

Yukon's COVID-19 Vaccine Strategy

DECEMBER 2020



SUPPORTING YUKONERS
on our path forward

Introduction

Despite the unprecedented challenges COVID-19 has presented over the course of the pandemic, Yukoners have come together to minimize the harmful effects on our families and our communities.

By working together to follow our “Safe 6 plus 1” practices, we have succeeded in slowing the spread of the virus while protecting the most vulnerable Yukoners and communities.

As we move into the next phase, where access to a safe and effective COVID-19 vaccine is a critical element of our response to the COVID-19 pandemic, practising the Safe 6 plus 1 will continue to be essential. This means:

- keeping your distance;
- keeping your hands clean;
- staying home if you feel sick;
- avoiding crowds;
- travelling with respect;
- self-isolating when necessary; and
- wearing a mask.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic was declared in March 2020, developing safe and effective vaccines to reduce the transmission of the virus has been a global priority. Advances in science and technology and unprecedented levels of cooperation mean a COVID-19 vaccine will be available much sooner than was ever thought possible.

As a result of tremendous efforts from many Yukoners across the territory and in cooperation with our federal, provincial and territorial colleagues, Yukon is ready to safely and efficiently deliver COVID-19 vaccines across the territory.

Widespread immunization is the best option to protect Yukoners from COVID-19

Safe and effective vaccines will reduce the transmission of the virus that causes COVID-19 and associated illnesses and deaths. Over time, widespread immunization will allow Yukoners to live with fewer restrictions as outlined in [A Path Forward: Yukon's plan for lifting COVID-19 restrictions](#).

Table of Contents

Introduction	iii	Establish vaccine clinics.....	7
Goal	1	Support the distribution of the vaccine	8
Principles	2	Monitor and report on the vaccine	8
Science-driven decision making.....	2	Objective 2: Yukoners have barrier-free access to the vaccine	8
Transparency.....	2	Provide the vaccine at no cost to Yukoners	8
Coherence and adaptability	2	Provide the vaccine at multiple locations	8
Fairness and equity.....	3	Coordinate efficient timing and sequencing of vaccine rollout	9
Public involvement.....	3	Priority recipients for the vaccine	9
Consistent monitoring and reporting	3	Objective 3: Yukoners are confident in the process and the COVID-19 vaccine....	10
Cultural safety and humility	3	Be open and transparent	10
Yukon's vaccination strategy highlights	4	Communicate the scientific evidence about the vaccine.....	10
Yukon's strategy in an evolving environment	4	Engage Yukoners	10
Available vaccine product.....	4	National considerations and supply assumptions.....	11
Vaccine quantity.....	5	National immunization approach	11
Phased approach.....	5	Ensuring the safety and effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccines	11
Objectives	6	Population immunity.....	12
Objectives and actions	7	National allocation and sequencing strategy.....	12
Objective 1: The COVID-19 vaccine is safely and efficiently delivered to Yukoners.	7	Next steps	13
Build on existing partnerships and expertise	7	Conclusion	14

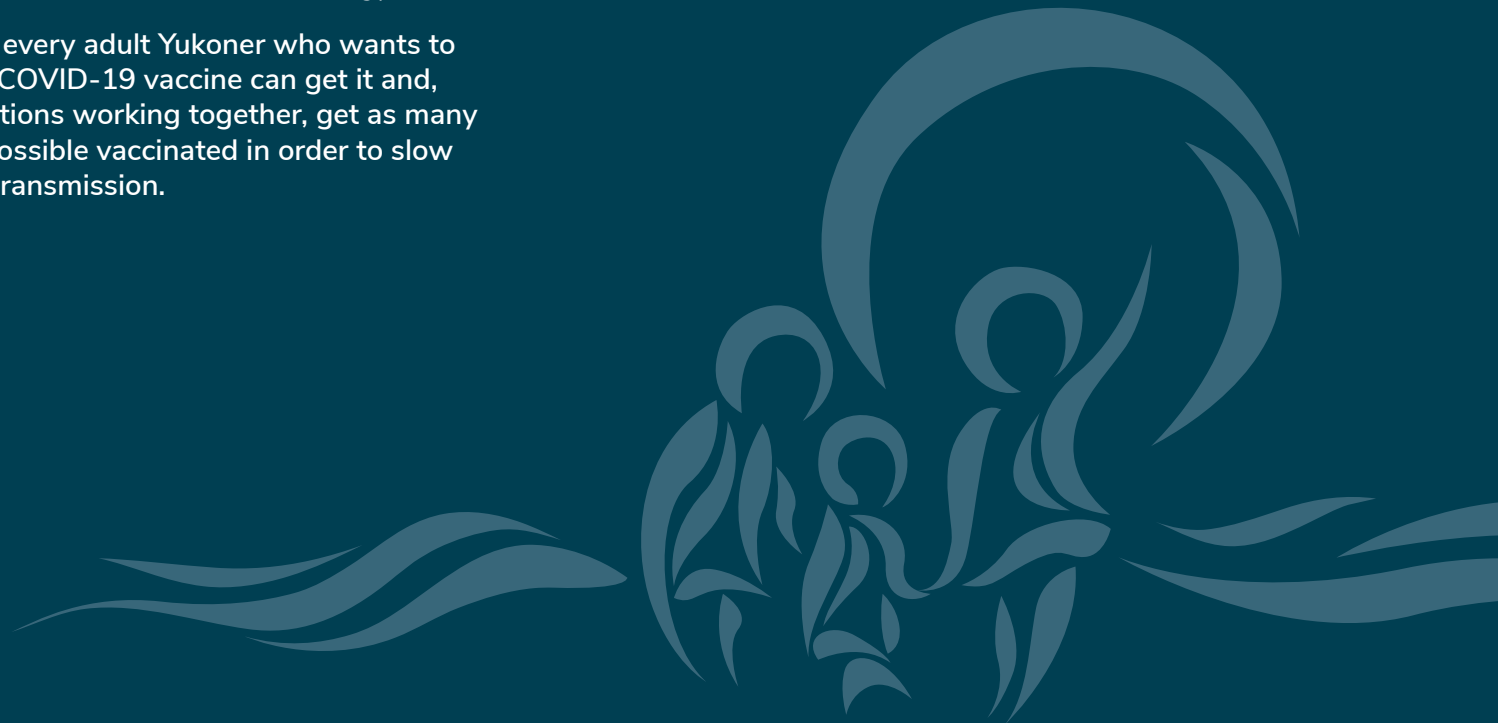
Goal

As we have seen throughout the pandemic, every person in Yukon has a part to play in stopping the spread of COVID-19. It is no different with the COVID-19 vaccine. To protect everyone and stop the spread of COVID-19, Yukoners will:

- need to have easy access to the vaccine; and
- make the personal choice to get it.

The goal of Yukon's COVID-19 Vaccine Strategy is to:

- ensure that every adult Yukoner who wants to receive the COVID-19 vaccine can get it and, by organizations working together, get as many people as possible vaccinated in order to slow the rate of transmission.



Principles

Yukon's COVID-19 Vaccine Strategy is based upon the following ethical principles. We have adapted these principles from the Government of Canada's COVID-19 Immunisation Plan: Saving Lives and Livelihoods.

Science-driven decision making

Governments' decision making on COVID-19 vaccine use in Canada will be based on science, independent regulatory review and the advice of medical and other experts, including the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI). Science-driven decision making is essential to establish and maintain public confidence in the processes related to approving, procuring, administering and monitoring vaccines.

Transparency

Reliable, comprehensive and transparent information about all aspects of the development, evaluation, recommended use and surveillance and monitoring of vaccines is fundamental in order to maintain public trust.

Thoughtful engagement with First Nations governments, municipalities, communities and stakeholders will provide appropriate information to their populations on COVID-19 vaccines and on the COVID-19 immunization programs.

All communication strengthens public confidence in the strategy and in COVID-19 vaccines, supported by accessible language and culturally safe approaches to vaccine delivery.

Coherence and adaptability

Federal, provincial and territorial governments all recognize the need for consistency in approaches and communication regarding immunization, while allowing for adaptability and flexibility in immunization planning and implementation.

A limited vaccine supply will be available initially. Therefore, federal, provincial and territorial governments are working together with First Nations, Inuit and Métis leadership to develop a clear and transparent process for the allocation of vaccines across jurisdictions. Provincial and territorial governments are responsible for vaccine allocation to their respective populations.

Governments across Canada will rely on expert advice from public health, scientific and medical experts, including the National Advisory Committee on Immunization and provincial and territorial immunization committees, as the basis for decisions on:

- priority groups for immunization for the populations under their respective responsibilities while vaccine supplies are limited; and
- the recommended use of authorized vaccines in Canada.

Fairness and equity

Fair and equitable access to vaccines underpins the overall approach to immunization. There is more about these principles in the federal, provincial and territorial [allocation framework](#) for COVID-19 vaccines. The Government of Yukon is committed to ensuring fairness and equity in access to vaccines in the territory. We understand the unique requirements of individuals, families and communities throughout the territory and that an immunization plan will need to meet the needs of all Yukoners.

Public involvement

People are at the centre of effective immunization programs. This means that engaging First Nations governments, communities, non-governmental organizations and stakeholders is essential to how our government will effectively implement Yukon's COVID-19 Vaccine Strategy.

Consistent monitoring and reporting

There is recognition that timely access to data is essential to an effective pandemic vaccine response. All elements of Canada's public health system need timely and accurate information to monitor program implementation and to inform decision making. The Government of Yukon is committed to effective monitoring and reporting on core elements of vaccine distribution, administration and safety and effectiveness, in a way that can benefit Yukon and all jurisdictions in Canada. Accurate and timely data will enable effective delivery and use of vaccines across all jurisdictions.

Cultural safety and humility

There is recognition that there is a historical legacy of colonialism and racism in Canada and many Indigenous communities and people have experienced significant trauma, including from communicable diseases. Given the documented healthcare inequities experienced by Indigenous communities and people, COVID-19 is a significant and unique risk. It is vitally important to support community-led approaches so that any barriers to access are eliminated for Indigenous Peoples in Yukon.



Yukon's vaccination strategy highlights

Yukon's strategy in an evolving environment

Over the coming weeks and months there will be new information regarding vaccine products, distribution and other logistical details. While this will impact operational plans, Yukon's COVID-19 Vaccine Strategy will remain intact as a guiding document.

Yukon's COVID-19 Vaccine Strategy has been developed on the best available resources and information at this point in time.

Available vaccine product

Canada's three territories will be receiving the Moderna vaccine.

This is based upon recommendations from the National Advisory Committee on Immunization and the Special Advisory Committee (which is composed of federal, provincial and territorial Chief Medical Officers of Health) and following negotiations with the federal government and the provinces and territories.

Moderna has completed all clinical trials. The vaccine was approved by Health Canada on December 23, 2020.

The vaccine requires two doses (injections) with the second dose required to be given 28 days after the first dose. This is flexible within a seven-day window. All Yukoners will need to continue practising the Safe 6 plus 1 while they are waiting for the second shot and until enough people have completed their vaccine series. Yukon's Chief Medical Officer of Health will continue to provide regular updates on any changes to the Safe 6 plus 1 guidance and other current public health measures.

Vaccine storage and transportation requires strict temperature control at refrigerated or frozen temperatures. Moderna requires storage and transportation at -20 degrees Celsius. Yukon is well-positioned to meet these requirements.

Initially, vaccines may only be approved for people over the age of 18. To date, no COVID-19 vaccine has been approved for children or for pregnant people as clinical trials for those population groups have not yet been completed. The Government of Yukon will continue to actively monitor the status of further approvals and will provide updated information as it is available.

Given Yukon's strength and expertise in flu and other immunization rollouts, plans are well underway for storage and distribution throughout the territory. The Government of Yukon is confident in the vaccine rollout with the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine.

Vaccine quantity

Yukon and the other territories are expected to receive enough vaccine to immunize 75% of the population over the age of 18 in the first quarter of 2021. This allocation recognizes the territories' remote communities, significant Indigenous populations and limited healthcare system capacities. The provinces are receiving a per-capita based allocation.

While the goal is to vaccinate all Yukoners, based on available data not every Yukoner or Canadian will choose to be vaccinated. We expect that the allocation Yukon will receive in the first three months of 2021 means there will be enough vaccine for every adult Yukoner who chooses to be vaccinated. Should more than 75% of adult Yukoners choose to be immunized, more vaccine will be available in the second quarter of 2021.

Phased approach

All Yukoners who want to receive the vaccine will have access to it. We'll take a phased approach for delivery and administration of vaccines. This approach will be determined by logistical needs and ensuring priority recipients are among the 1st to get access the vaccines.

Our operational plans will remain flexible to adapt to the delivery of the vaccine. Our plans will ensure the effective storage, distribution and administration based on the manufacturer and Health Canada's requirements.

We'll continue to engage with First Nations governments, municipalities, communities and stakeholders as details about vaccine delivery and quantities are confirmed.



Objectives

Now that the vaccine has regulatory approval from Health Canada and is available in the territory, our three key objectives to achieve the primary goal of ensuring vaccine access for every Yukoner who wants it are to:

1. Ensure the COVID-19 vaccine is safely and efficiently delivered to Yukoners
2. Ensure there is barrier-free access to the COVID-19 vaccine
3. Establish and maintain confidence in the process and the COVID-19 vaccine



Objectives and actions

Objective 1: The COVID-19 vaccine is safely and efficiently delivered to Yukoners

The Government of Yukon is committed to ensuring the COVID-19 vaccine is delivered safely and efficiently throughout the territory. This is a significant logistics challenge requiring the collaboration of multiple First Nations governments, municipal governments and Government of Yukon departments.

The Government of Yukon's Department of Health and Social Services is leading this effort and will use the strength and expertise of the Yukon Immunization Program, Yukon Communicable Disease Control, our 14 community health centres and Yukon Hospital Corporation's three hospitals. Experience gained and lessons learned from our COVID-19 testing centres and flu clinics will be invaluable.

To ensure the safe and efficient delivery of the vaccine, the Government of Yukon will:

Build on existing partnerships and expertise

The rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine across the territory will require building on the existing partnerships and expertise of key stakeholders. Each year, health system partners work together to deliver and administer thousands of vaccines across the territory. The flu clinic offered in Whitehorse this year was developed as a template for the COVID-19 vaccine rollout with more than 14,000 Yukoners being vaccinated over a six-week period. The success of the flu clinic allows us to build this strategy from a strong foundation.

The safe and efficient delivery of the COVID-19 vaccine to Yukoners will involve public and primary health care nurses, community health centre staff, Health and Social Services' Emergency Preparedness team, Community Services' Emergency Measures Organization, Yukon Hospital Corporation staff and other health system partners.

Other local and federal partners will also be engaged throughout the process, including the Public Health Agency of Canada.

Establish vaccine clinics

To ensure the COVID-19 vaccine is safely and efficiently delivered, vaccine clinics will be established to deliver the immunizations. These clinics will be supported by health professionals, including nurses and other COVID-19-specific staff such as greeters, screeners and cleaners. Centralized venues will ensure that we can complete thorough risk assessments, and accommodate the Safe 6 plus 1 guidelines, including physical distancing requirements.

Support the distribution of the vaccine

The federal government and the manufacturer will support the transportation of COVID-19 vaccines to all provinces and territories, including Yukon. Distribution is being managed through the Immunization National Operation Centre for COVID-19 across Canada. To ensure safety and traceability of the vaccine, the Government of Yukon is working with logistics experts from Joint Task Force North who are also supporting our planning efforts.

Monitor and report on the vaccine

COVID-19 vaccines are undergoing the same stringent Health Canada approval processes as any other vaccine. As part of the process, a strong immunization surveillance system is essential to monitor the safety and effectiveness of the vaccine and track when we achieve a level of vaccine uptake necessary to slow disease transmission.

Vaccination requires monitoring to identify the timing for a second dose, to track uptake and to observe outcomes and adverse events. Yukon already has a single electronic information system – Panorama – that we use to maintain a record of all immunizations and vaccine inventories in the territory. Similar to any other vaccine, COVID-19 vaccine safety monitoring will be undertaken on territorial, provincial, national and global levels and shared collaboratively amongst governments.

If safety issues are confirmed, the Government of Yukon and Health Canada will take appropriate action, such as communicating with the public and risk mitigation measures.

Objective 2: Yukoners have barrier-free access to the vaccine

The Government of Yukon is committed to ensuring that all Yukoners who want to receive a COVID-19 vaccine can. We want to ensure there is “barrier-free” access for all Yukoners.

To ensure that access, the Government of Yukon will:

Provide the vaccine at no cost to Yukoners

There will be no cost for Yukoners to receive the vaccine. All costs associated with vaccine doses, supplies, transportation and administration will be covered by the Government of Yukon and the Government of Canada.

Provide the vaccine at multiple locations

The Government of Yukon is committed to bringing the vaccine to communities through the use of mobile vaccine clinics. When the clinics are in the communities all adults who would like to be vaccinated will be vaccinated. Working closely with community health centres, First Nations governments, communities and non-governmental organizations, every effort will be made to make the vaccine available to every adult Yukoner who wants it. This will include providing transportation and escorts for those Yukoners who require support to access the vaccine. Targeted communications for each community will help ensure all Yukoners know when and where they can access the vaccine.

In Dawson City and Watson Lake, Yukon Hospital Corporation resources will also be used. In Whitehorse, the majority of vaccinations will be completed at a single-location vaccination clinic based on the successful model of the 2020 Whitehorse flu clinic.

For people living in long-term care homes and people who are homebound and receive home care services, the vaccine will be brought to them. This will eliminate unnecessary travel and further protect one of our most vulnerable population groups.

Operational plans are underway to reduce barriers for other vulnerable population groups such as the housing challenged and other Yukon social services clients. This could include adding targeted locations to help ensure the most vulnerable Yukoners can access the vaccine.

Coordinate efficient timing and sequencing of vaccine rollout

Working together with Yukoners to get as many people vaccinated as possible in order to reduce the rate of transmission requires efficient timing. The goal is to reach all of the adult population in Yukon as quickly as possible.

Details about what order communities will get the vaccine, which we call sequencing, will be part of ongoing engagement with First Nations governments and key stakeholders. These decisions will depend on the timing and quantity of shipments received and the realities of distributing the vaccine throughout Yukon.

Priority recipients for the vaccine

It is anticipated that Yukon will receive enough supply of the vaccine to immunize 75% of the adult population within the first quarter of 2021. That said, Yukon's strategy will involve the sequencing of the vaccine to some priority populations as soon as the first shipments arrive.

These priority populations are informed by the guidance from the National Advisory Committee on Immunization and the Special Advisory Committee, which consists of the Chief Medical Officers of Health from all provinces and territories.

Yukon's prioritization will be determined in consultation with the Chief Medical Officer of Health and will be responsive to the epidemiology at the time of vaccine availability.

Priority populations in Yukon will include but are not limited to:

- residents and staff of group living settings that provide care for seniors and for vulnerable populations, including long-term care homes and shelters;
- health care workers, including those who work in healthcare settings and personal support workers who work directly with patients and clients;
- other older adults who are not in long-term care, initially including those who are over 80 years of age and decreasing in age by five-year increments; and
- Yukoners living in rural and remote communities, including Yukon First Nations people.

As operational and logistical planning is further defined, including the quantity and arrival of the vaccine, we will announce decisions about how best to reach these priority populations as well as all other Yukoners over 18 years of age.

Objective 3: Yukoners are confident in the process and the COVID-19 vaccine

For the immunization rollout to be a success, Yukoners must be confident in the safety and effectiveness of the vaccines and understand government decisions on priority populations and sequencing. Yukoners need trustworthy information to make informed choices about immunization.

To support this, the Government of Yukon will:

Be open and transparent

In partnership with First Nations governments, health professionals and stakeholders, the Government of Yukon will provide ongoing access to comprehensive, accurate and clear information about the available vaccines and our immunization plans.

Yukoners will have the most up-to-date and accurate information to keep their families and themselves safe, including through the following sources: news conferences, updates on Yukon.ca and a public awareness campaign using radio, printed materials and social media.

We will encourage Yukoners to use trusted sources of information such as Yukon.ca, Canada.ca and the World Health Organization to get the latest news and to obtain accurate information.

Communicate the scientific evidence about the vaccine

While the timeliness of vaccine delivery is essential, all vaccine candidates go through a rigorous multi-phase clinical trial process to ensure high quality products and results. Health Canada has a robust, proven, world-class regulatory system, employing tested safety protocols, to determine which vaccines are safe and effective in preventing the diseases they target.

Yukoners can be assured that the Government of Yukon has a strong immunization surveillance system in order to monitor the safety and effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccines. Existing and emerging evidence about the vaccines will be regularly communicated as it becomes available.

Engage Yukoners

In order for this strategy to be successful, it will require all Yukoners working together. We are committed to continuing to engage with Yukon First Nations governments and leadership, communities and municipalities, non-governmental organizations, healthcare providers and the public to ensure that Yukon's COVID-19 Vaccine Strategy and approach takes into account population and community needs. We will ensure that partners and stakeholders are informed throughout the processes and that there is opportunity for meaningful discussion to support the rollout of the strategy.

National considerations and supply assumptions

National immunization approach

COVID-19 immunization requires close collaboration between all levels of government, Indigenous Peoples, experts and partners in Canada. The Government of Canada has taken a leadership role for the country's approach to immunization, working with provinces and territories to ensure there is a coordinated, equitable approach across Canada.

Federal responsibilities include: procuring vaccinations; authorizing and approving vaccines for use; distributing vaccines on behalf of, and to, jurisdictions; providing guidance and recommendations on vaccine use; and national surveillance and reporting.

Ensuring the safety and effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccines

Health Canada has a trusted and robust approval system to ensure vaccines are safe and effective. Clinical trials are an important requirement of this review. In clinical trials, patients are selected carefully, given the vaccine and followed closely under controlled conditions. Prior to receiving Health Canada approval, a vaccine must successfully complete several phases of clinical trials and demonstrate safety, efficacy and high and consistent quality.



Similar to any other vaccine, decision making on COVID-19 vaccine use in Canada is based on science, independent regulatory review and the advice of experts, including the National Advisory Committee on Immunization.

Health Canada has already received submissions for the authorization of several vaccines and reviews are progressing well.

Population immunity

Population immunity also known as “herd immunity” means that enough people in any given population have been vaccinated so that the chain of transmission is broken. The percentage of people who need to be vaccinated in order to achieve herd immunity varies with each disease. For example, herd immunity against measles requires about 95% of a population to be vaccinated. The remaining 5% will be protected by the fact that measles will not spread among those who are vaccinated. For polio, the threshold is about 80%.

The science is still to be determined about what level of vaccine uptake is required to achieve herd immunity for COVID-19. At this point, it would be reasonable to assume that 75% vaccine uptake of an adult population should provide some level of herd immunity.

National allocation and sequencing strategy

While there will be more than enough vaccines to immunize every Canadian in the coming year, the initial shipment of vaccines in January to March 31, 2021 (Track 1) will be sufficient to immunize approximately three million people. This is expected to include two COVID-19 vaccines – one from Moderna, the other from Pfizer.

Recognizing the limited supply of vaccines available in Track 1 (January to March 31, 2021), a national approach to allocation and sequencing guidance has been developed.

The guidance for vaccine allocation amounts have been approved by the federal, provincial and territorial governments based on the expert advice of the National Advisory Committee on Immunization and the Chief Medical Officers of Health across the country.



Next steps

Yukon's COVID-19 Vaccine Strategy has been developed based on the most current information available, but several unknowns remain. As information becomes available, the Government of Yukon will:

- finalize plans that outline logistics, dates and times for vaccine rollout in the territory;
- continue to engage First Nations governments, communities, municipalities and other stakeholders; and
- communicate with all Yukoners about the vaccine and how, where and when they can get vaccinated.



Conclusion

Widespread immunization is the best option to protect all Canadians from COVID-19.

While vaccinations will be available in 2021 to all eligible Canadians, Yukon and Canada's other two territories are in the fortunate position of receiving an allocation for all citizens who want the vaccine in the first quarter of 2021.

Yukon's COVID-19 Vaccine Strategy provides an overview of the plan for vaccine rollout in the territory. As information from the Government of Canada evolves daily, this strategy is designed to be flexible to adapt to the changing plans and possible challenges that may arise in the weeks and months ahead.

Yukoners can feel confident that as information becomes available, it will be shared through our trusted sources.

Ensuring Yukoners have access to a safe and effective COVID-19 vaccine is a critical step, but it is important to remember that Yukoners need to continue working together to keep each other safe. Yukoners must continue practising the Safe 6 plus 1 and follow COVID-19 public health measures until the territory's Chief Medical Officer of Health recommends otherwise.

The COVID-19 pandemic has taken a toll on our communities. Yukoners can be proud of the continued strength and resilience they are showing throughout the territory to protect each other. Addressing the threat of COVID-19 is a shared responsibility. By working together, and following our Safe 6 plus 1 practices, we have succeeded in slowing the spread of the virus while protecting the most vulnerable Yukoners and communities.

The partnerships we are forging today to support our COVID-19 pandemic response will enable Yukon's public health system and Yukoners to emerge from this pandemic stronger and more resilient.



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