

COVID-19 Facebook live update: May 19, 2021

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

We are joined by the honourable Sandy Silver and Doctor Brendan Hanley.

Our sign language interpretation is provided by Mary Tiessen.

We will go to the phone lines for questions by reporters and will call you by name and you will each have two questions.

I'd like to verify everyone can hear us.

If any reporters are having a problem please e-mail ecoinfo@gov.yk.ca.

Premier silver?

>> Good morning and thanks for joining us on the traditional territory of the Kwanlin Dün and the Taa'an Kwächän Council.

I'm happy to be here with Doctor Hanley and the team.

We have reached an extremely important milestone as my new health Minister announced, more than 75 percent of eligible adults in the Yukon have received their first shot of the vaccine.

This is absolutely great news for Yukon and for Canada.

I want to thank all the dedicated individuals in our government and all our partners in each and every community that have contributed.

And has been a team Yukon effort and there is no team that myself and Doctor Hanley and Mary would rather beyond.

I'm elated but not surprised.

We are hardy stock and history has many examples of our extraordinary efforts whether the machine gun company, mighty efforts during World War I, or the Dawson city Nuggets travelling overland by a sled and strain, coastal steamer and transcontinental train to challenge for the Stanley Cup.

Or the group of first nations leaders who travelled in 1973 to Ottawa to present together today for our children tomorrow which gave the pathway towards the most comprehensive self-governing agreements, Yukon has a history of stepping up.

Efforts will be added.

Canada's chief public health officer, Chief Public Health Officer Doctor Theresa Tam recently called the Yukon a model.

We are leading the country when it comes to vaccinations.

Last week Minister McPhee announced we have made arrangements with the federal government to obtain enough Pfizer to get all Yukon youth vaccinated.

The details of the youth vaccine rollover released yesterday and can be found online.

The first clinic opens on May 31st two all youth aged 12 and up.

They will receive their first shot before the end of the school year.

I know this is welcome news for parents and youth who want to do their part.

I encourage our youth and all Yukoners to step up.

The more people we get immunize the safer our territory will be.

I also want to thank everyone who has stepped up to get their shot.

The vaccine uptake has been so great and means we are in a position to start lifting restrictions as part of our plan.

Two weeks ago we announced plans to lift restrictions.

One of the changes we are looking at is that fully vaccinated individuals will no longer need to self isolate upon entry as of May 25th.

These individuals need to declare they have been fully vaccinated which means two shots and at least 14 days though second shot.

We will need to provide consent for the verification of their vaccine status this is a new initiative we are leading and we are working with our partners across the country to sort out the details of what verification will look like.

There are important privacy concerns and there are also important public health concerns.

This change in our self-isolation requirements will mostly benefit fully vaccinated Yukoners that leave the Yukon and return.

First is we are ahead of the country when it comes to vaccine rollout.

Over 67 percent have received their second shot already and we are pleased to see an increase in vaccine uptake but many Canadians have not yet received their second shot and are not yet fully vaccinated.

It will be easiest to verify the vaccination status of Yukoners that have received their shots as part of our vaccine rollout.

We will also be in a position to verify the vaccine status of British Columbia residents thanks to a close working relationship and we are working with our partners to sort out how verification will work.

This work is ongoing and we look forward to sharing more information as it becomes available.

The other chains we have discussed is bars and restaurants will be able to return to full capacity as of May 25th.

I know Doctor Hanley and his team have been working on outlining the public health guidelines to ensure they can safely welcome more customers.

It is also great to see Whitehorse moving towards plans to allow pop-up patios.

We offer our support and it will provide more opportunities for these businesses to get on the patio and path of recovery.

I want to touch on some of the areas as we look at changing based on new recommendations.

We are looking at increasing the numbers for indoor social gatherings to 20 people and outdoor gatherings to 100 people and are looking at increasing organized events Tom a maximum of.

This would include funerals weddings and faith-based services as well as cultural events.

I know it's been a long time since people gathered to celebrate life events.

As we look towards the summer and return of camps and recreation we are looking to increase indoor limits to 20 people and outdoor to 100 people.

It will be important to practice safe six plus one.

We are in a fortunate position but we need to keep up that diligence.

The variants are a very real concern and we know from watching developments and other jurisdiction how quickly things can change.

Keep up the good work and continued to keep your friends and neighbours and colleagues safe.

We will continue to exercise patience and we will all have a great summer.

You probably notice more licence plates from outside already.

I want to remind all Yukoners these people need to follow the rules when transiting through the territory.

Thanks are different this year compared to last year.

Our vaccination rate is leading the country and it is mandatory to wear masks and public spaces, the federal government has tightened up the rules for US citizens and transit including requiring COVID-19 testing and the use of tags and stickers.

These are measures that mitigate the risk of transmission.

Keep in mind more than 40,000 US citizens have transited through the territory over the past year with zero cases associated with these travellers.

Be kind and respectful.

I want to thank our partners with the Leonhard first nation who were working at the southern border helping keep being travellers informed.

If you have any questions please contact our enforcement team.

I will now hand things over to Doctor Hanley.

>> Thank you and good morning.

We have no active cases in Yukon thanks to the cooperation of all Yukoners.

We continue to remain in a stable place.

As we have announced a trickle of cases here and there despite the presence of variants we have managed to maintain our containments approach.

We continue to see those who have tested positive took all the necessary steps to protect themselves and those around them.

With most people doing the right thing most of the time we can maintain our control even as we start down the road of opening up.

It could mean more cases in Yukon.

Our ability to limit the impact of any single case or cluster improves dramatically as our level of vaccination increases.

Canada's tally is also increasing steadily contributing to a slowly declining risk of case importation.

We can be realistically optimistic about our summer ahead.

Yukon has recently passed a 75 percent benchmark of vaccination for first doses.

People are continuing to step forward, particularly younger adults.

All Yukoners should be proud and with each additional vaccination we are getting a bit closer to seeing our Maliseet return.

Vaccination continues to be the biggest step we can take towards living in a place without as many protective measures needed.

I know we have reached a point where we're working more and more with a declining number of those who have been hesitant or are holding back.

Each one of those groups is important to reach to ensure they have an opportunity to have their concerns addressed.

Our aphids are working as people get their questions answered and see their own reasons.

One group I'd like to return to consider is those who are concerned about fertility and pregnancy.

Following the live Q&A event I participated in with Doctor Tam last weekend I was able to revisit some of the questions asked within that period.

Many related to how vaccination affects fertility and pregnancy.

With regard to the vaccine affecting fertility this is an unfortunate misconception that has rapidly spread throughout social media.

There is no biological reasons then this or any other vaccine should affects fertility and there is no evidence or data to support this.

For those who are pregnant and unsure whether or not to seek immunize a shin let me reiterate some of the messages are related.

The evidence is increasing not your risk of getting severe COVID diseases higher when pregnant.

We know that most cases of COVID-19 are mild but sometimes and unpredictably the disease can be much more serious.

That the risk has been shown to be higher in pregnancy.

The risk of premature birth is higher with COVID-19 infection.

Next we also know that COVID vaccines work just as well in pregnancy are for a breast-feeding mother.

As these vaccines are inactivated and therefore not live we can be confident that these vaccines will be safe during pregnancy.

We now have early but significant real-world

experience with this vaccine and the data is very positive with no safety signals.

There is also pulmonary evidence to suggest there is an antibody transfer across the percent which should help protect the newborn infant although to what degree and for how long, we don't know.]

If you have any questions as to weather when and how to get the vaccine please arrange to have a conversation with your family physician.

You can also e-mail our COVID Infoline.

We will ensure year provided with the answers and clarity you need.

With our recent announcement of exemption from self-isolation, as of May 25th next Tuesday I know many have begun making travel plans or are discussing plans with family and friends.

I want to provide as much clarification as I can to the many questions about who is eligible and to is not.

I want to reinforce that anyone who's incoming to Yukon must be fully vaccinated which means two weeks passed the final dose of a Health Canada approved vaccine.

I want to add to the premier's comments on verification for immunization.

Vaccine certification will be an ongoing national and international conversation.

We are working on a local verification process.

But on the consent, to have that information verified.

I'm confident we will have a robust and reliable process and will continue to improve it as other jurisdictions develop their own process.

I want to reassure you that anyone who declines to attest they are fully vaccinated or he wishes not to consent to have their information verified will be required by law under the Quarantine Act...

Who have received vaccination and gone on to shed their masks and expand their social bubbles.

It does not work like that, immunity builds with time.

It does take a minimum of two weeks to build up immunity than the effectiveness of the vaccine continues to improve beyond that.

Although the data supports these COVID-19 vaccines as some of the most effective vaccines ever made they are not 100 percent guaranteed to prevent infection.

It is possible to get infected and we have seen this in other parts of Canada especially if exposed to high COVID activity and a household or public setting.

This if you plan travel after a second dose.

Consider waiting for your departure until two weeks before that second dose.

And it provides better protection, for travellers you must have two plus two before entering the territory.

Two doses plus two weeks following your second dose means you are protected enough to mingle with others and enter public spaces.

I want to discuss some expectations about what to do and where to go after return from travel even though you may not need to self isolate.

We know over the past 15 months we have worked hard to protect people who are more vulnerable to infection or to reduce the risk of COVID spread.

Remember a vital but simple principle, COVID spreads in crowded places where there is close contact between people.

That is why it is so important to continue to work together to reduce the risk of spread.

Keep your social bubble consistent and follow personal practices as well as the COVID rules and guidelines including healthcare and associated settings.

Even while fully vaccinated it is your responsibility to observe and comply with local public health measures.

Enjoy your travels and revisits but avoid gathering where Cobia transmission might be occurring, closed crowded poorly ventilated indoor spaces.

For those coming back to Yukon who are fully vaccinated and infection is still a small but real possibility.

We are also learning that although the risk of transmission to others is low it is still possible.

We need to develop guidance based on recent and rapidly evolving evidence.

We are working to offer guidance to various types of facilities whether business is personal care facilities and health settings as to how to welcome those who are fully vaccinated.

Select guidelines are being developed but not all will be revised and ready by next Tuesday.

General retail premises restaurants organize gathering places and places of worship I have no special concerns as long as these businesses and organizations agree those who are fully vaccinated and have recently travel domestically can be welcomed into these areas.

They have designed protocols and practice is based on operational plans to minimize the introduction and spread of COVID infection.

The traveller who was fully vaccinated who wants to grab a bite to eat or go shopping or rental car or a bicycle should be able to do so safely.

Other settings like personal care services like salons, dentists, hospitals, long term care facilities will take more time and consultation.

Please be patient and continue to follow existing policies for returning travellers.

Please continue to abide by whatever rule certain premises have in place and be prepared not to visit these places during your first two weeks until we've had the chance to work with these businesses.

Emergency departments and health centres will continue to see people in self isolation when there are emergencies.

As we move to a two vaccine summer we must remember reopening as a process of slowly and carefully peeling away restrictions as our vaccination rates climb and asked we show success in working together.

As the premier mention I have made recommendations about social gatherings based on the many requests and e-mails from individuals and from the faith community.

We are addressing your needs and concerns very seriously.

Some things you will notice when the new guidelines are finalized, we have made the guidelines for gatherings as simple and consistent as possible.

The numbers are higher but are within reasonable limits given the new environment we are in.

We continue to make distinctions between higher risk gatherings, social and formal events versus organized gatherings where the risk is lower because these events are developed against the COVID operational plan.

Our experience with organizers and operators has been good.

That's it for today.

I hope you can all take advantage of this upcoming weekend and enjoy a bit of a reset and arrest.

Remember to be grateful and stay well.

Thank you.

>> Pat: Thank you premier silver, thank you Doctor Hanley.

Will move to the phone lines and begin with Luke.

>> Reporter: This is for the premier, I know both you and Doctor Hanley mentioned the increase in numbers for indoor and outdoor gatherings but you did not mention a date.

Is date for these restrictions, is it this Monday or is it in the coming weeks.

>> The recommendation has been presented and we will do the work and side cabinet to get that out and we will make that date available as soon as possible.

>> Pat: Do you have another question?

>> Reporter: Doctor Hanley last week there was guidelines from the CDC in the US about mask wearing for fully vaccinated individuals but federal health officials in Canada were saying that mask wearing will continue and it'll be one of the last things to be lifted.

Do you share those views as well?

>> Yes.

I thought that the quote from -- I believe that was Doctor Njoo, that was close to what I have said.

I see masks as a later lifting measures because it -- it's an individual action and it gives that individual protection as well as that additional layer.

But there is also no clear way of distinguishing between who was wearing a mask and to isn't.

Our approach is more of waiting for that achievement of high population and I would say that applies to Canada as well as Yukon.

We could do this as a Canadian initiative rather than a local initiative.

Of course,, nothing is set in stone in a pandemic but what I do think this has signalled is from CDC, and this surprised many people, what it signals is the increasing amount of evidence that is now coming through from studies in the US, Israel and the UK which shows how effective these vaccines are in real life.

I think it's taken and is an at a station to the confidence in the fully vaccinated a fact in this real-life effectiveness of the COVID-19 vaccines.

I think if anything it affirms our approach and our current process and added to our ability to confidently move ahead even with our measures as of next week

where we are showing more and more real-world evidence that these vaccines work.

>> We will now move to Haley from Yukon news.

>> Reporter: I have a question for Doctor Hanley.

The primary benefit for the changing quarantine rules is Yukoners and its be determined British Columbians can have their health information verified.

Where do we stand with the other territories?

Those are the other jurisdictions with the most second doses.

Will travel be fairly smooth?

Is there a way to verify vaccination status between Nunavut, the West -- Northwest Territories and the Yukon?

>> I can't give you details but I know we've been having conversations for a while and each jurisdictional conversation is different.

It is difficult to have those conversation with our northern colleagues but I'm optimistic we will have a process in place but I can't give you any further details at this point.

>> Pat: Do you have another question?

>> Reporter: I do not.

Thank you.

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

>> Reporter: This is a question for either the premier or for Doctor Hanley.

Could you tell me what the arrangement is with BC for travel?

Considering we may see the variants of concern here?

>> Thank you for that question.

Just to reiterate, the requirement for fully vaccinated applies to anyone who is coming in from -- in to Yukon, a Canadian resident who has that full vaccine status and we are able to verify.

Because we shared information system with BC there are privacy walls on the each side of that but we basically have a shared immunization registry that allows us easier access to obtain the information based on if the individual consents to have us access that.

That's where there is an advantage for BC.

This isn't an interjurisdictional bubble.

It relies on vaccination and ability to verify that.

But we also have now a long history especially throughout the pandemic of having close collaborative working relationships with BC and we are also seeing very good progress in the management of COVID activity in BC.

And you are seeing those numbers and all health authorities in BC start to decline.

BC is positioning itself very well and looking ahead to the coming weeks and as far as I understand from following BC public statements they are still looking forward to lifting their restrictions against essential travel so I think it just shows that from a COVID activity points of view BC is starting to improve and that is ahead of many of the other major provinces.

>> Pat: A second question?

>> Reporter: Do you have any extra doses and what happens to those now that most of the people they are vaccinated?

>> We have no extra doses, per se.

Our dose allotment has been very closely aligned with our projections for uptake including projections in to the second quarter we've been, you know, trying to do our best that a close match between between anticipated demand and supply including extra allocation for our children, Danish 12 to 17 with the special Pfizer allocation and plus for our additional population such as rotational workers where we are providing vaccine.

I think we're sitting at a pretty tight connection and I think we've managed not allocation and process well.

I don't think we are sitting unused doses.

>> Pat: We will move to Tim from Whitehorse Star.

>> Reporter: My first question is for either of you not to long before the briefing began the Yukon privacy and information Commissioner released a statement from the commissioners across the country warning that these vaccine passports or certificates could be a bit of a minefield from a legal and privacy perspective so I'm wondering if you have any thoughts on that.

I realize you have not yet seen that statement.

>> At every step over the last 14 months we've been very considerate and deliberate and our approach.

Recommendations coming from a pandemic puts us into a different situation than regular governance and business and I look at the success of our managers as a really important hallmark but also making sure we work in lockstep with the Department of Justice and the Medical Officer of Health.

We are confident that our approach to the vaccinated individuals and again all Canadians is well within the provisions of the civil emergency measures act and a testament to the strength of a coordinated community wishes to me the most important piece.

We all need to work together and we need to recognize this is an emergency and I think credit goes to the department for being so extremely professional and understanding the mental wellness aspects but also the importance of the guidelines and restrictions because you have a jurisdiction that has zero cases and has used

the measures to make sure the ability for all Yukoners to do more answered be more by way of guiding gas through this difficult time has got us to a place where we will be on the other side of this virus in the most efficient amount of time which has always been our approach.

I haven't yet seen the statement but as far as the concept goes I think we have done well to take the guidelines from the medical community and assess that in the most proper way possible.

>> Pat: Do you have a follow-up question?

>> Reporter: To follow-up on that quickly, in the same statement the Yukon commissioner says she has not been involved in these discussions on a possible vaccine certificate or passport and your Minister of health and social services said that yesterday to reporters.

Don't you think that expertise could be taken advantage of it what could be a contentious program?

>> I think we've been very clear that once a recommendation gets formulated from the doctor's office after consultation with the international and national community that information becomes writerly available immediately.

Also are plans to implement the policies and designs and the guidelines again, is readily available.

>> Pat: We will move to Philippe from CBC Yukon.

>> Reporter: Could you town me more about the process of declaring or agreeing to consent of medical records?

Does not happen at the airport or at a roadside stop?

How does that interaction happen?

>> More details will come out.

Once we get this finalized we will give that information.

The most important thing is to understand we are going to ensure that this is done in the least in intrusive way possible.

I'm confident that Minister McPhee's team and Justice will work this out with our partners across the country and to be clear no one will be compelled to share any personal health information.

If an individual does not want to consent they still may enter the territory as long as they self isolate.

Doctor Hanley, you want to add?

>> I think you said it well.

Thank you.

>> Pat: Do you have a second question?

>> Reporter: Do you know roughly how long it would take to check this information?

Will people need to self isolate perhaps the first day waiting for a check to come back.

>> Again, more details will become available as soon those conversations got figured out.

We are in a great place with house and social services and our ability to share information.

We modernize our system in the last four and a half years which puts us in a place to be very proficient in not sharing of information.

Every jurisdiction is different.

>> Pat: We will not move the radio Canada.

[Speaking French]

>> Andre: You talked about the school for vaccination of youth and they'd like to know if this vaccination campaign will take place in schools?

[Speaking French]

[Speaking French]

Is there anything I should add Pat.

>> Pat: So in Whitehorse, they will take place at the convention Centre.

[Speaking French]

[Speaking French]

[Speaking French]

>> Andre: You announced fully vaccinated Canadians will be allowed to comment to the Yukon without vaccination and we'd like to know if this means your recommendation on nonessential travel is waived to the extent people are vaccinated and are welcome to come in to the Yukon?

[Speaking French]

>> Should I...

>> Pat: You address that in English if I recall.

You and I moved to Lori.

[Speaking French]

>> Andre: The question is essentially why do we still have restriction on the number of people for outside activities if we still need to respect the extent she nation and wearing masks?

Why do we have a maximum limit of the number of people that can gather outside?

[Speaking French]

[Speaking French]

[Speaking French]

>> Pat: Do you have another question?

>>> We now move to Paul from the CBC.

>> Reporter: Can you hear me?

>> Pat: We can.

>> Reporter: I want to come back to the questions around proof of vaccination.

May 25th is just six days away and I'm hearing a lot of the answers being that you are still working on it, to stay tuned.

How confident are you that you can provide those details in the next six days as to what people can expect?

How can they prove their vaccination?

What's required for them to not need to isolate.

>> I think we've been clear that as far as the proof required we are confident for Yukoners and those from British Columbia and will work out the details for all other regions.

To say we would be ready by the 25th, we won't be but those conversations are continuing.

From the very first time we talked about this recommendation we said that verification will take some time and we need people to be patient and that for those jurisdictions that don't have the ability to be verified we want to be respectful of the travel recommendations as well and as Doctor Hanley mentioned after the long weekend British Columbia will update their travel requirements.

It is cautiously optimistic.

They are very similar to where they were in October as far as.

Count but that verification, BC and Yukon for now and we will update people as we get it for other jurisdictions.

>> Pat: Doctor Hanley.

>> I will add to that Paul.

Apart from the other territories just keep in mind 3 percent of Canadians have had their second Oso we are really talking about primarily an initiative for Yukoners and they have nothing to worry about.

We will have the ability to verify that.

They don't need -- Yukoners don't need to worry that they will be needing to self isolate while this is figured out.

As long as they are prepared to sign the declaration and consent they will not be required to self isolate.

But the reality is for that very small number of people from the southern jurisdiction, those details are still being worked out and I'm pretty confident will be available soon.

>> Pat: Do you have a second question Paul.

>> Reporter: This one has to do with vaccination rates.

We have seen the vaccination rates for central Yukoner quite a bit lower than some other regions.

Are you doing anything to try to address that to see those numbers co-opt specifically in that central Yukon region where the numbers have been lower?

>> I can start.

>> Pat: Go ahead premier silver.

>> Whoever's playing the piano behind you is doing a fantastic job by the way.

[Laughter]

>> This is the most successful thing we have ever seen in terms of how we got the campaign out, also coordinating with the First Nations government and municipalities to dispel the myths and rumours and misinformation.

We been very successful.

Where it comes to, some numbers and some demographics in each region are continuing to work with our partners to make sure we have as many as possible healthy folks that can take the vaccine but again to sit here in the Yukon and to announce we have achieved 75 percent for the first dose is a remarkable accomplishment in the credit is deserved amongst the dedicated people in health and social services to show that professionalism, to use the vaccine sought we were granted through rural Indigenous and remote communities, it's an extraordinary effort.

I think we are comfortable with the numbers we have.

Now turning the page -- page to the Pfizer vaccine and turning out the logistics.

We will continue on the successful path we started with the campaign of this is our shot.

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

The next COVID-19 update will take place at May 26 at 10:30 AM.