



COVID-19 livestream

Wednesday, March 2, 2022

>> One. 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 ASL interpretation, and André Bourcier for our French translation. Following the remarks from our speakers, we will go to the media for a round of questions. I will call you by name, and you'll each have two questions. Should time allow, we'll circle back for another round. Before we begin with our speakers, I would like to verify that everyone can hear us. If any reporters are having any issues, please email ecoinfo@yukon.ca. I will now hand it over to Premier Silver.

>> Thank you very much, Renée, and good morning, everyone. We are here on the traditional territory of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation in the Taa'an Kwächän Council with Dr. Elliot, Mary, and Andre, and the team.

Last week, I spoke of the injustices that are happening to the people of Ukraine. Our government is donating \$50,000 to the Canadian Red Cross to support humanitarian efforts in Ukraine, and also neighbouring countries in response to Russia's attack on Ukraine.

I know Yukoners and all Canadians are appalled by the actions of Russia, we stand in solidarity with the people of Ukraine. We'll continue to work with our partners across the country to fast-track immigration of Ukrainians, and to provide humanitarian aid and other supports. The strength and resolve of the Ukrainian people in the face of this unjustified aggression is truly powerful, and we will continue to support them.

I'm deeply saddened that another Yukoner has died due to COVID, and I want to express my sincere condolences to the family and friends of this individual. Please know that our thoughts and prayers are with you.

It has been-- well, it's been nearly two years since Dr. Elliot and I first stood before a packed room of people to announce the cancellation of the 2020 Arctic Winter Games. Looking back, that was a very difficult decision, that's for sure.

But it was the responsible decision, and it prevented an early outbreak of cases in the territory.

We have had to make some very serious and difficult decisions every day since then, to protect the health and safety of Yukoners.



In the last two years, we've learned a lot. We've learned a lot as we navigate together through different phases of this pandemic, from the availability of vaccines at the start of 2021, which seems a lifetime ago, to different waves and variants, especially Delta in the fall, and of course, most recently Omicron at the beginning of this year. It has not been easy.

It has been incredible to see Yukoners coming together to support each other, to step up and to protect our friends, our neighbours, and our communities. And we have avoided the most serious, severe health and economic impacts of the pandemic, because of this camaraderie and sense of community. We could not have done it without Yukoners getting vaccinated, Yukoners practising the Safe 6, following the public health measures, supporting local businesses and organizations, and the leadership that has been shown by every community leader, local businesses, leaders in the local businesses, community organizations as well.

It was so wonderful to see people gathering last weekend for rendezvous. Getting together after the dark and the cold and the isolation of winter.

It has never been so important.

After a long and difficult two years, 2022 is looking promising.

We have moved past the peak of the Omicron wave, and thanks to the diligence of Yukoners, again, following these public health measures, we have prevented our healthcare system from being overwhelmed.

I wanna thank all of our health care workers who have shown such dedication over the past two years.

We would not be where we are without you.

I cannot express how thankful we all are as Yukoners for your exemplary service.

As I announced last week, this Friday, we will be lifting nearly all of the remaining COVID-19 public health measures. Gatherings and events will no longer have capacity limits, bars and restaurants can return to normal services, it's time to get your dancing shoes again.

We know that this is very welcome news to people right across the territory.

As of March 4, the only public health measures that will remain in place are the requirement to wear masks, the requirement to show proof of vaccination to access designated sites, and the vaccine requirements for public servants.

We continue to be in a good position with health indicators trending in the right direction. Dr. Elliott will have more to share about our current situation in just a moment.



Today, I'm happy to share more about our plans for the upcoming weeks.

Starting March 18, we will be removing the requirement to wear masks in public indoor spaces. Wearing a mask will still be strongly recommended, particularly when people are in crowded or close quarters, and where it is difficult to physically distance. But it will no longer be a requirement.

I plan to keep on wearing my mask when I'm out shopping or heading to my table at a restaurant, and I'm sure I'm not alone in that.

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

And we encourage everyone to respect the requests and any other health and safety protocols that are in place.

Dr. Elliot and her team continue to work closely with the Department of Education to update guidance for schools as we move forward, so more information will be shared with schools later this week.

Additionally, the requirement to show proof of vaccination to access designated sites will be lifted on March the 18th.

Businesses and organizations can continue to require proof of vaccination if they so choose, and like masking, we urge all Yukoners to respect these safety protocols.

We will continue to provide proof of vaccination certification for those who are fully vaccinated, and the vaccine verifier app will remain available for download. Dr. Elliot and I have spoken in the past about how public health measures are like speed limits, I borrowed the expression from her.

They set the standards that must be followed, but it's still important to use your discretion.

Be responsible to the conditions, and act in a way that will keep you and everyone around you safe.

As we look to adapt in the coming weeks, we need to continue to be kind and respectful of one another.

We are all in this together, and we need to continue to support each other.

Now the last remaining public health measure is the vaccine requirement for employment.



This requirement was introduced to ensure a safe working environment for our employees, including our health care workers, while protecting the health and safety of the members of the public that we serve each and every day, especially our most vulnerable populations.

As the territory's largest employer, the Government of Yukon has a duty to lead by example, and to do our part to keep Yukoners safe.

As of February the 15th, nearly 95% of our public service had attested to being fully vaccinated.

I wanna thank each and every one of these employees that have attested to their vaccine status.

This vaccination requirement has been very effective in minimizing the spread of COVID-19 in our workplace, and ensuring continuity of service delivery, thank you.

Thank you for helping to keep us all safe and our workplaces safe for employees, as well as those who are accessing our programs and services.

The Delta and Omicron variants, they really tested our territory.

We have responded with the community minded spirit and resolve that makes this such a special place for all of us to call home, and for that I'm extremely grateful. Employees that have not yet attested to vaccination requirements have been placed on leave without pay, this includes 95 permanent employees and 198 casual, on call, and seasonal employees.

We will continue to monitor the situation in the coming weeks, and if things go well our plan is to lift this measure and allow many of these employees to return to work as of April the fourth.

We are still working with Dr. Elliot and her team to evaluate and to assess some positions, including those people who work in high risk settings with vulnerable populations.

Now, we will have more information to share with you in the coming weeks.

I want to thank these individuals for their service, I know the last few months has been extremely difficult.

The pandemic has been challenging for every single one of us.

We have taken measures and measured approaches to the pandemic to protect the health and safety of Yukoners.

It has not been easy, but our approach has been-- has proven to be very effective.



We are fortunate that together we have avoided the most severe health and economic impacts. We would not be in this position if it were not for every Yukoner who stepped up, got their vaccines, practised the Safe 6, and helped prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Yukoners have been diligent.

I'm extremely proud and humbled by how we pulled together in these recent weeks and months, in spite of the many challenges that we've all faced.

I know that there's been sacrifices as people have had to pivot and adapt, it has not been something that anyone wanted to have to do, and we don't wanna do it again.

But you all have stepped up.

Thank you for keeping us safe, it really matters, and it really has made a difference.

Vaccinations, they're still available, including the booster shots.

Get your shots, please folks.

By doing so you show your loved ones and those around you your care. And please remember to get boosted when it's time.

It's especially important to keep your immunity strong and to prevent severe illness if you contract COVID-19.

You can find this information again about appointments as well online at yukon.ca/thisisourshot.

Rapid tests are available in Whitehorse and in our communities, these are yet another tool in the toolbox to help you when we're making decisions when heading out the door.

If you have any COVID-19 symptoms, no matter how mild, even a headache, or a runny nose, please stay at home.

It is these little actions that add up and helped prevent the spread.

As we continue to lift public health measures and get back to a sense of normal, we will be scaling back these live updates as well to once every two weeks.

We'll continue to monitor the situation very closely, and you can find the most up to date information again, online, at yukon.ca.

I wanna thank everyone who's tuned in to listen today, and with that I will hand it over to Dr. Elliot, Mahsi' Cho.



Mahsi' Cho, Premier Silver. Good morning, bonjour, [Speaking alternate language]. I'm pleased to join you on another beautiful spring day in Yukon. And as more public health measures are eased this Friday, I know it will be welcomed breath of fresh air for many. And it may feel like starting to get some of the things back that we have forgone in order to get through this past wave. But we need to remember to respect that people and businesses need to adjust, each at their own speed, and we need to be patient, kind and accepting of all the different choices that people will make. With spring break just around the corner, I'm going to talk a bit today about how to use your COVID sense, and this will help all of us enjoy a safe and well-deserved spring break. For some people, it will feel like things are taking a very long time to change back to fewer measures, and for others it will be a frightening time. A time that builds anxiety, as we change the ways that we've been protecting ourselves over the past few months, through a back to back Delta wave, followed by an Omicron wave. This is why everybody will make their own choices, and why respect is so important right now. Here's what's happening around the territory today. There are currently 43 active cases in the territory, and there are four new cases. The most recent reports show that we've had 123 hospitalizations due to COVID-19, and a total of 21 deaths since the pandemic began. Yes, unfortunately, we have had another death, and my condolences go to the family of that person. Many people will wonder, "well, where are we now?" Here's where we are. We're over the crest, we've had a downslope, and we've stabilized at a moderate level of case activity. And throughout this time, we have made decisions in order to balance the harms and the benefits of the pandemic with those associated with the response. This is a part of the challenging work that Premier and I and our colleagues do together. Here are some of the ways that we have done that. We have had an overall clear goal to minimize severe illness and death, and also to minimize the outcomes or impacts of the pandemic on the population, including those of the measures that we have imposed. We've had another goal to avoid hospital strain and overwhelm. We have accomplished these things. The first thing I want to say is many people say, well, there is not that many hospitalizations. How could there be any strain? Here's where we've seen the strain. We got out early, we were proactive in this wave and we did a number of things. We revised our schools guidance, and we kept our schools open to in person learning. We supported businesses, and organizations, and groups as they changed and adapted to the different measures. We never locked down. We kept businesses open, we kept schools open, and we each did our part by minimizing the number of contacts we each had while keeping these things going. We minimize the amount of time with the most stringent measures, and we've lifted logically and in a stepwise manner. All of this has taken a toll on our Yukon communicable disease control staff who have adapted to changing guidance and really responded effectively to the outbreaks that we've had in long term care, and in Whitehorse Correctional Centre, as well as a number of other situations



where guidance was needed and supports were needed. The testing program has changed. We changed the guidance, we changed the locations, opening the testing in the Delta and maintaining that opening, the drive-thru testing, and we also were able to offer the rapid antigen tests and offer this to people. We've put a lot of effort into communications and creating supports. New traffic light, new pages to explain the measures, and also these media briefings in order to make sure that you're informed and you have those supports. And the government has done a lot of work in supports, financial supports, in different areas of strain, such as businesses, or people who need to isolate and lose income because of that. We've also suffered some losses. Throughout the pandemic here, as well as in the rest of Canada, there has been an increase in use of substances, strain on mental health, people's mental health, and we have had more deaths this year from a health condition that we all know well, which is substance use disorder than we've had in the past, particularly among those who use illicit drugs. These are the losses of the pandemic, and these do not go unnoticed, and there have been and will continue to be efforts to offer full supports in those areas. It's also why we need to look at where we've been, what measures we put in place, what diseases we have had, and what we've averted, in terms of our severe illness and death, and do our own homework, looking in the-- as an after action piece of homework, which is part of any pandemic, and it's part of what we do in public health. One major harm right now that I need to talk about, because I think it's very important, is the divisiveness that we've seen in society. Never before have we known how connected we are globally. Think of any variant that's come, or the amount of travel that's changed, and how those connections have changed. How we are within Canada. Think of the supports we've had and the ways we've worked with the federal government around rapid testing, case and contact management, and the many ways that we work across our governments. And locally. Think of all the ways all the community, organizations, local governments, First Nations governments, all of the elements of our society that have shifted and changed in order to support us all through this time, and also the ways that people have stopped transmitting COVID-19 to you, to your family, to those you love. Because-- despite all of this connectedness, we have also suffered divisiveness, and where we are seeing this right now is around behavior toward health care workers, threats, or comments to leadership, and even, unfortunately, in school children, and how they're bringing these arguments into the school. This is something we have to stop. We need to move forward, and we need to heal together. We are all connected. We live in an incredible place where there's the right to free speech is very important, and we need to be sure that we do it responsibly, and civilly, and peacefully. So, what else do we need to do now? As we move forward with fewer public health measures, I encourage you to be wise in your choices, to make good choices, and accept the diversity and differences of other people's choices. It's important to connect with friends and loved ones and do the things that help us stay healthy. Enjoy the arts, enjoy the wilderness. But we need to do so wisely in a way that won't put people at risk. So use your



COVID sense. There still remains considerable transmission of COVID-19 in the community. This is a new variant of COVID-19. If you are vaccinated-- fully vaccinated, your risk of hospitalization is extremely low. However, we want to keep the transmission at the level it's at. We're at a stable, moderate level, and we all have responsibility with this. I'm pleased that the measures will be lifted gradually, and also, because I having those legal tools is really the bottom line, the speed limit, as the Premier said. At the same time, we still need to live responsibly in community with each other. So, as you plan what you're going to do, think about these things. Are you a vulnerable person? Or will you be in contact with people who are vulnerable? Are you going to plan an indoor event? And how big of a space? How much ventilation will there be? Or will it be outdoors? We know when we're crowded in closed spaces, even a person with mild symptoms, or even no symptoms, can transmit the virus. I encourage you to find-- to use ways to keep your activities lower risk, and use creative ways and post them on Facebook and share them so we can all learn from the different ways that we can keep ourselves healthy and safe. Find ways to explore your community, to enjoy your spring break, and to check out that new restaurant, or art exhibit. To enjoy maybe going to a bakery, or having a fire outside, or any of these things that we all enjoy, sports and arts, and just follow the safe six when you feel like it's necessary. And you-- definitely, you are going to wear a mask up until the 18th of March, but if, you know, after that, use your mask wisely. And accept the caution of others. That means use your own COVID sense. If you know that it's likely that you're going to be gathering, many of us will be gathering with people outside of our own social circles that we've kept, especially in spring break. So this is about keeping, again, the contact-- the types of contacts the lowest risk possible, and using the time and the place and the space to do so. If you're going to visit communities or events happening around the territory, let's be respectful of our neighbours. You can find the most up to date information for community travel advisories in the Council of Yukon First Nations website, at cyfn.ca. If you're planning to travel out of territory, check the provincial websites, where you're going. These measures are changing very rapidly and you need to have a look and see what it is you're expected to do in the places you visit. Similarly, if you're travelling internationally, check out canada.ca and make sure you meet all the federal travel requirements. Whether you're travelling outside of territory, welcoming visitors here, or hanging out with people you haven't seen in a while, think about your risks and how to keep yourself and others safe. Remember that if you follow these public health measures, that's what you need to do, and also be respectful of people's choices and those who go above and beyond what the measures are. Even though over time the vaccine requirement won't be available-- won't be in place everywhere, some others-- some people might not feel comfortable socializing with those who are vaccinated, or they might want to take extra measures. So feel comfortable to ask and to be asked. It's okay, we make different choices. Even if you're not needing to wear a mask in certain places, some people will choose to wear a mask. The Premier himself suggested some of the



places he'll wear a mask, and I'll wear a mask when I'm mixing with people who I don't normally mix with, or with people who are vulnerable. I like to think of it like this, when the weather's cold outside, we all choose different layers. Similarly, we'll choose different layers of protection as we move through this part of the pandemic. All the choices-- all of these types of choices are personal, and let's respect them. At the end of the day, you know what to do, and we'll continue to provide you with tools to support your choices. Remember, and this is really important, if you're feeling unwell, or showing symptoms of COVID-19, please stay away from others and do a self-assessment. Check if you're a person who requires a PCR test. Are you someone who would like to do a rapid antigen test, or would you prefer just to lay low and have some quiet time while you recover? In closing. As we close today, I just want to remind you that as the public health measures are easing, we need to look at the dates and make sure that we follow them as they are, stepwise lifting, and we also don't want to lose the momentum we've gained thanks to all of our hard work in this past month, and that's why it's so important to use your COVID sense. It's now more important than ever to think about these things. And we're all going to take these next few weeks at our own pace, so please give each other the grace, and remember to be kind. As the days continue to get longer, the sun shines into the evening, and soon into the night, I hope you will get out and enjoy this well-deserved spring and soak up some of the time with your family, friends, and neighbours, and our whole community which connects us all. [Speaking alternate language]. Thank you, Merci.

Thank you, Dr. Elliott, and thank you Premier Silver. We'll now move on to the question and answer session with media. 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 will go to the phone lines and start with Luke, at CKRW.

Hi. Thank you. This first question would be for Premier Silver, I know that these mandates are going to be lifted on March 18, but the state of emergency will still be in place, and you mentioned that businesses can have their own right to request that you wear a mask or show proof of vaccination in certain settings. I'm wondering if that case-- if somebody refuses to comply with the business's requests, can they still be subject to discipline under the Civil Emergency Measures Act?

Yeah, so once the Civil Emergency Measure Act ends, the answer would be no, and if we're lifting our provisions as of the 18th, well, then that's when we lift our provisions. Businesses can refuse access to their businesses to anybody based upon what they think is best. As I said,



we will be in a position to lift the state of emergency, hopefully, in mid-March, along with the requirements for masks and the proof of vaccination, if health indicators continue to trend in the right direction. That's the direction we're going in. Remember, as well, you know, COVID's not over. There will be more variants, you know, but right now we believe we're in a situation, if we can cautiously move forward in the next two weeks, to lift the civil emergency measures. If that measure is lifted, so it would be the restrictions and the fines that come into the purview of that act.

Thank you. Luke, do you have a second question? Hello, Luke, can you hear us? Do you have a second question? I'll circle back to you, Luke. We will move to Haley at Yukon News.

Hi, thank you. My first question had to do with the government vaccine mandates. I heard you, Premier Silver, say that considerations are still being talked about when it comes to high risk settings like long term care home. I was wondering if you could just clarify, do you mean that some workers may not be invited back, or that you'll implement testing requirements, for example, or different accommodations there?

Yeah, so we'll be working very closely with Dr Elliot and her team on this. Yeah, so we'll be working very closely with Dr Elliot and her team on this.

[Speaking French].

Thank you. [Speaking French].

So if I understand well, we can imagine that there might be another wave after that. And we might have to reinstall some of these measures. How difficult would it be to go back and reintroduce some of these measures, if there was a need to reintroduce them?

Mmm-hmm. Yeah, I mean, this isn't our first wave. Every time, Claudiane, that we invoke new public health measures or take them away, it's extremely difficult. You know, it's a lot of planning, a lot of logistics. That's just from the government side. I mean, the disruption to people in the communities as well. It's very difficult. So we don't take these measures lightly. But the good news is, after all these waves, Yukon has proven to be very versatile and able to quickly move forward to protect the health and safety of Yukoners, so I'm hoping that the next variant is extremely mild and months and months away. But we are ready, we're ready for what



comes and most importantly, Yukoners have done so much to prove their resilience in very, very trying times.

[Speaking French].

Doctor Elliott, if I could have you repeat some of your answer for the reporters on the line in English. Summarize from the end. Sure.

I think one of the things I'm really grateful for here in Yukon is that you Yukoners, you've stuck with us through these tough times. It's been challenging. We don't like to use public health measures unless they're absolutely needed. I am so grateful for your resilience, for your creativity, for the ways that you found to make this work, and the ways you've stuck it out when it's been hard. And I think these are the things that are going to be-- help us get through anything that comes our way is staying together and helping each other and being wise. Thank you.

Thank you so much. I'll circle back to Luke one last time at CKRW. Luke, for your second question. [Silence]. Hearing nothing and seeing the time, that now concludes our COVID-19 update for today. Thank you to our speakers, to the media, to everyone who joined us watching live over Facebook. We appreciate it. Stay kind, stay safe, and have a wonderful Wednesday, everyone.