



March 2, 2021

JACKIE JACOBSON
MLA, NUNAKPUT

Oral Question 512-19(2): COVID-19 Effect on Teachers Being Able to Travel

This letter is in follow up to the Oral Question you raised on February 8, 2021 regarding COVID-19 Effect on Teachers Being Able to Travel.

We recognize that teachers perform a critical function in our communities and that the self-isolation requirements make travel outside the Northwest Territories (NWT) challenging. We know this has taken its toll on teachers, many of whom are away from their family, friends and home communities. Self-isolation requirements protect our most vulnerable residents and communities, a goal which we are all committed to and share.

Changes to restrictions are dependent on the successful rollout of the vaccine in the NWT and across Canada a better understanding of whether an individual can still transmit the virus and whether the vaccine is effective on the new variants. It is clear that lifting of restrictions is anticipated all residents and will benefit both teachers and all residents who wish to travel.

Under the Public Health Orders, teachers are required to complete 14 days of self-isolation in a hub community. So far we have avoided cases or outbreaks at schools, and they have remained open since September 2020 despite the ongoing pandemic. This is a significant achievement and is due, in large part, to the willingness of all, including teachers, to follow self-isolation requirements. Additionally, in the agreements with Education, Culture and Employment and school boards, the Chief Public Health Officer (CPHO) relaxed certain measures within schools. This includes things like no distancing requirements for grades 6 and under. These agreements were reached with the understanding that everyone would self-isolate before attending school, keeping risk introduction low.

Rapid testing is available in all communities and is prioritized for symptomatic individuals. A negative rapid test does not replace the requirement for self-isolation or shorten the self-isolation period for those without symptoms. The virus can be present in an individual but not be detected through testing. An individual can even develop COVID-19 shortly after

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testing negative. Because of this, a negative test result in those tested without symptoms is not reliable. False negative test results could lead to individuals unknowingly spreading the virus to others. The CPHO has moved to recommend all individuals who live in small communities receive a COVID test near the end of their self-isolation period as an added measure of surveillance and protection for small communities.

Being listed as an essential worker does not guarantee being able to work in the first 14 days. All individuals travelling into the NWT must self-isolate for 14 days as per the order. This includes essential workers. The permission to work application is reserved for certain occupations where the individual cannot self-isolate for 14 days and must be present at the workplace, such as nurses. The CPHO must review each permission to work application based upon a public health risk assessment. Even if teachers were to be added to the list of essential workers, they would likely not receive a permission to work in the 14 day self-isolation period due to their work occurring in a congregate setting.

The CPHO continues to strongly recommend that NWT residents avoid non-essential travel outside of NWT. This recommendation is supported by provinces and territories across Canada who are recommending to avoid any inter-jurisdictional travel especially during March Break. Barring a compassionate or medical exemption, any NWT resident travelling for leisure is responsible for their isolation costs.

Thank you.



Julie Green
Minister of Health and Social Services

c Clerk of the Legislative Assembly

Legislative Coordinator
Department of Executive and Indigenous Affairs