

COVID-19 Facebook live update: March 31, 2021

>> Pat: I'm Pat living with the Department of Health and social services and your moderator for the COVID update.

I like to remind listeners before we begin that these updates will look slightly different over the coming weeks during the election period.

Doctor Hanley will provide case updates and will focus on technical aspects and will use the opportunity to respond to questions.

This week he is joined by Nicole Morgan the deputy minister of education who will address the return to full-time classes.

Sign language interpretation is provided by

Mary Tiessen and Andre Bourcier from French language services

directorates will translate questions from French-speaking journalists.

Doctor Hanley?

>> There is lots of positive news to share.

As always with COVID we need to keep vigilant and check in with the facts and risks.

I talked about variants and the risk for Yukon.

And it was next day we announced two important cases of variants and we have witnessed in most of the provinces what has been predicted.

Researching cases largely linked to the B.1.351 variant.

-- B.1.1.7 variants.

A Yukoner and one a nonresident are doing well and we have had no further exposures associated.

These individuals did the right thing and did not spread the infection.

With potentially other variants of concern that take over from the traditional COVID-19 virus we know that cases were inevitable and we will see more introductions.

We need to stay on top of this.

We are still at risk as variants cases surge and if we let our guard down a variant could easily take hold, spread and cause one or more outbreaks.

There is also an important added menace.

Younger adults are at higher risk for more severe outcomes with variants compared to traditional COVID.

More and more adults in their fifties forties even thirties are getting hospitalized.

It is being felt among younger populations.

For now continuing to follow the is carefully and wearing masks in indoor public spaces is essential.

Wash your hands can't wear a mask and keep your two metres from those not in your bubble.

If you are sick please isolate yourself and arrange for testing and if you haven't gotten your vaccine vaccine, please do so.

It is now important than ever.

The presence of variants in the territory is not as important as whether we allow them to spread.

We are fortunate that just because we have cases of the variants here in Yukon does not mean we need to rush to make changes to the current health measures.

We know what we each need to do to help stop the spread of COVID variants or not.

The ingredients might be different but the recipe is the same.

By staying on our game we can write out the threat the current third wave is posing and get to the other side when we look forward to much better days.

I know we're all tired of living through this pandemic even though in Yukon we have been spared many of the harsh and prolonged measures other Canadians have tolerated and we can only feel for our friends and neighbours in BC who need to face the strict measures of a three week circuit breaker.

I would like to keep us free from having to do anything like that.

All the same this pandemic seems like a long winter that refuses to leave.

But just as spring and summer it will be here in a matter of weeks so while the other side of this pandemic.

The great news is so far the municipal vaccine is effective against the B.1.1.7 vaccine by the evidence is not yet as clear for other variants.

This is the time to plug away if you haven't yet.

It is time to roll up your sleeve bank at the protection the vaccine offers.

In vaccine news as of Tuesday 67 percent of eligible Yukoners have received their first shot and we are in an enviable position and I hope we can keep up the momentum.

Vaccines are our best shot
a protection against
COVID.

If we break down the
numbers, as of March 29th
here's what we are seeing.

With every increase in the
age group the uptick in
vaccine rises.

In the 18 to 29-year-old
age group 51 percent.

30 to 39, 61 percent.

40 to 49, 67 percent.

50 to 59, 70 percent.

60 to 69, 78 percent, and
the winners are...

[Laughter]

>> Seventy plus,
87 percent.

If we compare it to a week
ago we can see the uptake
is increasing slightly more
in the younger age groups
while it has essentially
plateaued in the older
groups which makes me
optimistic we can still get

to a goal for 75 percent or more.

Right now it there is easily enough susceptible adults.

To allow for circulation.

And compare the lower rate of vaccine uptake to what I mentioned earlier.

Younger people are getting more sick and we are seeing ICUs and hospitals in the southern province with multiple patients.

More than ever we are reminded that no one is immune to COVID-19 as we have seen with the recent studies and research.

Just being a healthy young adult does not offer enough protection.

And it's not just the acute illness.

We see that COVID-19 can cause long-term effect that may prevent daily life from

being what it was before
COVID-19.

It's a virus with no
brush -- preference.

Our best method of
protection is vaccination.

Looking at our own data,
compare our vaccine first to
those who have been
infected.

The average age is 33
years old with a median
age, half below this dazed
and half 29 years old.

Close to half hour cases are
between 20 and 39 years
old, the same age group
with the lower uptake.

Even though most young
people do well some
people will not and
younger people are more
frequently infected.

While I'm happy to see it
silly increase we still need a
lot more.

Back recognizing younger
individuals lead busy lives

and they have children who work maybe multiple jobs and commitments that might be hard to make and keep an appointment, we are still welcoming drop ins at the mass clinic in Whitehorse.

The third round of vaccine visits is taking place and we will have updated regional numbers to share.

Getting that first dose is critical but so is completing the vaccine schedule as a general population receives their second Osiris heard people ask why get the second when the first offers protection?

The first dose is a great start but you need to be fully immunized.

The second stoves has an immune booster to have a more robust longer-lasting effect then if you just received the first.

And ensures your body is prepared with the best possible protection.

People have also commented if they are going to have a serious reaction they won't bother to get the second shot.

Getting side effects is not beautiful even though most of the time the effects are minor but at least that fever or those aching muscles are an indication the vaccine is doing it's job.

And overall it's not an easy message to take.

But that is the reality we are in for these few weeks.

We will be able to talk about what to look forward to and hopefully within and to the current surge in the South.

As we look forward to Easter it's a good idea to remember we on need to follow the safe six plus masking.

If you are relishing some mild days on the ski slope or just hanging out think about and how fortunate we are to have so much choice of activity.

Member to treat this gift with respect.

Respect the gathering guidelines and followed the safe six plus one.

A final word about testing.

Testing for COVID-19 remains an important part of our response against COVID-19.

I can't stress enough the need to seek testing if you have symptoms.

It is easy to convince ourselves it is a cold are an allergy but without a negative test in hand you can't know for sure.

We have just begun a new social media campaign reminding people of exactly that.

Cough, cold, slower throat
can all present symptoms.

And we don't know for
sure and we all have a
responsibility to not only
take care of ourselves but
to protect those around us.

We continue to get a rapid
turnaround of results.

Earlier this month the
return to full-time classes
and students grades ten
through 12 was announced
and we are happy to bring
you similar details about
how and when this return
will occur.

When kids in other places
are needing to return to
online learning we are
fortunate to be moving in a
more positive direction so I
will now pass the baton to
the Deputy Minister of
education to provide an
update on students ten to
12 returning to full-time in
class learning.

>> Thank you Doctor Hanley and good morning everyone.

I'm happy to be here to talk to you about transitioning all grades ten to 12 back to full-time in class learning.

Here in Whitehorse, since the first time the pandemic it.

From the outset our goal has always been to ensure as many students can be safely learning as possible.

And I know that this year has been extremely challenging for students and I want to thank each and every one of them.

As the doctor mentioned we're fortunate that COVID cases and numbers have been low and the vaccine has been steadily rolling out.

It is encouraging to hear we're in a position to welcome our most senior

students back to full-time in class learning.

I know many of you have been awaiting an update and today I can confirm grade ten to 12 students will return to full-time in class learning on Monday April 19th.

Making this transition will allow us to complete the important planning work needed to ensure school operations are adapted to meet updated health and safety guidelines.

Over the coming weeks we will continue working together with the Chief Medical Officer of Health and school administrators to plan updates to school operational plans and scheduling for students.

We will also be working to provide additional information to students, family us and working with our partners including the Yukon teachers Association

and Yukon first Nations governments to hear their feedback.

Lum providing this update today there is still much planning work that needs to occur to determine more specific details about what this transition will look like.

This includes working with school administrators and school staff who have just returned to school after March break.

I would like to take the opportunity to answer some of the key questions we have heard.

Timing is a question in the minds of many students and families wondering why we're bringing students back to full class so late in the school year.

We know many students families and school staff have adjusted their daily routines.

From the outset of the pandemic our goal has always been to ensure as many students can be learning in class full-time as safely as they can.

We know students learn better when we are into school and they have the support of teachers classmates and their friends.

By bringing students back to school we will be able to provide approximately nine D. hours of face to face instruction which is a meaningful opportunity to address any learning gaps.

We are also aware of the social elements of being at school and the impact it has on the positive mental health and wellness of young people.

We have based our decision-making around the recommendations of Yukon Chief Medical Officer

of Health and this decision is no different.

With vaccination rates increasing and case counts remaining low Doctor Hanley has indicated we're in a position where it is safe to welcome the students back full-time.

The risks are low and outweigh the risks of keeping students out of school.

As those responsible for providing kindergarten to grade 12 education we have a responsibility to provide the best programming and learning opportunities that we can for all our students.

We recognize some students six -- are succeeding on the half day in class schedule perhaps finding ways to have valuable work experiences.

There are a number of parents and guardians who

are worried about the impact the schedule has had a.

Our second learning during COVID-19 survey, many parents students and school staff identified that this half day in class schedule has negatively impacted student learning and more teacher support is needed.

We know they will be some adjustments but there are many benefits to returning the students to in class full-time learning.

This transition provides students with greater access to in person support from their teachers especially in learning areas where they might be struggling.

Creates opportunities for students to ensure they are earning credits they need to graduate and provide students with opportunities to return to more familiar

school routines ahead of the next school year.

It allows our graduating students to reconnect with friends and teachers to finish off their school year as they would have expected in a normal school year.

Many students and family maybe wondering if this will have an impact on current course schedules and we have been in discussion with school principals and I want to confirm students will continue with the courses they are taking to finish the school year.

It does mean that some adjustments will need to be made to timetables.

We will work with school administrators to determine what kinds of adjustments need to be made.

Our goal is to make the transition as least

disruptive as possible so students can stay focused on learning and we can ensure they have the supports they need.

We have also heard from families asking a this will impact the great students who are attending at Wood Street centre.

This transition does not impact those students.

Those students will remain at the Centre for the remainder of the school year.

We've heard from families who are asking about the impact to busing.

We recognize some adjustments will need to be made to the current busing schedule and we are working with our operations team to identify those changes and we will update families as soon as we have more details.

Student employment is another concern we have heard.

From those who have picked up jobs while on the current schedule and they wish to maintain this.

We have heard some expressed concern that returning to full-time in class learning will disrupt the use opportunities and I want to clarify while students have only been required to attend in person classes for half the school day it has always been the expectation students would continue to complete the other half of their learning day away from school.

I recognize some students have been able to find a balance between completing their school work on their own time and finding opportunities within the flexibility this schedule has created.

However, it has always been our goal to return students to full-time in class learning as soon as we can.

And while we know many students have found success on the schedule they are still many others who are struggling.

We know they will be some adjustments but we have a responsibility to take the steps we can to ensure all students are successful.

We have the opportunity to improve access to in person teacher support and are confident this will provide overall benefits to students.

To our teachers, I know they are awaiting to hear if they will have time to prepare for this transition.

Teachers and school staff have been on the front

lines of supporting Yukon students.

They have done a tremendous job adapting their practice.

I understand this has not been easy and I want to thank all her teachers and school staff.

Throughout the school year.

I note you are wondering if you will be allocated time and support for planning for this transition.

We are scheduling two school days where the school administrators and teachers of grades ten to 12 can focus on planning for the remainder of the school year.

These days are scheduled for Thursday April 15th and Friday April 16th.

During these days grades ten to 12 students will not attend classes at school but

will be asked to complete two days of learning from home.

These additional days will provide focused time for school administrators teachers and school staff to identify any needed adjustments to course plans and timetables.

While I have tried to address the questions around impacts to planning I want to address planning around health and safety.

The health and safety of students and staff is our first priority.

From the outset we have followed the recommendations from Doctor Hanley and his staff with vaccination rates increasing and low case counts.

Doctor Hanley has indicated we are in a position to welcome me

students back to full-time learning.

Has provided health and safety guidance for us to do so by updated health and safety guidelines.

They will inform our work with school administrators and school councils to adjust operational plans to ensure we continue to keep students staff and communities safe.

His guidance will allow us to be more flexible in cases where physical distancing is more challenging.

While we will have adjustments to school operational plans for these three high schools the other schools will follow their current operational plans.

While some of the physical distancing requirements will be relaxed at these three schools we continue to expect all school staff

students and visitors to stay at home when sick or showing symptoms practice proper hand hygiene maximize physical distancing where possible, use nonmedical masks where physical distancing is not possible and keep groups of students together while limiting mixing as much as possible.

This is all part of our overall approach to keeping the risk of COVID-19 low across our territory.

Thank you everyone for your time today.

I hope this has answered some of the questions on your mind.

We will continue to communicate to keep you updated on this transition.

Thank you again for your patience kindness and solidarity as we combine our efforts to ensure the

success of all Yukon students.

>> Pat: Thank you both.

We will now move to the phone lines and will begin with Nick at the Canadian press.

>> Announcer: Joining the meeting.

>> Reporter: Hi there.

>> Pat: Are you still with us Nick?

I'm not hearing anything.

We will move to Luke.

>> Reporter: I'm curious safe they will be encouragement for the students going back to school that are 18 years of age to get vaccinated as soon as possible.

>> Certainly.

And again, for some time we've had the clinics open for the wider public and I definitely encourage it, that we really want to

encourage young adults including 18-year-old adults and kids as they turned 18 and we are paying close attention to the beginnings of child results.

We saw that Pfizer released Plenum and airy trial results on the 12th to 15 trial and we will expect 12 to 17 trial results from Moderna.

We look forward to pushing not only our -- the accessibility for the existing age brackets by its to think ahead to immunizing younger people.

>> Follow-up?

>> Reporter: Just one question for me.

>> Pat: Mario from radio Canada.

>> Reporter: Thank you.

My question isn't French French for Doctor Hanner -- Henry.

[Speaking French]

Carcross.

>> SPEAKER-03: The question is for Doctor Hanley.

Can you refresh our memory as why you feel right now is the right time for these higher grades to return to the classroom?

[Speaking French]

[Speaking French]

[Speaking French]

>> In the English?

>> Essentially, to repeat it in English, there are a couple aspects are described in French but from my point of view you always trying to strike that balance between COVID prevention and recognition of anything we do.

How do we always try to restrike that balance between sound prevention

and prevention of those possible effects.

And having heard more and more concerns.

And we need to respond to those concerns and give a chance for them to get together for the last two months to restore some of that ability to get back to a face to face environment.

When we are in spring, doors and windows, we are getting toward spring and are getting towards that time when more and more activities can be outside.

We can -- we can modify the environment and we've had all of the school year to practice the routine and to take on this added ability to take in the students and do it well so I'm confident that this is good timing and it does help us get into learn how to do this so I think it's much better to do it now when the risk is low and we have a fairly short time

to work out the kinks and be that much better prepared for a return to school.

>> Pat: Another question?

>> Reporter: About the variants in the Yukon.

Was a confirmed?

I note one of the cases, one not from a Yukoner, was the variants of the case from the Yukon ever confirmed?

>> We don't have the actual confirmation.

We had the screen positive variants which is what BC does no looking for that gene deletion which signifies a variant but we don't have the final sequencing information as of yet.

We suspect it to be a B.1.1.7 but it could be another that shares that gene deletion.

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

>> Reporter: No questions.

>> Pat: Thank you.

Tim from the Whitehorse
star.

>> Reporter: Good
morning.

My question is directed
more to the deputy
minister.

I'm curious as to why
students are going back to
school a full three weeks
later than scheduled?

Was there not a model or
a template or plan to take
them back or did you start
from scratch.

>> Thank you Tim.

As I mentioned, the school
staff and administrators
have been on spring break
for two weeks and so that
is a time where they are
not working and we met
with them to talk about

what work we needed to get started.

And we continue to work with Doctor Hanley's staff on finalizing health and safety guidelines being provided to schools and now the schools begin the work locally with families and students to put together more detail around what those plans will look like.

>> Follow-up?

>> Reporter: I don't think my question was really answered.

Was there some kind of framework in place?

You had almost a full school year to plan how to go back to school.

Did you start from scratch or was there something in place.

>> In terms of a framework we have provided the learning during COVID-19

framework which shows the range of risk and different configurations during a pandemic and we continued to be in the low risk to COVID-19 sections of that framework and we continue to follow health and safety guidelines.

And the continuity of learning and both of those have been updated.

So we are following the framework and that time period has been specific updates to those guiding documents.

>> Pat: We will move to Chris from CBC.

>> Reporter: Another question for Deputy Minister Morgan.

I'm curious to know for some students, the news that full-time classes will resume is not good news for whatever reason.

Will they be able to opt out of returning to full-time

classes if they feel they must.

>> That's a good question.

Certainly one we hear often.

This announcement is that we are returning students back to full-time in class learning and that is what teachers will now get underway and begin to put together.

As we do in normal times we OA's work with students and their families to address whatever individual circumstances they have and work within the expectations of how the curriculum has been delivered.

The expectation is students are returning to full-time in class learning.

>> Follow-up?

>> Reporter: Only have a two-part follow-up.

I'm not sure what that answer means.

Can students often doubt if, for some reason, it makes sense to administrators if they feel like they need to?

You did mention a survey.

Can you tell us what proportion of students have cited.

>> It's important to touch base back to the learning during COVID-19 survey.

Learning during COVID-19 surveys we've conducted two of them and we developed them with partners in education, school councils and First Nations and the second survey, we ask some questions about the current school year and about the half day schedule.

Many students parents and school staff identified this is impacting student learning.

51 percent and 69 percent of their parents.

And said increased teacher support would be helpful to be successful.

And 48 percent from ten helpful 12.

And they said there learning schedule was negatively impacted their learning.

I think for me that is something that's important for us to keep in mind.

There isn't one answer that will work for all students.

Students and families all have a very different and varied context in which they live their lives.

On their particular circumstances and students all have very diverse ranges of learning.

And sewn to trying to be as specific as possible the expectation is all students, teachers will prepare for all

students to be in class full-time and that does not mean schools are in flexible and do not work with students and families.

Even a normal times they do that work and we will have those conversations of what supports are needed for those that are unable to return to full-time in class learning.

>> Thank you.

>> Reporter: No questions.

>> Pat: I will check back on negg from the Canadian press.

Are you there?

>> Reporter: I am but no questions.

>> Pat: Thank you.

I'd like to thank everyone for their time today and advise the next update will be April 7th at 10:30 AM.

The technical topic will be based on COVID-19

testing include the pros and cons of rapid testing along with updated info on vaccines and variants.

Please e-mail your questions to the Facebook page or e-mail us.

Thank you.