Coronavirus updates

Updates on COVID-19 from Yukon Deputy Chief Medical Officer of Health Dr. Catherine Elliott

March 16, 2020 – Updates on travel and mass gathering

Yukon’s Chief Medical Officer of Health is telling all individuals who have travelled outside of Canada in the last 14 days to self-isolate. This includes travel to Alaska.

Individuals who have travelled outside of Yukon in the last 14 days, or who are feeling sick, are banned from visiting hospitals.

Long-term care facilities are closed to visitors and volunteers, unless family members are at the end of life or gravely ill regardless of travel.

These restrictions are accompanied by several others including the following:

* Mass gatherings of more than 50 people are banned, including at houses of worship.
* Parents or caregivers who are able to keep their children home from spring break daycamps, or daycare, are requested to do so. Fewer children in camps or daycares will help to limit any spread.
* People who can work from home are requested to do so. Employers are asked to look for ways to support employees to work from home where possible.

Many of us are interested in how COVID-19 is spread from one person to another.  As an emerging disease, there are many uncertainties about its characteristics.  The information that we communicate today is the best knowledge at this time.  This knowledge does change and get out of date rapidly, and we are keeping updated and adjusting our response accordingly. We must all be cautious and patient as the information changes.

Current evidence supports that the main route of COVID-19 spread is from person-to-person through respiratory droplets when an infected person sneezes or coughs. The risk of transmission is believed to be highest when the person is most symptomatic. However recent evidence and modeling suggests that transmission may occur prior to symptoms being present.  Major uncertainties remain in the role that asymptomatic transmission may play in the spread of COVID-19.

At this time in Yukon, we are recommending self-isolation for all travelers from international destinations, even those without symptoms.  This precautionary measure is important as we are working with an illness that is not fully understood.

All people returning from international travel should self-isolate for 14 days.  This means that they should stay home or in the outdoors where they can be 2 metres away from other people. See the Government of Canada webpage for [more information](https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/diseases-conditions/covid-19-how-to-isolate-at-home.html).

We are asking all people throughout Yukon to do their part to keep Yukon healthy.  Please continue to practice good hand hygiene and cough etiquette. Please be especially considerate of people over 65 years old and people who have underlying medical conditions who are at highest risk of severe complications of respiratory infections including influenza and COVID-19.

Persons who are returning from travel and have any cough or sensation of fever, even mild, should consider themselves infectious and be extra cautious with their self-isolation and distancing from those at highest risk of severe infection.  In that case please self-isolate and call YCDC at 867-667-8323 or 1-800661-1408 ext. 8323.

The situation with COVID-19 is fluid and we continue to update our guidance based on the latest information.  We will continue to provide the public regular updates as the situation continues to evolve.

Yours in health,

Dr. Catherine Elliott, MD FRCPC

March 11, 2020 – Coronavirus updates

There have been many questions from Yukoners today who attended, live closely with, or work with someone who attended the Prospectors and Developers Association of Canada conference in Toronto from March 1 to 4, 2020.

Yukoners who attended the conference may have been exposed to COVID-19. Symptoms of COVID-19 include a cough, fever or shortness of breath. If you don’t have these symptoms, then you can go about your regular day-to-day activities. This includes attending work, classes, events and other activities. However, if you develop any of the symptoms listed above, then please stay home and contact Yukon Communicable Disease Control at 1-867-667-8323 to arrange for testing.

It is important to remember people who have no symptoms cannot pass COVID-19 on to others.

It is normal for people to be afraid of contagious diseases. We all want to protect our families, friends and communities. However, fear can cause us to make unwise decisions like spreading misinformation, or hoarding food and medications.

Please remember that the risk of COVID-19 infection for Yukoners remains low, and the majority of individuals who contract the disease will have mild symptoms. We will continue to provide regular updates as the situation evolves.

Yours in health,

Dr. Catherine Elliott, MD FRCPC

March 7, 2020 – Cancellation of 2020 Arctic Winter Games

It is out of an abundance of caution that today, as the Chief Medical Officer of Health, responsible for public health in Yukon, I have recommended the cancellation of the 2020 Arctic Winter Games that were scheduled to be held here in Whitehorse beginning next week.

I am making this recommendation out of concern for the health and safety of Yukoners, of all athletes and delegates and for their home communities throughout the circumpolar North.

COVID-19 is a contagious disease that spreads from person to person rapidly through respiratory secretions. In a setting like the Arctic Winter Games, where people are sleeping, eating and playing together in such close quarters, the potential to spread is amplified greatly. Even in the absence of COVID-19 here, a single suspected case would have serious impacts. For example, a person with a cough who has travelled to the games would need to be tested and isolated while awaiting results. The necessity for rapid and rigorous public health response, for the individual, for the contacts, diagnosis and isolation while waiting for even a negative result, the potential for fear, concern here and throughout the North, these would be challenging in the setting of Arctic Winter Games in Whitehorse.

The possibility of importation of the disease is changing and raises much uncertainty. While there is no case of COVID-19 in Yukon, other places are seeing community spread with no explanation of how or why. We have been surprised by cases in BC, Alberta and Washington State that have no links to diagnosed cases nor travel history to affected areas. The global spread of COVID-19 has been faster and more uncertain than many of us have expected and we must take the necessary steps to protect ourselves, our citizens and others.

In Yukon, we are already responding to the potential threat of COVID-19. We are taking advantage of this time when the risk is low to mobilize our public health response and our preparedness for potential impacts on acute care services. We are actively monitoring for cases, leveraging existing influenza surveillance systems. We are ready to ensure excellent medical care in a way that protects the health of our population should COVID-19 arrive here.

It is with a heavy heart that I make this recommendation. The Arctic Winter Games is an event that brings together so many northerners from across Canada and other circumpolar regions to celebrate sport, art and culture. It demonstrates the beauty, strength and cohesion of northern peoples. This beauty, strength and cohesion must remain strong through today’s announcement and the coming days.

Catherine Elliott, MD MHSc FRCPC