



Crystal Schick/Yukon News Premier Sandy Silver, left, and Dr. Brendan Hanley, chief medical officer of health, right, announce a fourth COVID-19 case for the territory and that the Yukon is now under a state of emergency, while Mary Tiessen, centre, does the American sign language interpretation at a press conference in Whitehorse on March 27.

UPDATED: Yukon declares state of emergency over COVID-19

Declaration should not cause panic, officials say, and risk level in Yukon remains unchanged

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The Yukon has declared a state of emergency over COVID-19.

Yukon Premier Sandy Silver made the announcement at a press conference the afternoon of March 27.

Silver said the declaration does not indicate an increased level of risk in the territory, but gives the government “a wide range of options” to manage public enforcement and legal issues that may come from COVID-19 and the impacts

it'll have on the territory.

The declaration, made under *Civil Emergency Measures Act*, will last for 90 days but can be terminated earlier or extended.

Silver said the declaration should not cause Yukoners alarm, noting it does not supersede Yukoners' human rights nor give the government the right to freely access their health information.

"It's preparation," Silver said. "The situation has not changed — just our ability to respond to an ever-evolving situation has. We now have more tools in the toolbox."

He stressed that there is no increased risk. What the declaration does is allow the government to move quicker to address issues related to the pandemic.

Under a state of emergency the government can do all things advisable to deal with the emergency. This includes protecting people and property, maintain and control the use of roads, obtain and distribute food, clothing and other services, and provide water supply, sewer disposal and electrical power.

"The government must follow very defined legislation and process to make changes such as these," Silver said.

The Yukon had previously declared a public health emergency on March 18 under the territory's *Public Health and Safety Act*. That declaration enabled Hanley, specifically, the ability to react more quickly, while today's declaration applies to the government. The public health emergency is in effect until further notice.

He urged Yukoners to follow recommendations and orders from the territory's chief medical officer of health, Dr. Brendan Hanley, such as practicing social distancing and self-isolating for 14 days if returning from anywhere outside the territory.

“Yukoners, you must take the direction of Dr. Hanley seriously,” Silver urged.

Silver noted penalties and enforcement were already covered in the public health emergency but that the government sees those things as a last resort.

Hanley, at the same press conference, also announced the Yukon’s fourth confirmed case of COVID-19, a Whitehorse resident he described as a “close contact of known case.” The test results were received within three days. This individual is experiencing mild symptoms and continues to self-isolate at home.

“The case was not unexpected,” Hanley said.

He warned that there will likely be more cases found as investigations continue over the next few days. He explained new cases could be known contacts of this individual.

He said that the Yukon has now moved from identifying cases to managing clusters, or groups of related cases, but is still focused on containment and the prevention of further spread. Anyone who develops symptoms will be tested and contacts will be traced from there.

He wanted Yukoners to go about life as if COVID-19 was all over the community, even though it is not.

“We should behave as it is,” Hanley said.

He clarified that this does not mean everyone needs to remain indoors. Those not ordered to self-isolate can still go outside and should practice proper social distancing.

He added that there is no sign of a community spread. A sign of a spread would be if a case is found that cannot be traced back to a known case. He said the measures already put in place, including the closure of certain businesses and

self-isolation protocols, are critical and has put Yukon ahead of the curve. He clarified that these measures may not completely prevent the spread of the virus, but will nonetheless save possibly hundreds of lives.

He explained there is no discretionary element when it comes to self-isolating for 14 days if returning from outside the territory.

“It is not optional,” he said. “It is an order.”

He added it not a free ride. Anyone in self-isolation must watch for respiratory illness symptoms and call 811 if they develop. Symptoms to look out for are cough, fever or shortness of breath.

He also clarified that a measure calling on Yukoners to refrain from travelling to the communities in order to prevent spreading COVID-19 outside Whitehorse was not an order, but a recommendation.

Hanley reiterated Silver’s stance that the declaration should not create panic, and is simply a move that will allow officials to respond “more rapidly and with less red tape” as the situation evolves. He indicated there are no plans to clamp down further, including border closures. He said it was about playing catch-up.

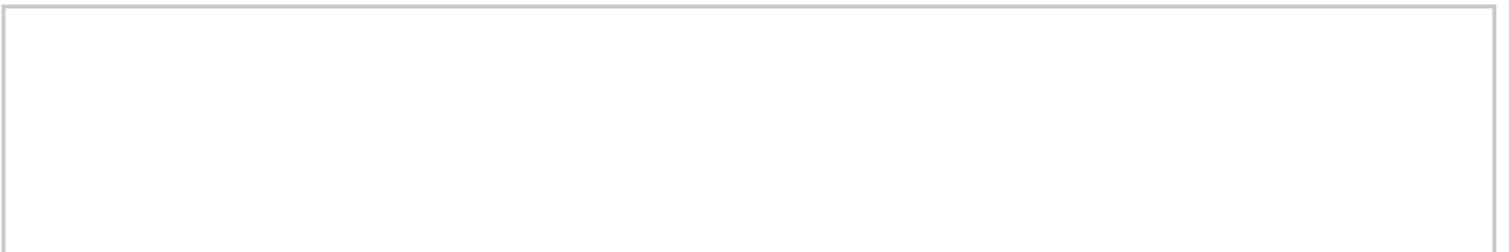
“I’m confident we are in a good position,” Hanley said.

With files from Jackie Hong

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