

COVID-19 Facebook live update: August 11, 2021

>> Good morning to you all.

I am Renee and the moderator for today's COVID 19 update.

We are joined by Premier Sandy Silver and Minister of community services, Richard Mostyn.

Closed captioning is provided by National Closed Captioning.

Thank you to Mary Tiessen for providing our ASL interpretation today.

Following the remarks from our speakers we will go to the media present in the room and on the phone lines for a round of questions.

We will call you my name and you will each have two questions.

Before we begin, I would like to verify that everyone can hear us?

If any reporters are having problems, please e mail ecoinfo@gov.yk.ca.

I will now hand it over to Premier Sandy Silver.

>> Thank you, Renee.

And thank you everybody for joining us today on the traditional territory of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and the Ta'an Kwächän Council.

It is great to be here today with Community Services Minister Richard Mostyn for another COVID 19 update.

And of course Andre and Mary as well.

We have a continuing improvement situation in Yukon.

Today, we have two new cases to report.

The current number of active cases in Yukon is 45.

That number may change as today, we will be seeing some recoveries hopefully confirmed.

We will continue to report these daily numbers online at Yukon.ca.

You can check therefore the most up to date information.

Our total number of active cases continues to decrease, and this is absolute welcome news.

We are happy the overall situation is stabilizing and we have seen no new outbreaks.

Thank you, everyone, for all that you do and your part in stopping the spread.

I know that it is not easy, but I also know that things are getting better.

There have been public notifications issued this week as well.

You can find details about these online as well, at Yukon.ca.

Anyone experiencing symptoms and Whitehorse should call COVID 19 testing and assessment centre, and that phone number is 867-393-3083.

You can also book online at Yukon.ca to arrange for testing.

People in the communities should contact their rural community centres, community health centres.

Testing turnaround times remain very quick and you can access negative results online.

Getting tested if you have symptoms absolutely remains an important part of lifting the spread of COVID-19.

And other pillar of our ongoing response to COVID-19 immunization.

We now know that vaccination is a powerful tool that allows us to treat COVID-19 as a preventable disease.

The vaccine is the best protection that we have now in into the future.

As of Monday, more than 80 per cent of eligible Yukoners over the age of 12 are now fully vaccinated.

A big thank you to all of our community partners, team Balto, team Togo, team Fox, and especially all you Yukoners for getting us to that remarkable percentage.

We need to keep these numbers going out.

The more people getting vaccinated, the safer our territory will be.

We have seen throughout the past two months that this virus is extremely troublesome, but vaccination has played a key role in preventing disastrous outcomes.

So please, if you have not received your shots yet, please book an appointment online at [Yukon.ca/thisisourshot](https://www.yukon.ca/thisisourshot).

You can also drop in at the clinic here in Whitehorse, or at the clinics that are popping up in the communities.

The teams will be at Old Crow, Watson Lake and Ross River this week.

Dawson and Watson Lake next week.

I want to thank again all of the Yukoners that have spoken out about how catching COVID helped them overcome their vaccine hesitancy.

And who have urged others to take their shot.

This is powerful testimony.

I know that it is not an easy conversation to have, but it is so extremely important.

The vaccines save lives, no doubt about it.

The more people that get vaccinated, the safer our territory will be.

We are currently leading the country when it comes to vaccinations, and that is really exciting.

Last week, we lifted some restrictions that we had in place.

We recognize that is still a tense time for folks.

Transition usually is, and transitioning away from border controls and mask mandates towards living with the ongoing risks of

COVID-19, it is a daunting task for us and it is a lived experience for Yukoners.

And we are ahead of the curve with vaccination rates, we are kind of a test case for a lot of the rest of Canada.

I would remind you that while you're no longer have to wear a mask indoors, it is still strongly recommended.

I'm still wearing mine when I am grabbing groceries, still wearing mine when heading to restaurant washrooms.

Different public places where you feel you might be too close contact.

I want people to feel comfortable, and I know that we are all moving at different paces through the nation and the world, but we need to adjust to things.

It is really important to continue to be respectful of businesses and organizations that continue to require masks as well.

We all need to keep in mind that our individual actions have an absolute impact on the entire territory.

We all have a role to play, and we need to be kind and helpful to each other because that is how we are going to get through this, and we are all in this in this together.

Our government will continue to work with our partners throughout the entire territory to adapt to the current risk and ensure the appropriate tools are in place for all Yukoners.

As we have been saying for weeks, the risks are decreasing as vaccination rates continue here in the territory and across Canada.

That means that we can shift our focus to a more targeted response to the threat of COVID-19.

The broad public measures, public health measures we have relied on to date are no longer necessary.

Minister Mostyn is here today and he is responsible for the *Civil Emergency Measures Act*.

He will be discussing the current state of emergency in in a moment.

Even as we transition back to normal, we remain focused on protecting the health and safety of all Yukoners.

We have a number of tools that we continue to use to manage the pandemic, and we will continue to actively respond to their risks and to adapt as necessary.

Thank you everybody for listening today, and I will pass it off to Richard.

>> Thank you very much, Premier.

Thank you all for joining us here this morning on the traditional territories of the Kwanlin Dün and the Ta'an Kwächän Council.

It is really great to be here today with you.

As the Premier just said, we recently lifted some of the restrictions in place based on the recommendations of the Chief Medical Officer's office.

Mask used in indoor spaces is no longer mandatory, but it remains strongly encouraged.

As the Premier mentioned, we want people to respect stores' and restaurants' requests that patrons continue to require mask use.

Yesterday afternoon, I was in Whitehorse International Airport picking up family.

It was a very busy flight.

It was nice to see, actually, an airport hustling and bustling again.

But I don't think I saw a single person not wearing a mask in the airport.

So in the Yukon, we are emerging carefully and methodically from an unprecedented public health emergency, and it is important people feel safe as we do that.

Self-isolation is no longer required for those entering the territory.

The federal government has also changed the rules at our international border to allow fully vaccinated Americans to come into Canada again.

This is welcome news for many of us who have close connections with Alaska and the lower 48.

It is also good for tourism operators and businesses that rely on travellers.

Yukoners may see more American plates in the territory over the coming weeks, months and years, and we encourage them to

respect the hospitality that Yukon has the camera noun for around the world.

Bars and restaurants are also at full capacity, though they must still use contact tracing sheets.

This measure is designed to protect the health and safety of you and your fellow Yukoners.

They are still limits on sizes of social gatherings.

Social gatherings are limited to 20 indoors with physical distancing and limited to 100 outdoors with physical distancing.

Organized gatherings, both indoor and out, are limited to 200 people with physical distancing.

Large gatherings is where we saw our spread occur during our June outbreak.

Size limits have been very effective in helping reduce our case count, as the Premier has mentioned.

Today, our vaccination rates continue to rise, and our case counts are decreasing.

The state of emergency is set to expire on August 25th and if these trends continue, the Yukon will not need to extend it further.

The most significant change once it is over will be the end of enforcement measures under the civil emergency measures act.

But the emergency also allowed administrative measures to support Yukoners impacted by the pandemic.

We allowed the Yukon medical Council to issue provisional licences to new graduates whose qualifying exams were delayed due to COVID-19.

This helped cover absences within our medical community.

We enable pharmacists to prescribe and extend prescriptions.

This helped ensure patients received on Monday uninterrupted access to vital medication throughout the pandemic.

We also saw flexibility around legal obligations, and that help support individuals who could not travel or needed to self isolate.

These are some of the 14 orders we used to support Yukoners over the past 17 months or so.

And as our world got turned upside down and many of these orders and with the state of emergency, or after a prescribed transition period after the fact.

The Department of Community Services is working on how we transition from the emergency and a planned manner that continues to support and inform Yukoners.

I want to thank all the public servants who have helped us manage the pandemic over the past year and a half.

I also want to thank Yukoners for all the sacrifices that they have made.

For the genuine thoughtfulness and consideration they have demonstrated for their family, friends, neighbours and strangers.

That took discipline, and it has saved lives.

There are people walking the streets in town today who would not be here if it were not for that dedication and thoughtfulness that Yukoners have shown.

I said it a couple of weeks ago.

Civil servants, nurses, doctors, Yukoners stepped up and become part of the best vaccination program in the nation, and arguably one of the best in the world.

It wasn't easy, delivering this wondrous medicine took skill.

Few people like getting jabbed in the arm.

So it has been an immense effort on the part of team Yukon, that is all of us, and we are just now starting to see some of the benefits of that hard work over the last 18 months.

But the necessity for thoughtfulness and consideration that we have demonstrated in the Yukon doesn't end with the state of emergency.

It must continue in the face of this now endemic illness.

The only thing ending really is the enforcement, about society still has a responsibility to do what they have demonstrated they know is right.

We will continue to monitor the situation in the coming weeks and continue to engage with our partners throughout the territory.

We remain focused on protecting the health and safety of Yukoners.

As the Premier touched on, we have a number of tools we continue to use in response to the pandemic and we will continue to actively manage the situation.

We are simply adjusting our approach.

Testing, rapid response teams, critical social support workers and expanded vaccine access are just some of the tools we are using in this transition.

We continue to follow the recommendations of the office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health as we have throughout the pandemic.

Nothing has changed, nothing will change.

If the risk changes, we will adapt as necessary.

The availability of vaccines, these safe, wonderful, marvellous wonders of science have completely changed the landscape when it comes to COVID-19, and significantly changed the risks we are facing as a society.

It is imperative that everybody who can gets vaccinated, as the Premier said a few minutes ago.

We have one of the highest vaccination rates in the world and we can take comfort in the strong level of protection provides our entire community.

We will keep working with our partners to push that higher and increase that level of protection.

We are all in this together, and we will get through this together as we have demonstrated over the last 17 months or so.

So thank you.

>> Thank you, Premier.

Thank you, Minister.

We will now move on to the question and answer session with the 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 first go to the reporter in the room and start with Luke at CKRW.

>> Reporter: hi, question for Minister Mostyn.

You mentioned a possible transition period out of the state of emergency, if it does happen to expire and you won't extend after August 25th.

Could you give some examples as to what that will look like.

Is there mandated enforcement by the government still in some way?

>> Things like driver's licences.

Seniors who have had a period of time where they haven't had to have their driver's licence exams, you know, when you're an older person.

When the state of emergency ends, we have a 90-day period where people can come and get those straightened out.

So pieces like that that are really administrative, and when we drop the state of emergency, we know there will be a backlog to deal with some of the cases and that type of thing.

That was built into the orders when they came into being, but for the most part, life will resume to where it was prior to the pandemic with people taking personal responsibility for their health.

But really, we have demonstrated the ability that we have the tools to do that.

And I have every confidence that Yukoners who demonstrated such an overwhelming concern and care for their fellow citizens in this territory will continue to do the right thing after the state of emergency ends.

>> Thank you.

Another question?

>> Reporter: I do, and this is for the Premier.

With the potential of the Moderna vaccine being approved for 12- to 17-year-olds at some point soon, they are going through trials still, is there a possibility the government might acquire more vaccine of either Pfizer or Moderna just to keep up with these vaccinations?

Or are we at the point where we have enough supply right now.

>> We are always engaged with the federal government as far as distribution and, as you know, we were recognized as northern, rural and Indigenous communities being prioritized right across Canada.

The Chief Medical Officer of Health has said in the past, we are not necessarily picky.

Whatever we get, we get.

But at the same time we have proven to be very successful with Moderna and the story of their distribution, and also Pfizer with 12-year-olds and up.

So we do have enough supply currently but, again, as new trials begin and those age limits reduce, we will send the message again to Ottawa that we are ready, willing and able to distribute the vaccines that we can get delivered.

Thank you.

>> Thank you.

We will now go to Haley on the phone lines from Yukon News.

>> Thank you.

I am not sure who this question is best directed at, but either feel free to answer.

Now that we are moving to more personal responsibility of managing COVID risk, I'm wondering if there will be more detailed information released like vaccination data for individual communities to help people make those choices about their risk?

>> It's a good question, and a lot of those questions will be answered when we release some more information about how we replace a path forward.

As we go from a pandemic to an endemic, we will continue to work with recommendations from the Chief Medical Officer of Health.

I guess the biggest changes obviously back the restrictions won't have that enforcement piece to it.

Minister Mostyn spoke about some of the backlog that we will endure as we get back to normal.

But what we will continue to do is make sure the advice we are getting from the communities is, it's extremely important that we need to be able to look at things on a more case by case basis.

As you have been reporting on over the last year, numbers in communities and policy therein has changed at different times based upon again giving people the information they need but also protecting the privacy of individuals.

That model won't end.

We'll continue to adhere to that but at the same time, we do now have to change and work with leadership in each community to

decide what is the most important piece for each community.

The doctor has said before, 80 per cent, that's great.

Now it is more of a microcosm of that.

We need to look at the communities that are under-vaccinated compared to over-vaccinated and really focus our efforts therein.

As far as the reporting of numbers, that is based upon consultation in each community really.

Thank you.

Another question?

>> Reporter: I do, thank you.

I was wondering if you have some advice or criteria for assessing risk when it comes to mask usage.

Is it more important for people who tend to be spending time with unvaccinated people, whether it's for work or social?

Is it more important for example that they be wearing masks?

Do you have advice for assessing risk like that?

>> That is a really good question.

And you know...

There's a question inside that about personal responsibility, there is a question inside their about the CDC's reports on the efficacy of masks for vaccinated versus unvaccinated.

And, really, we don't have the ability as individuals in our society to know who is in the room.

So I think, you know, we have said all along this pandemic, you have to act as if COVID is right beside you.

And as restaurants had their guidelines based upon that fact, we in Yukon went through a long period where we did not have any cases.

Yet still Yukoners understood that mentality for the most part, which is great to see.

When outbreaks came, we knew that the guidelines we had in place were effective to reduce the spread, and our traceability was impeccable.

When it comes to masks moving forward, now that we have populations that are very well-vaccinated and we don't have the justification for the fines and that type of thing.

I think it is important again for Yukoners to remember where they are.

If you're in an airport, personally, I am wearing a mask.

Sitting beside people, if I can't be one caribou away from somebody, I am still going to wear a mask.

The other day in the grocery store, it is great to be able to see people walking around a little more normal these days but again, personally, I still think that I will be continuing to wear that if I find myself in situations where I can't be safely distanced from others.

As a fully vaccinated Canadian, it is my way of showing the community that this is still real and still important to me.

>> Thank you.

We will now move to Tim with the Whitehorse Star.

>> Reporter: Yes, good morning.

Can you hear me?

>> We can, Tim, thank you.

>> Reporter: My question is either for the Premier or the Minister.

Wondering with the daily case counts, limping along, an average of seven cases a day for a couple of weeks now, whether the public is looking at this the wrong way and expecting to see that number go to zero?

Are we going to continue to sort of rumble along with a few active cases every day for the foreseeable future, or maybe kind of permanently?

>> [Premier] Very hard to predict.

You know, as Delta replaced other strains, I heard a stat the other day of 80 per cent of cases in Canada.

We have to adjust accordingly.

And as new strains come down the pike, we will have to act accordingly as well.

It is so hard to predict.

We're in a good position now, the cases haven't been over double digits in a while.

We announced today's cases, and of course all that information is on Yukon.ca.

We just need to be prepared for whatever comes with this virus.

And so far, the success of Moderna and Pfizer, the boosters, to be able to keep vaccinated people at a very high percentage of safety is encouraging news.

The nature of these mRNA vaccines is also good news, because they are plug and play as far as variants go.

Those trials should be very quick as the variants continue.

I am not a doctor, so I will stop there.

We will definitely rely on the Chief Medical Officer of Health and that office to make sure that whatever comes down the pike, our systems will, our healthcare systems will be ready for the next chapter.

I don't know if you have anything to add, Richard?

>> I can certainly weigh in a little bit.

I come from a public safety, workplace safety background, the goal is always zero.

We want to look around and see, nobody wants to see someone get hurt or get ill.

The goal as a society should always be to get to zero.

But that's, right now, in the face of this virus and all the variants we are seeing, it is going to be very very difficult.

That is why I have every confidence in Yukoners to do the right thing.

When this thing hit in March, when we put the state of emergency in, we were dealing with an unknown illness.

One that has only been in the world for a few months, really.

And in the course of 18 months, we have developed vaccines.

Speed which just boggles the mind, it really does.

We have safe medicine that didn't exist 18 months ago, is now saving billions of people around the world.

It's absolutely incredible.

And that is the key to our success as a society going forward, getting those vaccines in our arms.

Some people can't have them, some people won't get them.

So we have to do the right thing and protect our fellow Yukoners.

And over the last 18 months, we have developed the PPE.

We have trained ourselves.

Dr Hanley told us that the training would be difficult, it has been difficult, but we now know how to distance ourselves, how to wear masks, to wash our hands.

If you're in a busy store, to don a mask because you don't know who you're with.

If the store is not busy, you probably got a little more latitude.

People are going to have to look around and assess the situation, take a personal interest in what's happening around you.

I carry a mask in my pocket now all the time and I don it when I deem it necessary.

And if I, when I feel safe if nobody is around me, I may take it off.

It's all going to be on us to continue to care for our fellow Yukoners, our friends, our family, our neighbours and strangers as we navigate these waters going forward.

>> Thank you.

Tim, do you have another question?

>> Reporter: Just one more, either can answer because it is probably more of a medical thing.

Are we inching closer to having a formal recommendation on whether booster shots are going to be needed for people?

>> Yeah, I wouldn't weigh into that as Ministers or as Premier.

We will continue to be updated by the public health officials that in my opinion, right across Canada, have done an impeccable job of keeping us safe.

No sense speculating moving forward, but we will definitely be taking their recommendations from those public health officials.

>> {Minister Mostyn} Tim, I am not the doctor and I don't play one on TV.

I am going to just defer.

We have taken the recommendations of the Chief Medical Officer of health through this pandemic.

That office has guided us really, really well.

Nothing has changed on that front.

We are still taking the recommendations of the Chief Medical Officer and implementing them and that's the path forward.

>> Thank you.

We will now move to Nick with the Canadian press.

>> Reporter: Hi, I was just wondering if the Premier would be able to comment on I guess if there was any concerns about the kind of management of the pandemic response, with Dr. Hanley taking a leave of absence to run for, in the potential upcoming election?

>> You know, the Chief Medical Office of Health is exactly that.

It is an office of public health professionals.

We have an amazing alternative in Doctor Elliott, who, from the very early onset of this pandemic, has been providing our offices with extremely difficult, but bang on advice and recommendations.

Early on, we had to cancel the Arctic Winter Games and at that time, it was Doctor Elliott who was in charge.

And again, that would be the forward facing public official but behind the doctor, whether it's Doctor Elliott or now as well Dr. Kancir, who was from Doctor Henry's office in B.C. who is stepping in as well, there is a team of professionals in that office not just in the Yukon but right across Canada, that have, again, I have used the word a few times today, have provided impeccable advice.

The forward facing head of that office is no longer there, as of the Monday announcement.

But at the same time, the office is still integral in our approach.

And the officials in that office will continue to do what they have done all the way along, keep Yukoners safe with the most up to date recommendations.

>> Thank you.

Another question?

>> Reporter: That's it for me, thank you.

>> Thank you.

Now to Maryne, L'Aurore boréale.

[Speaking French]

>> [Interpreter: She had no questions.]

>> Thank you.

That concludes our COVID 19 update for today.

Stay tuned for more information on the next COVID 19 update.

Thank you again to Premier Silver and Minister Mostyn.

Thank you also to all the media on the line and in the room, and everyone who tuned in to watch over Facebook.

Have a wonderful Wednesday.