

# Public health emergency declared in Yukon over COVID-19 <sup>[1]</sup>

Territory says the declaration will allow for quicker response to virus.

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## AVAILABILITY

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## EXCERPTED

The Yukon is now under a public health emergency.

The territory's chief medical officer of health made the declaration on March 18 in light of concerns about the spread of COVID-19.

Dr. Brendan Hanley said the call ensures more authority when enforcing self-isolation and quarantine measures.

Asked how these would be enforced, he said an authority member could make contact with people ordered to self-quarantine to ensure the orders are being followed.

If they aren't, Hanley said, several enforcement measures could be taken, up to arrests if necessary.

Under the declaration, classes at the territory's 30 public schools will also be suspended until April 15; indoor recreation facilities and libraries will be required to close until further notice; and visitors will be barred from the territory's hospitals, with limited exceptions.

Hanley said the school cancellation won't interfere with graduating classes as education is to continue via online methods.

He said there is no urgency to change how daycares are presently run, as the use of this service has diminished.

On the hospital front, a limit of two people will be able to visit maternity wards and babies, sick children and those who are terminally ill or in emergency situations.

Caregivers of people with disabilities and substitute decision makers will also be permitted to visit.

Hanley maintained that there are no confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the Yukon.

Tests are to start trickling in from British Columbia this week, he said.

The Yukon has confirmed results for about 80 tests and is waiting for the results of about roughly 120.

It takes upwards of seven days for test results to come back. A cabinet spokesperson confirmed slight delays in the process this week to the News.

Hanley said the lab in B.C. has a "huge backlog," noting that a quicker turnaround is expected by next week as extra capacity has been added.

Detection and containment are top of mind when it comes to choosing how and when to administer tests, he explained. Travellers, for instance, would be a priority.

"We need to make sure that the right people are being tested," Hanley said.

He clarified that performing COVID-19 testing in the Yukon is not feasible at the moment due to capacity issues. It's about ensuring better turnaround times, he said.

In question period on March 18, Premier Sandy Silver referred to a computer application that's being developed between provincial and federal governments in an effort to alleviate pressure on an already-strained health care system.

"It's just another way of, if people really do need the tests, that they're the first ones in line," he said, adding that there isn't a timeline for the rollout of the application yet. "Statistical information is so important as the situation changes on a daily, weekly basis."

This is separate from an online tool launched by the Yukon government where users can check their if their symptoms justify being screened for COVID-19.

People exhibiting symptoms including such as a fever, cough and shortness of breath who have travelled outside of Canada within 14 days, or have been in close contact with someone who has a probable or confirmed case of COVID-19, are being urged to call 811 instead of

attending hospitals or health centres. Health officers have said the line is experiencing a lot of traffic.

A cabinet spokesperson said the Yukon government is working to set up a Yukon-specific phone line.

With files from Gord Fortin

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