The COVID-19 state of emergency is over: now what?

On March 27, 2020, the Government of Yukon declared a state of emergency under the *Civil Emergency Measures Act (CEMA)* in response to COVID-19. The state of emergency provided the necessary tools to enable the Government of Yukon's response the pandemic.

After extending the state of emergency five times since then, it will be allowed to expire at midnight on August 25, 2021. This marks a fundamental shift away from response mode towards living with COVID-19.

The Government of Yukon is ending the state of emergency, but protecting the health and well-being of Yukoners, and protecting the quality of life in the territory will remain a priority for our government in the months and years to come.

Why was a state of emergency necessary in the first place?

The state of emergency was instrumental to the Government of Yukon's response to COVID-19.

The state of emergency allowed our government to enact a number of temporary measures that supported Yukoners throughout the pandemic – from economic supports for businesses to the requirement to self-isolate for 14 days for anyone entering the territory.

It also made deploying resources to protect Yukoners and limit the spread of the virus more efficient, and allowed our government to respond quickly and effectively to a changing situation.

What will change now that the state of emergency is over?

Now that the state of emergency is over, the remaining COVID-19 restrictions have ended as well. There are no longer any legal limits on gathering sizes in the Yukon.

A number of other COVID-19 restrictions – such as the requirement to submit a declaration form and self-isolate on entry to Yukon, and the requirement to wear a mask indoors – all ended on August 4, 2021.

Ending the State of Emergency does not leave us without tools to manage COVID-19 in the Yukon. The Public Health and Safety Act provides sufficient means to ensure the safety of Yukoners. For example, the Chief Medical Officer of Health can order individuals who have tested positive for COVID-19 to self-isolate. The CMOH and their team can also order contacts of positive cases to self-isolate, and they have the authority to charge individuals who do not comply with a self-isolation order.

Under the state of emergency, our government also enacted a number of programs and provisions by way of Ministerial Orders to support Yukoners and ensure continuity of essential services. For example, pharmacists were enabled to prescribe and extend prescriptions where required under the state of emergency, and the Minister of Education was afforded the power to establish flexibility for instruction and provide educational programming by alternative means.

While some of these Ministerial Orders will end immediately now that the state of emergency is over, others have a transition period of up to 90 days. For a full list of these orders that have a transitional period, visit Yukon.ca.

Does this mean I can go back to life like it was before COVID-19?

While the state of emergency has ended, we do believe that as a society we are going to be living with COVID-19 for some time. In order for life to be as normal as possible, Yukoners are encouraged to adhere to the public health advice provided by the Chief Medical Officer of Health to stay healthy and stay safe. Yukoners should ensure that they:

- stay home when sick;
- wash your hands often;
- practice safe spacing;
- keep your space clean; and
- wear masks to protect those that are more vulnerable.

Read all of the Chief Medical Officer of Health's advice on Yukon.ca.

I am concerned that the state of emergency is ending too soon. Why is the government lifting all these measures while there is still COVID-19 in the territory?

Our government is ending the state of emergency as a COVID19 management tool based on the expert advice of the Chief Medical Officer of Health. Since the pandemic was first declared, we have learned much about COVID-19 and how to manage it. Rising vaccination rates in Canada and low COVID-19 activity have substantially reduced the risk to the Yukon of imported cases – we are in a very different position than we were 17 months ago. We are comfortable using alternate methods to manage the pandemic, such as the Public Health and Safety Act.

Though public health risk remains, blanket public health measures are no longer the best method of protection for the territory's population. A more targeted approach is now required. *Forging Ahead: The Yukon's Continued Response to COVID-19*, was released last week and outlines these targeted measures, and six pillars that lay the foundation for our government to continue to protect vulnerable populations and enhance Yukoners' well-being as we transition to our new normal. *Forging Ahead* can be found on Yukon.ca.