across the parking lot from Boston Pizza. The testing centre is open Monday to Friday, from 8:30 am to 4 pm, with a short closure between 12 and 12:30. It is also open on weekends and, starting March 26, it will be open from 8:30 to noon. You can book a COVID-19 test online by visiting yukon.ca or contacting your Community Health Centre. We are at the next turn in this journey with COVID-19 and this is a wonderful step on our journey. This Friday, we will move from acquiring public health measures to using them in a discretionary manner. I understand that some will be celebrating, while others may feel unsettled. Everyone will take this at their own pace and that's okay. For me, I am grateful. I am grateful to live in a community, in a place where we all pull together, in a place where people are used to using the layers of protection that work so well, and using their COVID sense about where and when to use them. Where we can all accept each other's choices and live well together. Let's all keep, keeping ourselves and each other healthy, by finding creative ways to enjoy this beautiful time of year and to take care of each other with these protective layers. When you gather, please use your

COVID sense by keeping your vaccinations up to date. So very important. Selecting a wise group size, just enough people, not more. Meeting in places with fresh air and larger spaces. If you have a chronic condition, or are older, or are not up-to-date on your vaccinations, use a few more of these layers for protections. Please check out the very simple to use risk assessment tool at yukon.ca/assess-your-risk. As I close today please, as always, if you're feeling sick, even with mild symptoms, stay home and away from those who are most vulnerable, even if they live with you. And finally, I'll say it once again. Everyone will make their own choices at this time and that's okay. Let's all be patient, be kind, be respectful towards each other. [Indigenous language]. Thank you, merci.

>> Thank you Dr. Elliott and thank you Premier Silver. We'll now move over to the question-answer session with media. A reminder to reporters, please identify which speaker you would like to answer your question before you start. And please, also remember to mute and unmute yourselves. We'll go to the phone lines and we will start with Luke at CKRW.

>> Thank you. This first question would be for Premier Silver. I'm wondering with the state of emergency being lifted, if there are still requirements for isolation that can be enforced under the Public Health and Safety Act.

>> Yeah, the Public Health and Safety Act has its own abilities and levers if necessary. But, with the ending of the state of emergency, we will see the ending of public health orders, we'll see the ending of mask orders, enforcement orders therein, pharmacy authorization order, and also the education measures order as well. Again, Luke, it's about monitoring the situation--we are no longer in a state of emergency. So, we're shutting down that, which is great to see. And again, the shout outs today are based upon, you know, the actions of Yukoners. You know, we're a highly vaccinated population, folks are paying attention quite a bit to the monthly, weekly updates and doing their best to pivot with us and we can't be more thankful for the efforts of Yukoners. Outside of the state of emergency, we have acts that allow us to continue to monitor and to make sure that we do everything we possibly can, outside of the state of emergency, to continue to keep our population healthy and safe.

>> Thank you. Luke, do you have a second question?

>> I do, this one is also for the premier. There are reports coming out today that the federal government is going to drop the COVID-19 testing requirements for travellers coming into Canada as of April 1, and I'm just wondering what your reaction to that is and what that might mean for maybe a recovered tourism industry here in the Yukon?

>> That's a great question, Luke. It is very welcome news, that is for sure. Minister Pillai has been working tirelessly with his federal counterparts, representing the Yukon and our very unique concerns here when it comes to our partners in the tourism industry, and our friends and neighbours in Alaska, but also the traffic that's going to be coming up from the lower 48 as well. You know, we have great numbers right now for bookings, everybody's cautiously optimistic, as far as a great travel season and this is just one more, you know, very, very positive and extremely timely announcement. We'll know, we also know that Dawson and Whitehorse, as far as international travel, great news there as well. So we're really poised, you know, again, a shout out to Ranj, to Minister Pillai and his team, who have been providing supports for the tourism sector. Every person that I know that works in the tourism sector, they're definitely grateful for the support, they want to earn their own money, they want to showcase this amazing place that we call home, and before the pandemic, it was so great to see, you know, an actual plan coming out from our government for tourism, working in partnership with those businesses, to get back on track to one of the most beautiful destinations in the world for our tourism season this summer, including international. I think that's very, very welcome news to some of the most amazing tourism operators on the planet that live in the Yukon.

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

>> Yes, good morning. First question I guess, is probably for Dr. Elliott. Just wondering, there was a bit of an uptick in cases, and certainly the testing positivity rate went quite high for a bit. Did you waver at some point on recommending the restrictions be lifted on Friday, in the state of emergency?

>> Thanks for this question. Yeah, you know, with the small numbers we have, we can expect to see the case counts and the percent positivity jump up and down. That's part of having small numbers in the territory. And, I continue to watch them and when we have a day with, you know, some upticks in our case activity in any of the indicators, I often will ask questions and my team will investigate it more, and we'll look into it and we'll watch. In a day or two, often things will come down again. So, I'm constantly watching these things and it takes a trend, it takes a continuous number of days and this is why we average things over three days and seven days, to really show whether we're seeing a significant change. As March break ends, and we move to discretionary measures, you know, how many people get vaccinated, all of these things we'll be watching as we move into the next part of our journey. So, absolutely I watch these all the time. They do inform my recommendations to government, I certainly don't jump on every single change every day we have a higher case count or a higher percent

positivity, or one school has a lot of people absent. We put them all together, and I use my clinical judgment, in terms of how that fits in with what the right next step is here for Yukon. Thank you.

>> Thank you. Tim, do you have a second question?

>> Yes, and this would be for the premier. Both you and Dr. Elliott were touching on, that the decision to drop the vaccine passports and the masking, etc. Basically, all the health restrictions could be a little bit controversial. Are you expecting people to have a tough time dealing with it? There's already some concerns that people are wearing masks more as a political statement than a health statement. How do you think Yukoners are going to react? And is there anything the government can do to help?

>> Yeah I think, as far as wearing it as a political statement, that's a small piece of the puzzle. I mean, you could say the same thing Tim, back when, my community of Dawson, the very first person to wear a mask in that community and people were looking at them as, "Is this a statement?" And the response from that person was, "No." This is me showing people that I'm in on it, like, I want to make sure that I'm part of the community and I want to show people that I'm here, not only to protect myself, but to also protect the people that I love around me. So sure, there's going to be some of that, in any topic, in any subject. There's going to be a political lens to it. I think the message is really clear from Dr. Elliott and her team and from myself as well. I'm going to continue to wear a mask, and I want people to respect my choice to do so. Businesses are going to decide, as well, what is safe and comfortable for them. And I've had a lot of conversations with different businesses as to which way they're going to go. But I think most people are at the same place, Tim, where sweeping government policy for the pandemic, it's time. It's time for the onus to be put back on individuals for responsibility. Dr. Elliott talked very prolifically about, even for folks before the pandemic, who had compromised immune systems or comorbidities, you know, had a path in their lives already set forward, as far as where they're going to go, how they're going to engage with others and be in different settings, or not go to different things based upon the size of that, of that gathering. So, I think what you're going to notice, I hope, I know, that is a lot more understanding because Yukoners have been through two years of a pandemic and even my, opinions and knowledge about masks three years ago, compared to today has changed drastically. And I think that that's what you're going to see.

>> Thank you. We'll now move to Jim at Yukon News.

>> Hi there. My first question is for Dr. Elliott, I was just wondering, with a requirement

for mask use in schools and other educational settings still in place, what markers or data are of most interest to you when making a choice to keep that in place or drop it in future?

>> Yeah so, we've taken a step in schools, as we go back after the spring break, there will be more mixing between schools, so more tournaments, more arts events, more debates, or political groups or theatre or, you know, all the things that are wonderful that we can do between schools. And that's a step, that's a mixing step, where we're going to see more contact between different students. And at the same time, we've chosen to maintain the masks. In the classroom, as well as everywhere in the school setting, where it's necessary. And this is because we like to go stepwise, we like to be cautious, we heard from communities and school communities that masks are important, because in some schools there's a fair bit of movement, a lot of kids together, a lot of youth together at the same time. And also, we're going to continue to watch case activity in schools. So what do I watch for schools, I watch absenteeism, I watch the case counts in those age groups that are in schools, and actually early learning centres as well. So this can go for both, actually. So absenteeism, those case counts by age group and percent positivity by age group. I talked to, I talked to my YCDC colleagues, who talk directly to schools, if there's any question or need for interpretation of those reports. And then, of course, we look at if there's any severe outcomes, if anybody's been to the emergency department, or people needing extra care, in those settings. I also look at the vaccination rates. So, looking forward to the future when people under five can have a vaccine. I'm happy that we have vaccines for children and for youth. And those rates of vaccination, and now for youth for boosters, need to come up in order to have less transmission amongst our children. So, these are all the things that I'm looking at. I'm assessing this as a really active time, as we come back after spring break, we often will see case activity at a time when there's been mixing in new crowds and people come together. So, this is a very active time of monitoring all these indicators, as we look forward to schools, and also looking at how the changes that were made, and the ways that we've enabled more healthy activities between schools, how those will impact the case activity at this time. Thank you.

>> Thank you. Jim, do you have a second question?

>> Yes, I do. And I think that the Premier might be able to answer this one. With vaccine requirements still in place for, you know, other workers, contractors and volunteers in the sort of health care setting, will that apply to rural ambulance volunteers, ambulance volunteers in the rural communities?

>> Yeah, so your ability to enter into hospitals is very clear, as far as the mandate goes. You know, when it comes to EMS, if you're a volunteer in EMS, you'd be severely

hampered if you weren't vaccinated in that job or position, as a volunteer. There's ways, and I'm sure we'll leave this up to further conversations, with Dr. Elliott as well, for somebody to volunteer and maybe get some training, as far as the specifics of the job, or help out in settings where you're not accessing these facilities. But the, as far as the facilities goes, they're very clear as to who can enter into a hospital or a care facility, but there's no specific requirement, I guess, for a volunteer. You can still volunteer in EMS, you're going to be very hampered into what you could actually do if you are not vaccinated, and if these ambulances are heading towards these health care facilities.

>> Thank you. We'll now move to Paul at CBC.

>> Hi, can you hear me? >> We can, thanks Paul.

>> Okay, I guess this question is for the Premier, just picking up on this move towards more discretionary use of public health measures. My question would be, what would you say to those people who are immunocompromised that you touched on that, that maybe don't see this as necessarily the way things were before the pandemic began. COVID is still out there, they are still vulnerable, and maybe wonder about this move now to lift all public health restrictions, especially, you know, the mask mandate, seemed to be fairly effective with a fairly low social cost. So yeah, my question would be, what do you say to people who are concerned about dropping all public health restrictions when we are still in a pandemic?

>> Yeah, it's a great question. And we're guided by science and by our medical professionals. Because there's no requirement under a Civil Emergency Measures Act, doesn't mean that the officials, the health authority, and others are going to lose the narrative of the most important thing for us to do and that we've done over the last two years, and even before that, it's the health and safety of Yukoners. The measures, as far as the vaccine requirement, applying in these settings, would be an answer to that question. It's, you're right, that we are dropping some public health measures, you know, in general, in areas where we see where we can be relaxing. But we're also making a message that if you're working with the most vulnerable, there still needs to be requirements. Also, those folks that are compromised, immune compromised. Yeah like, it's extremely important that we, as a government, and the Department of Health and Social Services, as a department, has their best interests in mind when it comes to them accessing services, and relying on the supports that we do have. So, even though we're moving out of a state of emergency, even though we are lifting requirements, lifting medical, public health measures, it doesn't mean that we've turned a blind eye. At all. We're now focusing in region by region, setting by setting, and understanding

the health concerns in each building, and we will act accordingly to make sure that Yukoners accessing the services that they rely on, can do so in the most healthy possible way, as we move from pandemic to endemic.

>> Thank you. Paul, do you have a second question?

>> I do. And this would be for Dr. Elliott. A month or so ago, Dr. Elliott, you pointed to the positivity rate in the territory when it was at around 35% and said that was considered very high. The positivity rate today is about 38%, and it's been high for the last number of days. I'm just wondering what we are to make of that. If, in the past, that's kind of been an indicator that maybe there was a lot more COVID circulating in the community that wasn't reflected in the case count. So yeah, what are we to make of that positivity rate? And does that suggest that we might see cases increase dramatically? You know, when more public health measures are lifted in the coming days?

>> Yeah, so the positivity rate is the percentage of those people who are tested who test positive. We have altered this by our testing policies, procedures and programs. And so what we see now, and the variant that is here, has also altered this for us. So, case activity in the territory is not reflected by the case counts alone. I expect in the Omicron wave we've had thousands of cases, many of which never had a PCR test and will not be recorded in our data. I'm very comfortable with this. I need people to get tested who are at risk of severe outcomes or at risk of exposing other people who are at risk of severe outcomes, because in their workplace, etc. And that's who requires a PCR test. The positivity rate and the case count go hand in hand, as well as the testing rate, the school absenteeism and work absenteeism, and the other surveillance indicators that we look at. We have found that with the current level of case activity, based on all these indicators, that this is a manageable level. If, what sort of responsibility each of us takes as we move forward, will definitely impact whether cases go up or cases go down. The more people who are vaccinated, you can transmit considerably less to other people. If you're vaccinated and you get infected, you are less likely to get infected, and you're really protected from those severe outcomes. So, please get vaccinated. If you go to a crowded space and cram a lot of people into a room and breathe heavily, there's a very, very good chance that you're at a super spreader event of Omicron. Because there's a lot of case activity. Omicron is a milder illness, with all of these cases, we've seen the hospitalizations and the number of deaths are similar to previous waves. Nevertheless, yes, we could create a big spreading event in Yukon if we're not wise. So, being COVID wise is very, very important. I don't like to have to use mandatory measures and mandate that we have to do X, Y and Z. I will recommend those measures when they're needed, because we're in

a really dire situation. Now, I'm asking everybody to use their COVID sense, use your wisdom, be wise, accept each other and what decisions you make. And, when you're sick, stay home. Get vaccinated. These are all the ways that we are all going to work together to keep the COVID-19 pandemic in a reasonable situation and keep things discretionary. Thank you.

>> Thank you. We'll now move to Claudiane at Radio Canada.

>> Yes, oui. [Speaking French].

>> So Dr. Elliott, could you please explain in French why we are keeping some safety measures in the schools across the Yukon?

>> Oui, merci pour la question. [Speaking French]. [Speaking French]. [Speaking French].

>> Merci. Une autre question, Claudiane?

>> Oui. [Speaking French].

>> So, Dr. Elliott, we're removing some of the restrictions right now, except for some groups of employees, except for the schools. And there is a number of these exceptions. So, are these exceptions going to stay with us for a very long time? What is the timeframe to removing all of these exceptions? Should we expect that they will stay with us for a very long time?

>> Merci pour la question. [Speaking French]. [Speaking French]. [Speaking French]. [Speaking French].

>> And, Dr. Elliott, as that question was slightly different than previous ones, if I could get you to summarize briefly in English.

>> Sure. Yeah, so the question was about how long? How long will we have these measures in place? First of all, I really want to emphasize that this is, this is not lifting and getting rid of all our measures and protections. This is really about moving from compulsory measures, or required measures, to discretionary measures. And how we move in this space is how we protect each other and how we keep the case activity at a manageable level. We will always be looking at these indicators for as long as we need to, and we will, I will make further recommendations as we move forward in this space. Of course, parents--I'm a parent myself, of school children, are wondering, when can the mask be off in the classrooms? And that's natural to wonder that. I've also heard children, talk to children, who have said, you know what? When we don't have to wear

masks, I'm gonna keep wearing a mask because I don't want to be sick, I've had COVID, or I've had a bad flu or something, and I don't want to be sick, so I'm going to keep wearing my mask. But that's an area where I will be doing a lot of surveillance in schools and really focussed over the next month, looking at those indicators. And I'm hopeful that, you know, in a month or so, after we see how the mixing between the different schools goes and how the, how everybody comes back from March break. I'll be watching that, and make further recommendations as I'm able to do that. Other areas, like discretionary mask wearing in general, it's a good idea to have discretionary mask wearing when we have community spread of COVID-19 or any other respiratory virus. So, I expect we'll have that for a while. I hope that, at some point, maybe in the middle of the summer or into the summer, we won't have as much spread and we'll be able to use our masks less. But, I think we're the--COVID-19 is not done with us. So, we need to keep that in mind and use the tools we have. I'm just so glad we have so many tools and we know how to use them. Thank you.

>> Thank you. That concludes our COVID-19 update for today. Thank you to our speakers, to the media and everyone who joined us to watch live over Facebook. Stay kind and have a wonderful rest of your Wednesday.