

what happened

afternoon and thank you for joining us my name is tina tebow and i will be your moderator for today's covid briefing joining us today the honorable tim houston premier of the province of nova scotia and dr robert strang chief medical officer of health for nova scotia go ahead premier thank you tina good afternoon everyone i need to start today by taking a moment to acknowledge the passing of another nova scotian who died of covid 19. to the families and friends please accept all of our deepest condolences and today is day three vaccinated nova scotians are beginning to get back to normal with proof of vaccine people are eating out going to the gym watching a hockey game in a full park or playing a sport themselves thank you to everyone for adopting and embracing the new rules that help to keep each and every one of us safe i'm proud of the way nova scotians continue to follow public health guidance and continue to look out for one another for the most part i'm hearing good news stories actually by far that's that's what i'm hearing from nova scotians however there are those stories of some people being rude to staff refusing to wear a mask or or even show their proof of vaccine we all know how ridiculous this type of behavior is if you don't want to wear your mask if you don't want to get vaccinated that's your choice but your choice has ramifications and there are no excuses for taking it out on anyone particularly those that are just trying to do their job those those of you who have gotten the vaccine have also made a choice if you don't want to do the things that keep us all safe just stay home and if you're unhappy feel free to flip me the bird when i'm walking down the street or yell at me but don't yell at the person that's just doing their job please please take that out on us but not not that the reality is this wave four is here we're seeing what's happening across the country and we need to make sure that it doesn't happen here our our vaccination rates are good they're increasing um they're where we where we need them to be uh where we need them to be before we knew about the delta variant and what the delta variant could do but but uh what we need to keep uh mindful of as with all things during this pandemic is with all things during this virus the more we learn the more we have to adapt and that means we need to get our vaccination rates higher than what we initially anticipated and that means we'll have to make some tough decisions along the way continue to make tough decisions so this week the proof of vaccine policy came into effect last week we announced mandatory vaccination for for some groups we've expanded it further this week um covers course nurses continuing care assistants teachers correctional officers early childhood educators and all provincial public servants and and and others will have until november 30th to get their vaccine a couple of days ago the the legislature unanimously agreed to require mlas to show proof of vaccine to enter provinces if mlas want to be in the legislature representing nova scotians they have to be vaccinated now i know that not everyone supports these public public safety measures that we've taken but this isn't isn't about each of us as individuals we have to think about what it takes to keep our communities safe uh our friends our neighbors our entire province that's the nova scotian way so if you haven't yet please get vaccinated um and if you're deciding not to get vaccinated that's your choice but the consequences of your choice are clear to you as you're making that choice so thank you to those nova scotians who've been vaccinated and i encourage others to get vaccinated as well thank you tina thank you

thank you premier good afternoon everyone and i do want to express my deep sympathies to the family of the individual who was our latest unfortunate death from from covid today i'm wearing the tie of the canadian navy submarine service in honor of lieutenant chris saunders who died october 6 2004 as a result of the fire on board the hmcs chicoutimi i knew chris and he is a role model for all of us in placing others ahead of ourselves in sacrificing to keep others safe so let me start by talking about our epidemiology we are averaging about 40 cases a day it sounds like a lot but it's largely what we expected we're in a wave 4 driven by a highly contagious easily transmissible variant strain of covid 19. and so far our situation is relatively stable which is good news but we all need to work together to keep it that way we have some community spread mostly in metro halifax and most of the cases are an unvaccinated people but everyone needs to be cautious and covered safe in their daily lives in the days and weeks ahead even if you're fully vaccinated today almost 76 of nova scotians are fully vaccinated and that number continues to grow this means we can handle a certain amount of covid spread in the province with a limited risk of people becoming severely ill and our hospitals getting overwhelmed but we cannot pretend we're not still in a pandemic just look at what's happening in new brunswick icus are full and they are now instituting lockdowns we are in a good position right now but if we let our guard down things can change quickly our vaccination rates are high but not high enough for the delta variant everyone who can needs to get vaccinated period it is how we continue to keep each other safe and we also need to keep doing all the safety measures we've been doing since day one of this pandemic if you're feeling unwell stay home and do the online or 8-1-1 screening to get advice on testing and please do get tested if you've been exposed or have symptoms and are advised to do so continue to wash your hands frequently and wear your mask and importantly limit your the number of close social

contacts you have in your life even though we're opening up gatherings our our number of close social contacts should be small and consistent and if at all possible keep those to vaccinated people as your close social contacts

let me address people's concerns about school cases i know parents are worried about their children getting covered especially if they're too young to get vaccinated and i understand that fortunately for most children covid 19 is a mild illness even with the delta variant in addition our vaccination rates for children 12 and over are very high like everything with our covert response our approach to school cases is about balance we need to balance the rare risk of severe illness in children with their overall well-being which is impacted by not being in school our goal is to keep students learning in classrooms if at all possible it's critical to their learning and their emotional social and psychological well-being and this is especially true for elementary school ages where online learning is much harder and social interactions are so important will we get cases in schools absolutely yes if there is covid in the community it will also be in schools but we are not at a point where we need to take extreme measures like closing schools we have many layers of prevention staying home when sick even when i'm with one single mild symptom if the person is unvaccinated getting tested wearing masks and increased public health measures at school when necessary are those layers of prevention we're watching for widespread infections and we have not yet seen that in a school not even in a single classroom right now we have 32 schools with covid cases eight of them involved spread to another person within the school and in all these eight cases there is secondary this secondary transmission was within a single classroom and typically involves one or two other students but there's been no schools where there has been a widespread within a classroom or spread beyond a single classroom in some schools there are multiple cases but no spread within the classroom and in these schools we know that covid is being introduced to a school in different ways from multiple multiple points from the community rather than being spread within the school or the classroom so still our experience throughout the pandemic even right now in the fourth wave and what we're seeing currently in schools is that the spread of covid in the communities poses the greatest risk to schools that there is limited spread of covid within the school environment even when covid is introduced into the school if we have one or two one sorry if we have two or more cases that are likely to be from transmission within a school we do apply enhanced public health measures for that school so we move them back to very similar to where we were in wave three keeping to classroom cohorts reducing non-essential activities and increasing a cleaning within the school and where necessary we support the school and the surrounding community with mobile testing and local vaccination opportunities and we're doing that right now in the in the fairview clayton park area we will continue to see cases in the community and in schools throughout the fourth wave high vaccination rate and mild symptoms in the vast majority of children means that we can have some tolerance for this and i firmly believe that the risk of not being in school is greater than the risk of covid i believe that schools remain safe even though we may have some virus activity but please be reassured if public health feels that closing a school is necessary we will not hesitate in collaboration with our education partners in the meantime please do not keep your kids out of school just because you're worried about covid unless you're directed to by public health however if your child is unwell and again even with one mild symptom if unvaccinated please keep them home we've had some schools where kids have been in school symptomatic for several days before they were actually taken to get tested you can then do the to keep them at home do the online self-assessment or call 8-1-1 and if you have a rapid testing kit from school use it if your child is told to stay home please follow the public health advice and make sure they have a negative test before they can return to school

for for at home testing as we announced last week all students in pre-primary to grade 6 will be getting a take-home testing kit each each kit contains four tests and detailed instructions this pilot program will make testing of people with uh kids with who have symptoms more accessible and it supports the early detection of covid 19. as i said as the tests are distributed which is starting today and will continue for several weeks there'll be much more detailed information accompanying those packages of testing kits and i do want to thank students and staff across nova scotia especially those in impacted schools for their hard work in keeping to the public health measures

as the premier noted the proof of full vaccination requirement came into effect on monday i've heard a lot of positive comments and things are generally going very well many people are happy to be listening to live music or watching sports in full venues others appreciate the added safety of knowing everyone participating is vaccinated not everyone supports this however and we don't expect that everyone to agree but i do and expect everyone to treat people with respect and i'm very sorry that people in the front line service industry are bearing the brunt of frustrations this is not fair or appropriate and i again ask everyone to be kind and compassionate to others businesses and organizations that not make these rules they are enforcing the rules that we in government have put in place

i know many people are looking for the new standard format for nova scotia's proof of vaccination the one with the qr code and i'm pleased to hear that because of our vax check ns app is ready later this month a business organization will be able to scan your code and get either a green confirmed or red sorry response it will make things faster and easier than that will be available in in a few weeks however you do not need to have the version with a qr code today or ever you can continue using the record that you got before without the qr code even when we have the vax check ns in place and if your records are from another province or another country that's fine you will be able to keep using them as well permanent residents can also get their out of province doses added to their covet 19 proof of vaccination and more information of how to do this is in our corona is on our coronavirus website lots of people are going to have different types of records and as long as it has the key information to show you meet our definition of fully vaccinated that's all you need i do expect that there will be some challenges in this week and next week especially as we implement things and people adapt to these new rules and i want to thank everyone for their patience and commitment for keeping everyone that you're keeping each other safe and i'll close by just acknowledging we are heading into the thanksgiving long weekend and it is a time to be thankful in many parts of our country families cannot be together because of covet yesterday new brunswick announced travel restrictions for the moncton frederickton and edmondson regions we asked nova scotians to respect the novus the new brunswick travel restrictions and avoid non-essential travel to these areas of our neighboring province thankfully in nova scotia is in a much different situation we're not fully out of the pandemic but we've come a long way and we've and we have much to be thankful for this weekend we can gather for dinner and visits with friends and family but let's do that safely if you're not vaccinated please don't travel and if you choose to do so you need to follow the rules and isolate when you return if you've traveled out of province and even if you are vaccinated and you're traveling uh this weekend please remember covert protocols and be cautious be mindful of indoor limits for informal gatherings no more than 25 can gather indoors and most importantly if you're feeling unwell don't attend events stay home or stay where you're at away from other people family and connections are more important now than ever before we've spent too much time apart during the pandemic so enjoy your time together and maybe reach out to a neighbor or friend who is alone or isolated be caring and kind to everyone you cross paths with let's be collectively thankful for our blessings and the fact that we live in a place like nova scotia thanks dr strang just a reminder we'll take questions from the room first and then we'll go to reporters on the phone line in the allotted time we have for today's briefing go ahead was the intention always to roll out the mandate in parts by by various groups was that by design is it more a function of some groups you were more ready to announce than others can you talk a little bit about that please a bit of both to be honest it kind of uh it kind of evolved as we look we want to cover we want to keep as many nova scotians safe as possible uh so our intention was to to cover what we saw as kind of the absolute necessary groups from the beginning but we knew that we'd be then as we consulted and engaged and and listened to the voices of nova scotians that would probably be expanding it and that's exactly what's happened right so uh on balance i would say the the feedback we've received from nova scotians and certainly there are some that don't like the policy i mean we we definitely we hear from from some of them but on balance the the feedback we've received has been very positive and in terms of people saying i wish my sector was covered by that too or i wish i wish this was covered as well so we we wanted to we wanted to get the policy out there uh i think we signaled early on that we would be expanding it as we thought necessary and that's what's happened is that to say there could be further expansion or from the province's standpoint have you reached the threshold for as far as you are empowered to go i think we're pretty much pretty much there and dr strang may uh may have something to add to that but i would say with what we've done provincially coupled with what we're seeing happening from the federal government some of the national things i think a lot of canadians are covered by this policy right now and i i think that's giving great comfort to the rest of us does the province have the ability to extend it to municipal employees i don't actually know on that one here's my position from public health i think we've made sure that with our vaccine policy from government we are covering those who work providing care or other types of supports to vulnerable vulnerable populations whether it's people who do healthcare kids in school a range of other community settings where people are living together and that's important from a public health perspective where as as the premier said today the government is showing leadership as an employer and then instituting a vaccination policy for as an employer those along with our general proof of vaccine policy that many people are just saying well okay if i want to go to restaurants stuff i'm going to get vaccinated i think we're covering off the vulnerable populations and enough other vaccine policies that are going to get us to the vaccine level that we need to but we certainly would encourage any other employer to make their own take their own steps and create their own workplace policies you have both each said that this the old 75 percent target is uh with delta is too low and it goes but you haven't stated what a new target would be do you have a percentage that's a goal well we said many times 75 was a minimum and i've said many times here that we now that experts across the country have said with delta we need that that you

need to reach a target they they they use the of the percent of eligible they say ninety percent and for us that would be roughly eighty percent of the entire population uh dr strange you spoke a bit about the concerns people have expressed about school cases uh i may be misinformed but i do believe there is one school that has a particularly high number of cases so can you talk just a little more about how you and the folks in your office and the education department view what it would take to outright close a school depending on what it's dealing with vis-a-vis cases so even with the school that you're referring to uh there there really is no widespread code within a classroom there's been two classrooms that have that have had some some secondary transmission but a very small percentage of of of chill students even within those classrooms and there's been no spread beyond those classrooms the two classrooms are related to separate introductions of virus into the school so even in our most affected school there is no evidence of all of widespread within a classroom and certainly we have no schools at all where there's any evidence of widespread within the school we will continue to watch carefully and if we are seeing in this school or another school signs that there is increasing spread within the school we will we will take further steps which may go as far as closing the school but even with that school in question we we in balance there is i'm very comfortable that there is no need to close the school our education colleagues are of the same opinion we've had conversations with education throughout the week today there was a conversation one of my medical officers of health was involved with all the principals from the halifax west family of schools explaining that they're all very comfortable where we're with the position we're landing right now with our schools what's the numbers you mentioned dr strength 32 schools with 12 and 19 cases uh you mentioned eight of them uh is that eight of them with spread of the virus within a classroom out of the 32 there's eight which have what we say enhanced public health measures where there's been evidence of transmission from one person to another within the classroom and then we imply enhanced measures which is really as i said going back to where we were in in the third wave with our overall in schools but beyond that we even as i said even in the the schools that are the most infected we are not seeing substantive numbers of spread within the classroom and no evidence of all of general spread within the school what about these eight classrooms or eight schools and would we say there is then community transmission within the classroom the majority of them there's been been one case there's been a one secondary case so one child or a staff has spread it to another person in a few circumstances we've had uh had more than one but no never more than four so the range of secondary cases within a classroom is usually one to two but the full range is from one to four and if you and so we're not again we're not if you look at the average size of a classroom we're not seeing widespread within a classroom and there's no spread it off between classrooms you know into the general school this is our first example of potential spread within a school then we didn't see a spread within schools correct in the third wave we did have some spread within schools uh that i think if we look at our overall if i remember correctly when we looked at our numbers after the fourth wave about four and a half percent over all our cases in the third wave were related to likely transmission within a school for the parents of these of these students whether they're in a school with with transmission or not you're saying don't keep your kids home unless you're directed by by public health what do you say to those parents obviously some have been keeping their kids home you must have heard from from some who are worried about virus transmission what do you say to reassure them and are there any i guess negative consequences for for keeping their their kids home so i understand people ultimately parents have their have that right to make that choice but what we're trying to help parents understand is making that choice is that it's a balance that they're uh that there are there is a a low risk of we're not of low risk of spread with of the virus within a school even when we know that there's virus at the school we have to balance that up with our clear understanding and this has been reinforced repeatedly by our pediatric colleagues at the iwkw that the best place for children to be for for their educational achievement for their social emotional learning for for uh unfortunately uh too large of a number of kids school is the is the secure place in their community for a meal for some other supports so there's there are significant harms if take if not having kids in school so we have to balance that out with what is the risk of covid what are the risk of not having kids in school and that's where i'm you know we we're always we're not we will always continue to reevaluate but right as i said today very clear in our conclusion and our education colleagues are right with us that right now there is no schools that it is not the best choice to have kids remaining in school the travel advisories that have been issued for new brunswick um i believe there's quite a significant hockey tournament that's coming up in the moncton area that draws folks from all over atlantic canada have you issued any type of guidance to hockey nova scotia or anything else about whether or not folks ought to actually attend that tournament i had a conversation with a medical lead from hockey nova scotia uh this earlier this afternoon uh advised her around that that uh we need to respect the new brunswick travel advisory and that going to a hockey tournament would not be considered uh you know essential travel to into the the moncton area where the tournament's been held she was in complete agreements and a complete agreement with that and hockey nova scotia will not be traveling to that tournament we know we also know that newfoundland is not sending a team as well also in terms of new brunswick uh this coming thanksgiving weekend it's my understanding yesterday at the press conference

new brunswickers were directed not even to to gather outside their household for thanksgiving dinners what do you say to nova scotians who are planning to to go there for thanksgiving i mean tons of people have family across the borders how do you think that situation is going to go this weekend so i think again we need to look at what what is new brunswick public health uh asking people to do they're saying in three areas of the province you know zones one three and five which is really the moncton area zone frederickson area zone and west and then up in the edmondson area they're saying non-essential travel to and from those parts of the province so my my strong request to nova scotians is that we respect those help new brunswick out don't travel to those areas right now uh unless it's essential uh and that also helps protect us here in nova scotia from there's certainly increased virus activity in those parts of new brunswick so it helps protect reduce the chance of the virus being brought back here as well you talked about this a bit last week when you announced the mandate for teachers and for health care workers but do you have any concerns that this mandate now for the public service may result in in services to the public being affected if a a certain segment of folks decide not to go to work no not anticipating any any disruption of service um certainly we're we're always concerned um you know that there will be there will be some people that just don't want to get vaccinated and um they feel so strongly that they don't want to get vaccinated that though that they'll put their own employment at risk and we hope that that's a small number of people um but even to the extent that it's it's it's any any number of people at all i don't anticipate any any disruption of service in nova scotians a report was released about the outbreak of coveta at the halifax infirmary award i wonder if you have any comments on that there were lessons that were supposed to be learned through that i'm told i haven't not been able to been confirmed so i won't name it but that there's been uh an outbreak today at another hospital and i um do you have any thoughts on all of that so i i'm aware of the report i haven't seen the results of that report so i can't really comment on that i am not at all aware of an outbreak in a hospital in nova scotia that has not been brought to my attention and i'm very certain that it would have been if that is the case i'm wondering about the qr code scanners in the app just if you could explain it a little more you said it'll be green confirmed or red sorry response so is this like a regular app is it a special scanner like will will my phone that scans qr codes be able to scan a qr code say if i'm having a house party and want to check that my friends have been vaccinated yeah my understanding is and and you're you know i'm not a technical tech he's savvy very much but it's a it's a it's a it's an app that will be made available to uh businesses to organizations and they can if you know they can upload it onto their phone that they have there and then they can use that app to uh read people scan people's qr codes not for the general public

doug string is there a timeline for perhaps entering a phase five part b once we reach that say 80 to 85 vaccination rate weigh in but so yeah go ahead so i think well you know i'm focused on wave four what do we need to have in place to keep us safe for wave four uh and i think what we're instituting and instituting are the necessary uh measures that uh my my belief and my hope is that uh we don't need to go further but you know always reserve that if we have to but i i don't anticipate us sort of going and relaxing further uh with as you said with a a phase phase five b or whatever we i think we not need to have what we have and monitor carefully and then we need to watch the epidemio epidemiology as we're coming out of uh the fourth wave and what might we be able to then start to relax as we've always done slowly and carefully as we emerge out of the fourth wave at the tactical briefing last week i may have misunderstood that i thought there was some mention of the province giving scanners to businesses that was me being i was corrected by my folks that was me being not understanding the details of the program my error like any old phone could use it it could work yeah any device is just an app that people uh that we'll make will make available our digital folks are working on the app that'll be made available in a limited fashion for those who need it and they can use their own phones or whatever to upload the app have you had any further conversations with the business community or or heard any further evidence from them to suggest that they may need some level of financial support from you to help with uh staffing up to accommodate this stuff there's ongoing discussions um i'm not i'm not aware that there's any huge pressing needs i mean and just anecdotally i mean i've spoke to some people working the service industry over the last few days and they haven't they haven't indicated to me that there's been any any major disruption you know they already had a process there's a little bit different process now but um my understanding and all the information i have says it's not been overly disruptive uh we'll continue to monitor it and just on the on the on the technology bit and the scanning bits i think it's important to note that uh dr strang started a major rush to a lamination of the vaccine cards when he announced that his family had done that i know certainly in my extended family a lot of people rushed out to get the laminated ones as well and those will still work so you can use those at your house party when you have that but uh i don't know but yeah again the message is that you don't have to have the qr code we're getting lots of people worried about how do i download my qr code what you have works now and if you choose to use it you can continue to use it so we're not we're going to require anybody to use the qr code it just makes it more convenient you uh said that 40 cases a day wasn't unexpected and uh in a previous briefing i think the last one you had mentioned modeling saying that this would kind of peter out

towards the end of november i think or into december i wonder if you can give us

can that modeling just be made public so that that is federal modeling i'm referring to we in my uh where i sit with other chief medical officer of health the public health agent of canada has presented that what they're modeling on what they anticipate the fourth wave will look like so you'd have to approach them to uh to get access to that modeling we'll go to the phone lines now and take some questions from the phone lines we'll start with keith deuces from the canadian press go ahead keith hi one for dr strang i just wonder if there's any information or update on the potential for the booster shots for the wider population do you have any other information on that right now there's lots of conversation going on uh around booster doses waiting for i know a national advisory committee and immunization is uh is uh convening next week to look at the evolving science on that what i can say for certainly what we announced last week so people with a specific definition of immune compromised as well as people who had mixed schedules so astrazeneca than mrna and have to travel outside of nova scotia for work they will be able to get their for the immune compromise their third dose in their primary series for the travelers a second mrna dose of mrna vaccine they will be able to get that starting october 15th and we will get more there'll be more information coming out next week we will continue to work nationally in the evolving science around where we might need to go further on booster doses we are working with in our long-term care sector now about how they roll out a booster dose of covet vaccine along with flu vaccine for long-term care residents go ahead keith with your follow-up i'm wondering personally though based on what you know at this point and what you see is happening elsewhere do you think it's it's fairly likely that that that will be the outcome or you don't you don't think that's a foregone conclusion at all so there's a number of issues it's where is the science uh there's a huge ethical overlay on that is that even though there may be some incremental benefit of a third dose uh in canada is is that the best use of a dosa vaccine when you look at it from a global perspective there's lots of people who have had no access to vaccine at all there's other provinces maybe moving ahead uh ahead of where nasty is even but based on their own epidemiology and what they feel their own needs are so again this is a rapidly evolving area and it's complex in terms of the decision making next we'll go to jean laroche from cbc go ahead john thank you very much i'm wondering premier houston how you feel about given what you've done with your provincial employees how you feel about what hrm is doing which is not mandating uh mandatory vaccine proof yeah i mean we saw the decision but and there's a question about whether we could extend to them as well and and um i think what where where i'm at is we want more people to be vaccinated i think we've been pretty clear we want our vaccination rates to go up and we've taken the steps as a province to to capture as many people as we can in the vaccine policies and i think we're at a place where we're we're comfortable with the steps we've taken do we wish others would follow along and and support us yes we do and i think that extends to individual employers of all kinds but but hrm made their decision and i respect their right to make that decision but i mean it doesn't distract from the overall message that you're hearing from public health dr strang myself my team is please get vaccinated if you're not vaccinated go ahead john with your follow-up dr strang just to follow up to that do you feel it makes epidemiological sense that hrm has taken this decision given the fact that we have police officers and we have transit employees who are in direct contact every single day with at least dozens if not hundreds of people so epidemiology is only one aspect that goes into making a decision there's legal issues there's labor relations issues for me the starting point is we know that across the board we have we have a good vaccine coverage rates in nova scotia and that's a good starting point we need to go higher but you know making a decision about your policy or vaccination you have to consider a whole range of issues so like the premier every every organization has to weigh those up and make their own decision we respect those decisions next we'll go to sarah plowman from ctv go ahead sarah

i think this is for both of you you talked about new brunswick and what's happening is thanksgiving um what's your message for new brunswickers who are thinking of coming to nova scotia um and for nova scotians who are thinking of hosting people from new brunswick so i think the starting point is we may we maintain that our our entry requirements that if you're not fully vaccinated you're going to have to isolate and so remember that uh the second point would be that if you're one in the air one of the areas of new brunswick that there is a travel advisory that travel advisory is for travel not only to but from those areas so i hope no new brunswickers are listening to their public health officials their government and with good reason uh you know moderating their travel based on those travel uh restrictions and if their families are having conversations uh with family in new brunswick about that uh include those in your conversations about what is actually uh what is actually safe for a family and what they need to be thinking about uh as our kind of maritime or atlantic uh uh collective approach and how we need to work together to keep each other as safe as possible i think just just what i'd say what i'd add to that is too is i had discussions earlier in the week just different people casually asked me did i think did i anticipate any issues with uh with traveling and of course with all things covet it's pretty hard

to anticipate changes so i mean as we as we sit here today we in this province encourage ask use the other tools to motivate people to follow public health instructions and just as we do that here we do that for the other provinces as well people should respect the public health guidance that in in the area that they live go ahead sarah with your follow-up i'd like to extend a question previously asked to dr strang to premier houston just regarding the investigation uh and to the outbreak at the qe2 i'm not sure if you've had a chance to look at it and if you have any uh response no i don't like dr strang i don't have any any further information on that and i'm certainly not aware of any other break breaks as well next we'll go to andrea leblanc radio canada go ahead adrian and thank you dr strang you laid out the reasons why schools shouldn't close right now but the teachers union calls for a circuit breaker approach so just one or two days of closing effective school until the situation is under control especially for parents who wonder if their children are at risk or not when they receive an advisory and why not take this approach so first of all that well they we i guess are going to disagree that you're lying you know i don't believe the situations are out of control we have a limited spread you know virus activity in a school that we take appropriate measures to keep it controlled uh and it's not we don't believe it's necessary in order to our education colleagues uh to close a school at this point in time we're at a different place now with vaccination as a major factor than we were in previous waves so we're taking we can take different measures uh because of where we're at and the vaccines you know create a very different uh dynamic for us when we look at schools we don't look at schools in isolation we look at schools as part of a community and the role that vaccination plays in in in greatly uh creating a great layer of safety within the community go ahead adrian with your follow-up thank you and the union says also that in at least one school sometimes only half of the students attend and it is a major disruption and maybe closing a school would allow teachers to switch to a virtual learning what what is what do you think about that so i know education continues to monitor uh the attendance rates uh they have dipped down but they have increased again and again we will say that we encourage uh uh parents to have their children in school uh and and follow public health and education advice that if we feel it's necessary uh for your children not to be in school you will hear from or hear from us next we'll go to chelsea ghou from saltwater go ahead chelsea hi dr strang so far uh have there been any instances of businesses not complying with the proof of vaccine texts and have there been any fines issued not that i'm aware we talked with our compliance folks uh this morning and and and they they confirm what we're hearing from other from businesses that things are going very smoothly uh we did hear about one business who was saying they weren't going to comply they had a visit from our enforcement team they were there where there was a good conversation and now that business is in it will will has committed that we'll be in compliance go ahead chelsea with your follow-up thank you and i've heard some restaurants and fast food joints they've just opted to close their dining rooms just to save the hassle have you heard any frustrations or feelings from people about having to do the vaccine check-in process at these places i haven't heard that as an issue that's that's the right of uh of uh fast food restaurant to modify their service based on their what they feel is necessary for their operations but i certainly have not heard any concerns uh raised to me about that that's all the time we have for the phone lines we'll come back to the room for two more questions if you've got it maybe the messaging from public health about the delta variant in the fourth wave has perhaps made people in particular parents overly fearful and that you know they're keeping their kids home even when there's just sort of one case at a school we're always trying to find the right balance uh throughout the whole pandemic it's been about finding a balance and giving people information so they can be take the appropriate action we do need a certain level of i don't going to use the word fear of concern and taking this seriously uh and that message uh we've tried to adjust that throughout the pandemic uh and and you know have some people overreacted or under-reacted probably but i think we've overall i think i think we've done a reasonable job of finding that balanced message about having people take the right actions that keep each other and all us collectively safe but not uh not we're always very cognizable about our messaging creating unnecessary fear and anxiety

that's it go ahead premiere with your closing oh thank you thank you tina thank you dr strange thank you um lots of questions about schools i know i know people are concerned about cases in our schools as as parents as caregivers it's our responsibility to worry about our children so i certainly i certainly appreciate um the questions and understand that people are concerned uh about covet but um here's here's the thing that i would leave people with i don't think dr strang and his team have steered us wrong yet during this pandemic so if if they tell me if they tell nova scotians it's safe for their kids to be in school i trust that advice and i'm asking nova scotians to trust it as well because i believe dr strang and his his team have earned that trust our goal is to keep students in school our goal is to keep students safe keep nova scotian safe and closing schools is is is a last resort but if it's deemed necessary by public health if public health recommends that it has to be done of course schools will be closed we all know um and and the experts will tell us that having kids in school especially younger kids is what is best for them socially and mentally so the best thing we can do for all our kids in school is to keep the spread of covet down in our communities overall that means getting your vaccine

staying home if you're sick and following the rules to keep everyone safe so i just ask that you you do what is required do what you can do to protect the people around you who cannot protect themselves so thank you very much

you

so

good morning and thank you for joining us my name is tina t-bone i will be your moderator for today's coveted briefing joining us today the honorable tim houston premier of the province of nova scotia dr robert strang chief medical officer of health for nova scotia and allison lamb executive director western zone nova scotia health go ahead premier good morning thank you thank everyone for coming things are things are all things considered when you look at other jurisdictions things are going well here in nova scotia we're doing well with covid but we need to we need to hold the course but before i talk about uh before we talk about the overall covid situation i do want to start by recognizing continuing care assistance last week was continuing care assistance week and i and i think we can all agree the people who do this work deserve deserve our recognition and appreciation they care for our loved ones during their most vulnerable years and they're there for them uh when we can't be so thank you to our uh continuing care assistance there's never been uh it's never been a time when they've been more needed than over the last 20 months of the pandemic so on behalf of dr strang and the team at public public health and all nova scotians i thank you i also want to welcome allison lamb executive director of valley regional hospital to today's briefing she's going to provide an update uh on a on a small coveted outbreak at the valley regional hospital and and answer any questions on that so i know i know we're all concerned when we hear about cases in our hospitals and our schools and and we're right we're right to pay close attention to that these are the places where we're supposed to feel the most safe but if covet is in our communities it's going to find its way into these places as well what's important is that we as a province and as directed by public health that we take quick action to prevent further spread and we are so far nova scotians are doing a really good job fighting this for fighting this fourth wave the measures that dr strang and his team have in place they're working and nova scotians are doing their part the covet activity in most parts of our provinces is very low nova scotians are following public health restrictions and continuing to get vaccinated nova scotia now has about 77 of our population fully vaccinated that's really good but we of course want to get it higher the vaccines are safe and they're effective and it's not too late to get that first dose and i know some nova scotians are taking that step and getting that first dose and i thank you and to those of you that that haven't yet i i urge you book today it's fast it's easy and we have appointments waiting for you right now so so take that first step so that's the good news part of things i guess but i do want to continue i do i do personally continue to be concerned about a couple of things community spread continues in halifax it's mainly among those who are not vaccinated there are clusters around the metro area it's not widespread but it exists it's no surprise that we're seeing cases in our schools in communities where there is more covet activity as of today we have three schools closed in the halifax regional municipality and we've taken that steps to those steps to avoid further spread because it's really simple if if covet is in our communities it's in our schools and the best thing that every nova scotian can do to help is to get to get vaccinated and while we're in this fourth wave act like covet is around you and continue to take the precautions that you that you've been asked to take by public health we need to keep our friends our family our neighbors and our communities safe from this virus and we can do that by working together so thank you um and i'll turn it over to uh dr strang first i think uh thank you premier and good morning everybody uh before i start i do want to thank jan she didn't want her last name you she spent many hours this is actually a hand quilted tie that she made and very generous her to give that so thank you jan um as of today nova scotia has 187 active cases of covet 19 so we continue to come down as people recover and our case numbers and hospitalizations remain stable overall nova scotia is doing very well at controlling the fourth wave but it's far from over but our vaccination efforts and the public health measures are working as the premier said as expected there are some pockets of covert but we are seeing moderate transmission that is not becoming widespread and that is good news as hard as it as hard as it is however we do need to expect to see some cases in places like schools hospitals and other group settings it's unavoidable if covet is in our communities it is going to get into these settings the outbreak at the valley regional hospital started with some cases in that community and i know allison will have more to say in this shortly but for now i'll say this our good vaccination rates and the other layers of protection we have in place in our hospitals and schools are and will limit the spread even if covet enters a facility there is some community spread in the halifax area related to families and close social groups in many cases these are little clusters of unvaccinated people and there are some some other cases that link between the different groups and not surprisingly it's in these same pockets of community transmission where we're also seeing cases in schools and in a few of those schools we're seeing limited spread of the virus and that's why there are currently three schools that we have had to close as a short-term measure to prevent further spread and i'm happy to report that the children and staff of duke danville are back in school as of yesterday and by all report things are going well my medical officer of health team and the department of education and early childhood development will assess when other students can safely come back to their classrooms we want this to happen as soon as possible not only to support children's

learning but also to provide social and developmental supports that these children need and i know the situation around around closed schools is concerning for families and school staff and i don't want to play down play your concerns but i do want to put that in a somewhat bigger context of the 370 public schools in nova scotia about 44 or around 10 percent uh have had at least one case and of those 44 schools only 11 have required increased public health measures and only four which is one percent of our total number of schools in the province have had to close to prevent further spread so collectively we are doing a good job of keeping covet out of our schools and as we've seen throughout the entire pandemic there is limited spread within schools in the school communities where there are concerns we are targeting testing and vaccination supports for the schools families and the surrounding community with the exception of the four schools that we've talked about the benefits of being in school continue to far outweigh the risks of disrupting school because of covet 19. i want to provide an update to the expiry date for the take-home test kits uh that students under 12 began receiving last week and that we spoke about at the end of last week we have now confirmed with health canada and the manufacturer that all of the tests are good for 10 months past the expiry date which is on the package and more details will be going out directly to the families who have received kits in the meantime if your child isn't feeling well even if they have one mild symptom follow the instructions in the kit and use the take home rapid test this is one way that we can all help keep covin out of our schools

since we last briefed you we've continued to hear that the vast majority of people and businesses are being very cooperative and supportive of the proof of full vaccination requirement and i thank everybody for their efforts i want to remind nova scotians that any vaccine record is acceptable as long as it shows the required details you do not need to have the new version with the qr code and businesses should not be rejecting anyone who has a valid proof of vaccination even if it doesn't have a qr code and we have a reminder that identification needs to be shown along with the proof of vaccine but if you don't have photo id a health card can also be used having said that the new version with the qr code is preferable and that's because starting this friday the vaxcheck ns the the reader of the qr code will start to become available it's a special qr code app that businesses will be able to download onto a smartphone for free and it will work with the nova scotia proof of vaccination to give a green confirmed response or a red sorry response this will make it faster and easier for everyone to show their proof of vaccination at a restaurant a recreational facility or any other places where proof is required and it also protects your personal health information so we encourage people to start to download the qr code but it's not essential that you have that if you have a paper copy it's important not to shrink or fold the qr code because it won't be able to be scanned if you do that um and although even if you do a business can still require read the required details on the page to confirm your proof you just won't be able to scan it uh scan the qr code so we're encouraging people to save it onto your phone or or print it off uh and then carried around with you and we are working with the federal government on a wallet size version that version that will be able to be printed off and laminated much easier to have around people can get the new version of nova scotia's proof of vaccination on our website uh all you need is your health card number and the and an email address or phone number you get that which you gave when you booked your vaccine uh and then you will be able to download that proof of vaccination with the qr code and if for some reason you cannot get your record online you can call the toll-free number i know the line is experiencing higher than normal call volumes and i'd ask for your patience and when you do get through you'll be able to get your records which can be either emailed to you or may or or through land uh mail to your home

starting today nova scotians who are moderately to severely immune to compromise or who are taking medications that substantively suppress their immune system are able to book a third dose of mrna vaccine emerging research shows that these people may respond differently to vaccines including lower antibody responses and lower vaccine effectiveness than the rest of us and the national advisory committee on immunization recommends a third dose for these people to increase their level of protection anyone who is eligible can schedule an appointment either online or through uh or by phone details or on our website 28 days after their second dose and that's a minimum of 28 days if it's longer than that you'll just go ahead and make your appointment however before scheduling the appointment please look at the detail and for detailed information on our coronavirus website to see if you actually are eligible and what information you need to bring to the vaccine appointment to confirm this if you're not sure you can speak with your health care provider they have all been given detailed information on on on this requirement of a third dose for specific conditions but you do not need to bring a letter from your doctor or nurse practitioner saying that you are eligible so please if all you're looking for is that you if you're if you're thinking you need to go get the appointment with your doctor a nurse practitioner just to get a letter you do not need to do that look on our website and you need to bring specific information such as prescriptions that as proof if you are not eligible and you arrive for your appointment you will be turned away this we have very specific criteria and we have to make make sure that the vaccine we have is offered for those who are

truly eligible

next week we'll start rolling out booster doses of covid vaccine for long-term care residents we've been working with the long-term care facilities to prepare and they will reach out to residents or their designated caregiver with more information nazi recommends a booster dose at least six months after the primary vaccine series for long-term care residents and they'll be also advised that they can get a covid vaccine along with their influenza vaccine and then so most residents in long-term care were among the first to get vaccinated in nova scotia and that minimum six-month time frame has passed and they're able to now start receiving their booster doses so in the in the days and a few weeks ahead we have a great opportunity to give both the coveted booster dose and the annual flu vaccine to our long-term care residents and so again starting next week it'll be a combination of covid booster dose and the high-dose flu vaccine to help protect our most vulnerable seniors other nova scotians will be able to start getting their flu vaccine at a pharmacy or their doctor's office starting next monday and if you're booked for a covid vaccine uh with a farm with your pharmacy ask them if you can get your flu shot at the same time you have to remember that these are different viruses then the covid vaccine will not prevent you from getting seasonal influenza you still need your annual a flu shot especially if you work with or spend time with nova scotians who are more vulnerable and at risk for getting severely ill from influenza and such as older nova scotians and those who are pregnant or immune compromised we have to remember that the flu symptoms and covid symptoms are very similar uh and people who do start to have these symptoms should stay home do their online covid self-assessments and then book a test if directed do not just assume this year it's really important that if you have fever cough those type of symptoms you can't just assume it's influenza you need to get the test do the screening and get the test when appropriate in the past we've had deaths from influenza in nova scotia each year last year we didn't have any confirmed cases and that's likely because of the preventive measures we had in place to keep covid controlled in our communities so let's learn from the covid experience and keep influenza to a minimum as well and that includes vaccination for both viruses and i want to provide a reminder to pregnant women because i'm getting a lot some a number of questions about that from pregnant women that influenza and covid infections significantly increase the risk of severe illness and complications including possible death to both you and your baby both vaccines are strongly recommended by by nazi so please pregnant women get both your covid vaccine and your influenza vaccine as we navigate our way through this fourth wave i want to thank nova scotians for sticking with us and continuing to follow our public health measures it's been a long haul and i know we are all tired but the thing we can celebrate is that we are moving forward we've been able to lift most of our restrictions our active case count is going down and we haven't yet had to impose extra targeted restrictions in any specific area everything we're doing is working to keep people safe so i'm asking you all of us to keep at it continue to get vaccinated stay home if you're sick keep up the daily health habits and spread caring and kindness we're all in this together and i have to end with this note and for those who have been verbally abusive to staff at vaccine outreach clinics because the proof of vaccine policy this is unacceptable and needs to stop be thankful that you have an opportunity to protect yourself your family and your community and be kind to those who are providing the vaccine for you allison thank you dr strange premier so i'd like to provide an update from nova scotia health uh nova scotia health has declared an outbreak at valley regional hospital in kentville three patients in a non-covid unit at valley regional hospital have tested positive for covid 19. one of those patients has been transferred to our intensive care unit affected patients have been isolated as per our infection control guidelines and so far more than 50 inpatient staff and physicians have been tested an outbreak management team has been established to support the hospital's response additional measures like contact tracing and enhanced cleaning is underway all other patients staff and visitors identified as close contacts will be tested the outbreak at valley regional hospital is limited as it stands however we wanted to share this information to be transparent about this evolving situation at our hospital we are committed to keeping the public informed as more information becomes available we know none of us want to hear about covid in our hospitals or in our communities but this is a reminder that covid is still very real here in nova scotia

thank you thank you alison we'll now take questions from the room and then we'll go to the phone lines i'll open it up to the room go ahead mike miss lam what do we know about how covid got into valley regional and when was it first detected so we do

test every patient who is admitted we identified a covid positive patient on friday and have started our investigation since then two additional patients were identified yesterday and hence why an outbreak has been declared at valley regional so we're very early on in our investigations but that that is what we know to date were patients two and three identified through close contact testing or how did they come to be tested and then deemed positive with our initial

investigation uh when we identify a patient we do start close contact tracing and others were tested as related and that's where those two were identified yes did you look at dr davis's recommendations after the outbreak at the infirmary and were those recommendations followed at valley regional certainly dr davis has been engaged as part of our ipac team and those recommendations have been reviewed and implemented and that is part of the reason we're here talking to you today as well as the other containment measures from the lessons learned have been

can you implemented

more detail on why the three schools were closed like what prompted the closures i know that there had been a number of exposures at each of them but why did they close when they closed so captioning not

on that basis available need to close them down for a short period of time uh and then and then promote testing and vaccination uh over the week while the school is closed and then we'll look to reopen that hopefully it'll be a week but we'll have to monitor things and see what we're seeing in that community and and what our testing of of any more you know of staff and students in that school shows so when was the transmission i guess discovered for instance i know i call mary mums and uh joseph howe like they were both open yesterday and parents had been calling for you know the school to close since the week before so was transmission only discovered yesterday no it's a volume if there's one case of tran you know if there's one case of a transmission within the school we don't close it down but it's an ongoing almost daily assessment of what we're seeing and we're seeing patterns of more cases where there where the likely explanation was exposure within the school we were looking at these late last week thursday friday and i had conversations with my medical officer of health team end of day friday and their recommendation was we not yet we need to continue to watch those schools uh carefully and then on sunday we had to make the decision that one of the schools dartmouth south had to close right away and then as they assessed things with the other two schools yesterday uh you know we'd reached the point with the new information coming forth on monday that we needed to close those schools so it's a daily assessment around what is the patterns of transmission and and some of the other factors in the school i'm wondering why given it's the fourth wave why you wouldn't close a family of schools associated with a school where you found an outbreak it's a precautionary measure if you look at the families of schools we're not seeing any activity in those other families of schools so our overall objective is to keep school children and youth in school wherever possible so given and part of that is we have families of schools you have elementary schools junior high high schools where most of the schools impact that are elementary schools and where because of vaccination we don't have this same issue there's much more protection in junior highs in high school so right now we're comfortable taking a school-by-school approach to this what was uptake like on the vaccine clinic that you ran near duke danville i don't have those numbers we did a number of over the weekend we did we had a number of tests and there was some vaccine there i don't have the direct numbers in front of me tell me how many can you tell us how many cases are linked to the marijuana school i i don't have this well i don't know i don't have those specific numbers and we're in you know double digits in in that school that's been going on for a couple of weeks uh but it's just we reached a point where we're having to remember all of the schools start and the majority of cases still in all the schools we've closed have been people from the community in with bringing the virus into the school what we look for is are we seeing patterns of where there's been exposure within the school and along with are we having multiple exposures so rather than classroom by classroom we're starting to have multiple classrooms impacted in hospital with us no you know what businesses will be getting the readers for the qr code uh as i said that uh starting friday that that uh that app will become available so so it's not it's not readers i was incorrect when i said that a couple of weeks ago they have they will start to have access to that uh where they can get online no cost the uh the uh the technology which will allow them to uh be able to then start scanning qr codes so will businesses be responsible for having that technology it can be done on a smartphone and uh and i'm sure

i'd be very surprised if there's businesses who don't have at least one smartphone already in there as part of their business they're going to have to show id if we wanted to yes it's it's uh it's that plus plus photo id because we have to confirm but it's just the advantage is the qr code is very quick uh the scanner plus all your get all that anybody is seeing is the red or green you know it doesn't contain any personal health information but people then still have to show whether it's uh whether it's a driver's license or you know people who don't have photo id uh you know your health card with the number of active cases that joseph howe um and dartmouth south also be in the double digits yeah they're in about you know from 10 to uh they're going off the top of my head between 10 and 15 that we've got for you know those schools that stand out whereas the vast majority of schools they even know they've had cases have had you know two or three why is there not more transparency for parents in terms of how many cases there are in a school and how

it's being if there's transmission you mentioned that there was transmission early on at a calmer mode and it wasn't until i guess there was more transmission parents are asking for that information they're not getting it they can't make decisions about their kids so why not so we continue to work public health continues to work with with education we did an additional communication to that to the parents at marymon school late last week it's always a balance between informing parents but also making sure we're respecting privacy of individual cases and circumstances around transmission doctor strain obviously people are very concerned about that young age group we understand that health canada is in the process of approving maybe for emergency use the vaccine for children do you have a plan in place should that uh be approved to quickly get that out whether it be vaccination clinics or how will you deal with that yeah well we're going to use our existing program which is based mostly on pharmacy delivered vaccination so when we get the approval and it's we have to remember that we're still a ways from educating the vaccine health canada now has to go through their regulatory process receive you know reviewing thoroughly the information from pfizer then their nasty has to review that same information uh but once we get final through those two steps we are the vaccine team is already working in detail planning that and our approach is going to be with with pharmacies right that's that's shown its success with our online booking tool and directing people to pharmacies and and being able to tightly control how we distribute vaccine across the province to make sure that that that families and children will have good access uh on that so i'm very comfortable that once we get the vaccine we'll be able to start delivering that uh very quickly at what point at what stage is valley regional hospital in terms of testing all patients and staff i understand 50 if so by so far been tested mother is more tested than calmer if you're anticipating any additional cases so when we identify a notebreak there is a test a series of tests that do happen so we've done our initial and we continue to develop so based on the results of those tests there will be further testing that happens over the next couple of weeks as the situation evolves um can you can you talk about how or if there are any impacts at the hospital because of this like on operations or anything as of right now because it's so early on there's no direct reduction in service uh certainly we'll continue to assess and monitor and uh we'll be notifying people if there is any i wonder if you can speak a little bit more about flu shots i'm just saying they're coming out next week um some professionals in other provinces are saying that it's more important given the fourth wave to get a flu shot um why should nova scotians get too vaccinated in a short period of time essentially because we're quite likely to have two viruses circulating and you need both we don't know uh for sure what's going to happen uh but we we have to be prepared that we're going to get a resurgence of of the flu virus and there is the possibility because it wasn't around we had no flu activity in the country last year and every year the flu activity helps boost people's immunity along with along with the vaccination so there is the risk that we have less underlying immunity in our communities because we had no flu last year so that's what our concern is and it makes it even more important that people get their flu shot this year they're two distinct viruses that they need their own individual vaccine to be protected against so it's really important that people get both are there any considerations for changes with respect to our approach with new brunswick given the activity that's going on in new brunswick are we remaining status quo at the moment with them so i had a conversation with the atlantic chief medical officers of health uh i do every monday uh new and and dr russell that they're still uh having their um the restrictions in place in in in in the province uh and now so what we're which is asking people to avoid non-essential travel in and out of various zones in new brunswick so we're asking nova scotians to continue to respect the public health recommendations from new brunswick public health and you pay attention and and in those uh zones uh to avoid non-essential travel to those parts of new brunswick where new brunswick public health themselves are still uh asking people to respect those restrictions

um will covet negative school the test be required for the schools that close will the students need them before going back we're not requiring them we're we're strongly recommending people get a test in the in the you know we like our schools in in the in the two to three days before people come back uh and we're providing like i'll use duke danville as an example we had the last weekend we had the the the mobile units with both testing and vaccine right on site at the school supporting the the community with that you know how many um students and staff were tested at duke danville before the um the school went back in before classes went back i i i don't have the numbers in front of me in terms of that volume of what went on over the weekend i have i've seen them but i just don't have them with me so i believe originally it the release did say that you were requiring a negative test um what changed that no i was that was that was actually my mistake and then i in a discussion the letter that went out to uh students said all along that it's a strongly recommended that was my my error in in uh in my language why not right or why not require it so that then you run how do you monitor that how do you get the where is the proof of test coming from and who is who is actually then going to stand there at the door and say and check that record uh there's a lot of logistical issues we've had good uptake in in our testing uh in in that area and we've had lots of we had lots of discussion with education about this and we're both comfortable with a strong recommendation uh and the other thing is that really that you know that if you required it

that's only effective for that for that first day what about tuesday when you know why do we not require it then every day when we go into school so i think we need to be a realistic at what's uh what's what's necessary and and feasible and continuing to support those communities and encourage uh people for testing and vaccination and make sure it's very easy for them to access it and that they have the right information as well let's take some questions from the phone now we'll start with ian fairclough from the chronicle herald go ahead ian thanks uh questions for uh allison lamb uh just running the uh you said that the patient was identified as covent possum on friday just wondering when they were admitted and whether that admission was an emergency admission or if they came in for a scheduled surgery or scheduled treatment uh so we do have a certainly a duty to protect our patients privacy and confidentiality so i i can't uh disclose any further information other than they were admitted for non-coveted related matters uh earlier in the week go ahead ian with your follow-up yeah and uh just i think we've covered before but at what point um you know if you do find more cases when could there be restrictions on on visitors or other other impacts on operations there so certainly the unit uh where we've identified those patients has been uh closed to admissions and visitors except for extenuating circumstances for compassionate reasons uh for family members uh so we do have those immediate containment measures in place and as the situation continues to evolve when we gather more information there could be uh further information with regards to restrictions but right now it is just the unit uh that we've identified of concern next we'll go to andrea blanc radio canada go ahead adrian thank you dr strang you mentioned it briefly but about transmission schools why not say which group of students is impacted and say to the whole community or how many cases there are precisely in the school that's something that many parents request thank you well i mean that that number changes on a daily basis upper uh you know whether they're active cases or you know new cases so we we we continue to communicate when there's exposures in a school to uh to staff and students uh and then we're just you know we're using our our media to our media daily media releases to uh to inform people about activities in schools as well go ahead adrian with your follow-up and i also wonder why some schools are so impacted and the others are nuts taking the example of merimond for example there were 10 exposures since september the beginning of september and other schools never have any exposure do you you know you have any idea why it's i mean it's related to the catchment area for the school what's what's what the what the activity is in the surrounding community uh a school like marymon because it's a french language school has a much wider catchment area uh so there's a number of factors and dynamics that go on that why some why our why four of our schools one percent of them uh have had enough activity that we've had to close whereas the vast majority of schools have not had any major impacts from covid or any covet at all it's all related to what's going on in terms of the covet activity in the surrounding community and and the families in the community that that access that school next we'll go to chelsea ghou from the truro news go ahead chelsea hello dr strang since the proof of vaccination was implemented two weeks ago have any businesses been reported or fined for not asking for proof as required my understanding from the enforcement team is that they they continue to do their their compliance uh with a focus on education and then when they we've had a very small number of businesses a vast majority of them are are very compliant and when we've had some challenges initially through an education approach uh everybody's come into compliance based on that go ahead chelsea with your follow-up okay and could you maybe describe the frequency of the compliance checks from the inspectors uh are they only checking spots that are reported no no we have uh we've had a comprehensive plan so when this was brought in uh a week ago uh our our inspection staff made up of folks our food our food safety inspectors alcohol and gaming and then we have occupational health and safety inspectors as well they were doing a proactive uh reach out and they're there for their initial focus has been on on places where there's a high high uh um volume of people moving in and out so restaurants gyms etc have been um have been a focus for their as i said they're taking an educative approach making sure thing people are are doing what's necessary and the vast majority are and the rest when they're told what's required have come into uh coming to line we also have a complaint based driven process as well next we'll go to pat healey from the laker go ahead pat hi this question for premier houston what do you have to say to business owners that are learning they will now have to use their own technology to download the app for the qr code hi pat and uh thank you for the question and you know i i believe that they'll be you know i don't i don't don't expect much pushback on that i mean businesses are used to people are used to downloading apps and using it and i think this will be pretty pretty efficient for them and overall i haven't had to you know touch wood i guess but i haven't heard a lot of complaints from business owners and as i've been out around the system seems to be working pretty well and nova scotians know that these these steps are in place so that they can keep us safe but that also so we can enjoy some of the some of the freedoms that we're experiencing here so so what what i would say to them is um bear with us uh we're getting through the pandemic but we're trying to keep people safe and and we expect it'll be work pretty smoothly go ahead pat with your follow-up uh so dr strang i know it's hard to look ahead even a month but what do activities during the holidays such as community parades and tree lightings look like in nova scotia this holiday season so thanks for the question uh um yeah my i'm i'm hopeful that by the time we get

there uh late november into december that we'll have even you know we'll be coming out of the fourth wave um but you have to remember right right now we don't have any uh restrictions on types of gatherings other than the people participating have to have proof of vaccination uh so it's quite people should be planning those those pre-christmas type of events uh on that uh on on on on currently what's in place around the requirement for mandatory masking indoor public places and proof of vaccination and if we're able to move away from those uh the er er that at that time well that just that that i would see that as a bonus but i think the safest precaution would be to you know plan it like we're in the we're going to be like we are today which as the premier has said we have a lot of freedoms that we're able to have that many other provinces don't because of the hard work everybody's doing but we've got to stick with a couple of key safety measures that allow us to then have gatherings and all in all sorts of ways that bring people together we'll come back to the room for two more questions if you've got it do you i don't know if this is for you or doctor strain do either of you have an update on the progress of ensuring vaccination status from public sector workers and health care workers

are you seeing an uptick there or is it too soon to know okay with the part of this is what we're seeing uh it's still dry we still have several hundred people a day that are coming looking to start their vaccine series and and certainly unfortunately some of them in an inappropriate way are are telling us that they uh that the reason they're coming to get vaccinated is because of the proof of vaccination policy do you have any concerns about that requirement affecting your staffing levels within western zone we are working uh certainly closely to validate our proof of vaccination of our employees and currently are hopeful that we've had a significant positive uptake of vaccination rates uh but time will tell once we the policy comes into place have you had any negative experiences with the requirement for visitors to be fully vaccinated is that going smoothly it's going relatively smoothly we've had some instances that have required some de-escalation but otherwise people for the most part are willing to provide the proof of vaccination so they can see their loved ones and certainly we take any matters where there has been challenges or people aren't able on a one-on-one basis to ensure patients in our hospitals have support people that they need but all in all it's going well

to my knowledge and is it strange that visitors are required to be vaccinated well before the staff who were there every day after the accident um i think it's certainly an opportunity and our staff are aware that they are protected through vaccination and we're working to have our staff protected and visitors and support people and certainly we have essential support people on a case-by-case basis that we look at if they are not vaccinated yet so that our patients can have support people with them thank you very much thank you thanks everyone um we're we're doing well in this province uh we really are but uh we need to we need to we can't let our guard down um and certainly when it's time to act um we will act and i think that's what we're seeing uh with some of the school situations that's certainly what we're seeing with valley regional when it's time to act we we will we will act uh for sure but a good good question today i appreciate that we're getting we're getting closer to the end of the pandemic we all hope but uh with with with the continued progress we'll get there there's a vaccine for children um that's that's in the works and hopefully will be will be available within the next couple months we're rolling out booster shots for residents in long-term care and the immuno compromised in nova scotia our vaccine numbers uh are are good and they're still climbing so these are all good things most people are following public health measures i know we're all tired of the pandemic that's that's for sure um but but nova scotians are known for their resilience uh for pushing forward in the face of adversity and we're seeing a lot of that in this province right now and i thank nova scotians for that so thank you

you

is the covid19 vaccine safe to get while pregnant or breastfeeding the covid 19 mrna vaccines approved in canada are safe to get at any time during pregnancy or breastfeeding even including the first 12 weeks of pregnancy although initially covid19 vaccines were not tested in pregnant or breastfeeding people because they were excluded from clinical trials we now have sufficient data and information collected from people who have been vaccinated to be confident that there is no increased risk of the vaccine to either mom or baby the vaccine has been shown to protect pregnant women and individuals in the same way as it does for those who are not pregnant and the vaccine does not include any ingredients that are known to be harmful to pregnant individuals or their babies there's even emerging evidence showing that the covid 19 mrna vaccines not only help protect the mother but also help to protect their baby when pregnant or lactating individuals are immunized antibodies are passed along to the baby and help to protect them after birth these antibodies will also pass into breast milk and further protect the baby if you have questions or concerns regarding vaccine safety we encourage you to discuss with your care provider and you can find more information by visiting the iwk website or nova scotia dot ca vaccine plan

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good afternoon and thank you for joining us my name is tina tebow and i will be your moderator for today's briefing joining us today the honorable tim houston premier of the province of nova scotia and dr robert strang chief medical officer of health for nova scotia go ahead premier good afternoon everyone thanks for joining us i want to begin today by sending my sympathies to the families of the three nova scotians who have passed away with covid since our last update our hearts go to those who are mourning the loss the cases we have seen over the last few days have certainly given me pause especially the sharp increase in the numbers in the western and northern zones and dr strang will have more to say on the cases and what is being done to reduce those numbers but he has assured me that public health is working closely with the communities and has a good understanding of the reasons behind the spike in cases and that that's really important we have about 79 percent of nova scotians fully vaccinated 79 percent and and just over 83 percent when including those with a first dose and waiting for their second dose the virus loves the unvaccinated that's why we're still focused on getting first and second doses to nova scotians i understand we should be able to add children under 12 to our priority list very soon but today we're announcing that we will follow the the recommendation released last friday by naci to roll out booster doses to certain groups and dr strang will again talk more about that in a moment but the the simple the simple message remains remains this uh please get vaccinated whether it's your first uh your

second or your booster dose as soon as you're able as soon as possible please get please get your vaccination that is the best way to protect your family and your community from this deadly disease now as you know last month we announced a mandatory vaccination policy for health care workers paramedics teachers and others given the news out of other provinces there's been a lot of interest in in what the vaccination rates are for these sectors uh here in nova scotia of course of course the november 30th deadline is approaching we've received preliminary numbers from health care workers at nova scotia health and the iwkw from paramedics and also from staff at long-term care homes and home care agencies and teachers we haven't heard from everyone we're still collecting data but the results that we have that have been reported to us are encouraging of the data we collected from the nova scotia health and iwkw employees those who reported the data we have uh 91 and 99 percent are fully vaccinated that's the nova scotia health and the iwkw the data we have for long-term care workers is 85 and only 67 percent for home care workers so the 97 97 percent are fully vaccinated in emergency health services and teachers are at 99 so that's a lot of numbers so be in they'll be in the release we're still waiting on on more long-term care numbers and home care numbers and we'll update you uh as soon as those come in but the priority now is to track down and identify workers who that employers haven't heard from to determine their actual vaccination status and and or their intentions employees who have not reported will have to take a mandatory education program if they are willing to be vaccinated we will work with them and we will help them have all the information they have to take that step this is all about protecting nova scotians it's not about penalizing the people who work in some of our most important sectors or putting services and supports at risk it's not about that but with that said we fully expect that there will be some who choose not to be vaccinated and that is their personal choice to make but we need to closely monitor that number and understand the impact that it could have if sectors need support after november 30th we will work with them no one wants to see service disruptions but more importantly i don't want to be offering condolences to any other family members who had a loved one taken by this virus especially if their loved one contracted covid19 from someone in a hospital who was as an example who was unvaccinated and caring for them that's just not acceptable so we continue to encourage people to get vaccinated and i'll turn it over to dr strang thank you premier good afternoon everybody uh and i do want to offer my uh sincere condolences to the families of the three individuals who have recently uh passed away due to covid 19. so as of today nova scotia has 220 active cases of covid 19. the increased case numbers we are seeing are from several clusters of cases primarily in the northern and western zones related to several faith groups that participated recently in a single multi-day event and we are now seeing further spread within each of these faith group communities the majority of the cases involved uh have remained unvaccinated unfortunately at this time there is no indication of spread beyond these uh these uh these number of faith communities uh and these communities are closely following public health requirements for testing and isolation and i want to thank them for their cooperation there is also a cluster of cases in central zone related to a separate faith community that involves mostly children who are not yet able to be vaccinated and i also want to thank the leaders and families in this community for their work with public health and again we're we're we're supporting those communities with uh enhanced opportunities for testing and vaccination as appropriate but again most of the majority of cases here are not yet eligible for vaccination the current situation brings with it an important reminder for faith groups in the province anything except a regular service so that's sunday church service saturday at the synagogue friday at the mosque anything other than that requires participants to show proof of vaccination so this includes things like bible studies retreats youth groups any other activities outside the regular weekly service does require proof of vaccination and also while in the those those services that that do not require a proof of vaccination it's important to there to a reminder that masks need to be worn at all times by the congregation so in general we continue to have contained clusters but unfortunately we are seeing some signs of community transmission in the amherst and north northern part of cumberland county area as a result of the clusters in that part of the province there have been increased opportunities for testing and vaccination in this area throughout the week and they will continue over the weekend and into next week so public health is watching this very carefully and i am optimistic that our as before that our overall high vaccination coverage rates will limit uh any spread into the broader community and i cannot stress enough the importance of people getting both doses of vaccine to further minimize the risk of spread of the of the covid19 virus in our province our case numbers and the spread we are seeing clearly shows what happens when people choose not to be vaccinated so i'm cautiously optimistic that we are still that this this will remain to these focused groups that we won't see spread to the general public but this should be a reminder if we need it that we're still in the middle of a pandemic we're in the middle of the fourth wave we cannot relax we still need to take this seriously we need to get vaccinated people following all the public health measures that are in place they are working they will get us through this but we need to continue to be very vigilant and take this seriously and i want to do with that i want to do give an update on our vaccination efforts across the province we're at the stage in our vaccine rollout where outreach vaccine opportunities are a key strategy to increasing vaccination rates local public health outreach teams continue to focus on communities in areas with lower

vaccine coverage rates to decrease barriers to successful vaccination these teams have delivered more than thirty thousand targeted doses of cova vaccine and their ongoing work is critical for nova scotians to reach sorry for nova scotia to reach the highest possible vaccine rates they are working closely with community partners like family resource centers high schools universities colleges community centers and others and they partner with the public health mobile testing units to offer covet testing and vaccine at the same time and this increases access to testing and vaccine by meeting people in the communities where they live work and learn this is difficult and tiring work and i want to thank these teams for doing such important work and i also want to acknowledge i've talked this morning with the increase in case numbers is putting a considerable stress on on frontline public health workers they're working long hard hours after after almost two years of this i want to acknowledge them and thank them for the work that they continue to do and recognize the the stress and the and the the challenge that is the current situation is placing on them

recently the national advisory committee on immunization released several recommendations on booster doses of covid vaccine in nova scotia we have already implemented two of these recommendations people who are moderately to severely immunocompromised are already booking third doses and the rollout of booster doses in long-term care along with flu vaccine is underway there are two other nasty recommendations that i would like to address today and how they will impact our vaccine roll out the first is that nasty now recommends at least eight weeks between dose one and dose two to be optimally protected we now know that an extended interval of at least eight eight weeks provides more durable protection against the disease so if you're current if you currently have a second dose booked at less than eight weeks you can keep your appointment or you can reschedule further out if you want to wait the eight weeks my recommendation is that you wait the additional time to maximize your vaccines effective effectiveness however if you prefer to get your second dose sooner you will still be very well protected the second group of nasty recommendations i would like to address are the booster doses for specific ages and populations that they that were announced uh by nancy last friday nova scotia will implement all of these recommendations uh that was had were released last friday and these include booster dose uh intervals of six months uh after the primary series so all of these people it's important people who are eligible for the boosters that you they have to be uh you have to wait um at least six months from the from your second dose before you can get uh your booster dose and that that's important to remember when you are when you soon will get the opportunity to go in and start to schedule your appointment it also it also means that naturally those who we have made a priority in our sequencing for the first series are going to be first in line for their booster dough so the 80 year olds will naturally be ahead of the 70 to 79 year olds because they were first in line for their primary series so we are going to be start to offering booster doses for the following groups people who were 80 and older and then people who were 70 to 79 adult frontline healthcare workers who received their primary series less than 28 days apart and that's the majority of our health care workers that we immunized la in december and then january into february who are frontline healthcare workers we were using pfizer and the and the recommendation that time was 21 days apart so we're there all will be eligible now to get an additional booster dose vaccine people who have received two doses of of astrazeneca vaccine or the one dose of jansen vaccine it's recommended that they now get an additional dose of an mrna vaccine and they're in nova scotia people are in either of those situations will or will now be eligible uh for that additional dose of an mri mrna vaccine because of as i said the sequencing we when we started the program we started with healthcare workers so we are going to be rolling out the booster doses in the in the coming uh weeks uh starting with eligible health care workers followed soon by anyone who's 80 plus and then 17 to 79. and like we did with our first and second doses we are already in discussions and working with our indigenous and african nova scotian communities to determine the best way to roll out booster doses in those communities we expect to be able to start offering appointments for these boosters by the end of november teams have been actively planning and working out the logistics to deliver boosters within the community and while our i.t experts make the necessary technical changes to our successful booking and data collection systems and we will share more information as soon as possible including the specific dates that eligible nova scotians will be able to start booking appointments for booster doses and as we prepare to administer booster doses we also expect to hear more about the vaccine for children 5 to 11. approval from health canada and recommendations from nasty are anticipated by the end of this month and so i think it's a fairly clear uh that we need to be prepared that it'll be uh early in december when we start to based on the on the national recommendations before you would really start to be able to uh provide vaccines into arms for for kids five to eleven if it happens a little sooner than that based on national recommendations uh we'll be happy to have that but i think a reasonable expectation for families and parents it'll be early in december before we actually start to immunize kids and although we will be rolling out booster doses our first priority will be to get vaccine into the arms of those who are unvaccinated children five to eleven and anyone else who uh who has who has only one or no doses of vaccine uh boosters may pride and may provide an added level of protection but our first priority and the best way to reduce the spread of the virus to ensure

that everyone who can has their primary series of two doses of vaccine there are about 65 000 children in nova scotia who will become eligible between uh they're in those five to 11 age groups and our we're working closely with our pharmacies who are prepared to move quickly to deliver a vaccine to the younger nova scotians there have been some questions about why we're not planning to vaccinate children during the school day uh different jurisdictions are taking different approaches and doing what works for them we firmly believe that relying on pharmacies is the as our primary an initial delivery mechanism is the right approach in nova scotia pharmacies have been a foundation of our overall vaccine program and if not for them we would not be in the position we are today where their vaccination rates they're very comfortable with all the other the online booking tools and all the data entry tools that they that they are have been learned to use over the last number of months we have pharmacies in every community and having them will allow parents the flexibility of booking appointments during times that work for their family and to be with their children during that appointment but if we're not seeing the uptake we expect in a particular area we will respond with tailored solutions like we've done throughout this pandemic we'll be monitoring uptake and local public health will work closely with the school community and we'll use things like our mobile vans other additional type of clinics if necessary enough a different approach is required so the next few months we'll be busy for our vaccine rollout and our immunizers i want to remind nova scotians to be patient and be to be kind to immunizers as they work as quickly as possible to vaccinate all nova scotians whether it's their first second or additional doses in closing i want to remind nova scotians that it's never too late to get your first dose of vaccine you may look at our vaccination rate and think that it's high enough and that you don't need to be vaccinated but the reality is being unvaccinated means being at risk and putting others at risk we have two recent hospitalizations as a result of some of our clusters unvaccinated people exposing other people resulting in those individuals going into hospital so those are examples of how unvaccinated people put others at risk it's not just about themselves the premier is given an update on the sectors who were required to be vaccinated by november 30th and i'm encouraged by the results but i want to speak personally to unvaccinated healthcare workers as healthcare workers our responsibility is the safety and well-being of our patients that needs to be your priority as you make your decision around vaccine for others who are not yet vaccinated remember that your choice impacts others we all need to do our part to protect ourselves our families and friends and those people in our communities who cannot who truly cannot be vaccinated so i'm asking everyone to do your part for our collective well-being and not just focus on yourselves remembrance day highlights the tremendous sacrifices previous generations have made for each other and for us with many giving your lives all we're asking for you is to get a proven safe and effective vaccine

thank you and uh happy weekend everybody thank you dr strang just a reminder we'll take questions from the room first before we go to the phone lines i'll open up the room dr strang as we ramp up the vaccination program is that going to require drawing frontline staff away from their ordinary jobs again or is this thing uh well established enough now that that won't be a requirement given our numbers that we have you know we know how many kids that we've we've ma we've looked at this carefully we believe that you know with our our established mechanism with pharmacies with the need to bring in secondary approaches with public health mobile vans which which is what we've been doing all along it will be certainly sufficient that's one of the reasons other models that people are saying you know to do school clinics and stuff would require significant redeployment of staff whereas the using the primary pharmacy model which is established well shown to be how effective it is does not have that impact on the rest of the health system a staffing question for you at 67 what concern do you have that at the end of this month there's going to be a dramatic decrease in available home care services for people who are receiving that right now it's a concern for sure i mean um we don't want to lose anyone working in in healthcare or education or any other sectors but um but the mandate has been in place we're concerned uh we're encouraging people to you know to if they have a concern about the vaccination to reach out we'll try to work work with them um work with them um and kind of alleviate their concerns and hopefully encourage them to get to get vaccinated i just had some updated some updated numbers as the reporting was coming in so now um the number right now um and this will be in the release i think is of the reported uh of those that have reported for for long-term care it's 93 and in home care it's 89. so that's that's certainly up from um the 67 number that you just referenced but that's the reality i mean as the as the numbers come in they're going to fluctuate um we don't have every every employer reporting yet so so number one we encourage we encourage the employees to to report one way or the other let people know don't hold back and the employers will aggregate that and send it through but the message remains the same um please get vaccinated and uh we we want to work with you one-on-one if you have concerns so in terms of numbers uh actual numbers can you put numbers to the percentages so that we so people can have an idea of how many people need to get vaccinated i mean i know in quebec they said the other day that about three percent of health care workers needed to get vaccinated that that translated to 14 000 people which is not insignificant do we know those numbers for are the percentages we don't know them but i mean we're kind of working

towards them obviously as the deadline looms but um we we're just kind of um the numbers we've reported are of those that reported so there's some that haven't reported that's different by we've kind of sliced it up pretty good in the release but um look um the it's i i can't say it enough is the wood the pressure's on our healthcare system and the pressures on our classrooms and the pressures on on those providing services nova scotians are are intense so anyone that we lose is is it hurts our system but there's contingency plans in place and uh we're still remain optimistic that people will take that step and get vaccinated but we'll get you we try to get you if we have more numbers we'll try to get those to you but it's like we were looking at thousands still thousands of people could be i usually could be yeah across all across all the sectors and employers yes but remember these are preliminary numbers we've got the month of november where we have educational efforts we have one-on-one sessions so there's a lot of work between now and november 30th to actually the number you're concerned about to shrink that as low as as low as possible doctor strength given the outbreaks in the uh faith communities why haven't uh those services at churches and the like been required to check for vaccination and it seems to be one of the primary sources of spread right now this is a specific circumstance of a group of faith communities at a at a multi-day event we are not seeing weekly services where people attending uh and we've deemed them to be essential and i i i firmly believe that people of those who are of faith that attending their weekly service is critically important to them and we've deemed them to be essential and they don't require therefore they don't require proof of vaccination and we're not seeing those weekly services popping up as sources of transmission this is a different set of circumstances that is happening the communities are cooperating um you used the same language when in the uh the outbreak in late september about a closely tight-knit community um it's my understanding though that that community stopped cooperating is that true no they we work closely with our local public health mohs they were very cooperative in terms of uh supporting public health in our contact tracing supporting people to remain isolated remaining access to testing we're getting the same cooperation is it possible that there were kobed related deaths in that community that have not been reported i'm not aware of uh we would have that if there were um um uh deaths that came through hospitals we'd be aware of those if they were if they'd gone through uh otherwise through the you know a death in the community that's not explained uh is meant to go through the medical examiner's office we've had no reports of any cova deaths through the medical examiner's office sorry about the nature of the gathering in terms of the faith groups involved are these are these people who have been told that they should not be vaccinated or is this a matter of people some people are vaccinated but most aren't and the gathering caused the virus to spread so what we know is you've had a large number a fairly large number of people from a number of of uh faith organizations who were together at a multi-day event uh what we're seeing now as we look at the cases that uh that a significant proportion of our cases are people who were eligible for vaccinate vaccination who weren't so that's a challenge uh and so we can but now they're you know but it's because they were together at an event they went back to their home communities we're seeing certainly seeing spread within each of those faith organizations and the families and you know like a community as they as a together uh but we're not at this point seeing spread be we're certainly seeing spread within those communities not unexpected because they have high rates of people unvaccinated but we are not seeing any indication uh so far of spread into the broader general community organizers of this faith event fined for not following the public health order they're they're they're we're not clear you know they're we haven't said you can't have lar you know large retreats events checking for vaccination proof of vaccination which you said is required for any event outside of a weekly service so given that that didn't happen should they not be fined we're we're working for them what was their understanding of that but i'm not for i'm not so much focused certainly as i said today i'm sending out communication to uh faith leaders across the province clarifying some things uh i'm more focused on on on moving forward and dealing with these communities in a constructive positive way to control the outbreak than and then to focus on what has happened and whether they should be penalized for that or not i'm given how the fact that kids vaccines might be available in a matter of weeks and not months what's the province doing to address vaccine hesitancy among parents we continue to have lots of information available we are we're we're working now knowing that we have a few weeks we're working on a strategy with our pediatric colleagues at uh the iwk the faculty of medicine so we'll be having many of the many of those leaders uh and and we have we're fortunate to have some national international experts uh in our pediatric pediatrician community right here in this province so we'll certainly be working with them and make sure that they are their voices are are part of uh the conversation with nova scotia and nova scotian families around the importance of vaccinating uh kids five to eleven when they get that opportunity what's your understanding in the faith communities of this large outbreak of why they are hesitant to get vaccinated there's large numbers who are not vaccinated do you understand where they're coming from what's their what's their belief around that i haven't talked directly to the community i've have some insights into that i mean certainly there's lots of reasons why people uh a small percentage of our population overall but still important uh you know don't believe they need to be vaccinated some of it's rooted in lack of trust some of it's rooted in misinformation some of some religious communities have firm beliefs that uh that

they've they've that they that they don't feel they from a biblical perspective they shouldn't be vaccinated i'm not going to argue with them about that i have a very different perspective but uh there are a small percentage that for whatever number of reasons don't believe they need to be vaccinated but that's why we continue to uh appeal to people to say it's not about what not so it's not about yourself it's about understanding the impact of you being unvaccinated what that means to other people and we hope that for the majority of people that that resonates with them that they have an obligation to care for others around them by getting vaccinated strange when previously when folks will get their first shot they would be automatically booked for the second shot for people who are getting the booster is there a notification for them for when their time comes or are we kind of back to the beginning now where folks will watch for when the system opens up for them as they become eligible so part of what we're going through is that you know people people we you know will be communicating starting today with other different ways of who's eligible there they they can then go online and book but part of what we're doing is bill is making the tweaks in the system so if if i rob strang if somehow i'm eligible for a third dose and i go on the book it won't let me book until i'm at least at that six month mark regarding the recommended eight-week interval between vaccines why is the province giving people the option to wait for eight weeks or to go sooner if we know from nasty that that's the most optimal time it's optimal but doesn't mean that four weeks doesn't give you very good protection and there may be reasons why why some people may want to or or uh need to get get that that that uh that second dose uh sooner uh so we wanna give people the choice as much as possible like something on vaccine you know we give people informed informed choice around things so they will have that option and again it's very important for people and eight weeks is optimal four weeks still gives you very very good coverage regarding the outbreak at the faith gathering has anyone died as a result or how many people have been hospitalized my understanding there's been two people that not directly but two people because of uh linked from you know exposures from people who were at that event uh now in hospital i'm not a one we haven't had no deaths uh uh associated with this the these cluster of of or this this group of uh outbreaks that we have for clarification uh you said the the third dose for people with two doses of astrazeneca does that apply to people with one dose of estrogenic and uh one mrna or what would you say if you've had the which the number nova scotians had first disasters again xenica then we were encouraging people for mrna no they have very good protection it's just if you if all you've had is the so-called viral vector which is astrazeneca or johnson johnson if that's all you've had then we know that you've got lower immunity than an mrna and nasty's recommendation is that those people then should have an additional mrna dose of vaccine so they get the third goes right away and the ones with mixed have to wait six months after their second pose no they they have to they have to wait the they have to if if they're if they had two doses of asterisk they have to wait for six months to get their additional mrna is there a dose of how many people were in attendance at this faith gathering that caused the clusters i i don't know i haven't made local public health may have that i mean i'm not involved directly in the investigation we know we had a number of organizations there with a fairly significant number of people i don't have an exact number hundreds below hundreds of there are sort of i've never been given a firm number uh so i'm not going to speculate on that premier is there a possibility that the province would back down on this vaccine mandate if it believes it might jeopardize health care no i think dr strang can can speak to this as well but it's really important that people get vaccinated especially those that are working around vulnerable people and um we want people to get vaccinated the mandate is in place i think when you when you consider the risk of there's risks on the other side of changing that policy and um there's a lot of vaccinated healthcare workers who don't want to work with an unvaccinated person so you'd be at risk of losing people that way but the overriding risk is man we don't want nova scotians to get covet because somebody who's taking care of them is not vaccinated so it's not it's not something we're discussing or looking at right now

you said that after november 30th the promise would look to support any sectors that i guess were shorthanded as a result of the mandate some people might imagine though just you know trying to steal workers who are already in short staff facilities and moving them over to other ones how do you how do you avoid that or how do you square that circle yeah i mean look there's there's already significant pressure on health care specifically so um it's not going to be easy um but but what what what i what i what i meant with the comment is is is the local management the local employers are already looking at scheduling and scheduling opportunities and how they can how they can move things around and it could be you know we had it during um covet before and the other the the first waves that some some services had to be rescheduled we don't want to get there um but so we were really really hopeful that um people will get vaccinated um and consider the impact right you were talking about surgeries there you said things done yeah some different different procedures you know different company consultations even like there's there's there's been impacts on our health care system by covet over the last 19 months two years uh we don't want to go back to that but we know that vaccination is critical for them for the health and safety and keep people safe as our main our main goal so i'd like to

clarify just to nail this down so it's my understanding that if you don't get at least one shot by the 30th you will be placed on administrative leave what if i came to you on december 1st and said i'd like to take the education course for writing we take an education course and i reconsider what happens in that year look we're going to work with anyone they can i wish they'd come do that tomorrow right but but if it's if it's in december we're definitely going to to work with them we this is not about penalizing people it's you know we don't want to we don't want to have any disruption of of service we want to put nova scotians health and safety first and but we want people to have we want people to get vaccinated but for those that need more information we're going to work with them we'll do that in december we'll do that in january we'll do that whenever it's necessary but we just want to see people on the path towards full vaccination you have to get back except that if you don't have one shot by the 30th you'll be placed on belief but you can't take action if you are placed yeah yeah for sure and the 30th is a hard deadline across all sectors yeah i'm going to go to the phone lines i'm going to go to the phone lines now i'll take a question from nicole sullivan with the cape breton post go ahead nicole uh yes thank you this is for dr strang um here in cape breton there's been a few schools that have had notice of exposures in one recently listed to have the enhanced health protection measures enacted a lot of parents are rumbling here with some confusion about what are public health guidelines for when a school is put into enhanced health protection measures or when it goes to the point that the school is actually closed can you provide some sort of details about this yeah it's really when we when we see we we we first start out with cases in the school but uh there's no evidence of any transmission within the school that's our first level and we've had a lot a number of schools with that when we start to see indication of uh of a transmission uh within a school so when we have a secondary case and somebody else shows up and the only realistic explanation for their exposure was in the school or you know when we have a case in the classroom we test all those classroom contacts if we start to get secondary cases from that testing that's at a point where we're saying we now have evidence of transmission within the school or if we have had multiple or we've had an exposure which has uh cro or even one individual who's in the school but has been exposed a number of people from multiple classrooms and then we have potential uh you know risk of of secondary cases in in a number of classrooms those are the things we look at that we would move a school from just having a case to uh needing enhanced public health measures go ahead nicole if you have a follow-up and yeah i'm wondering if you could provide a little bit of information about when the vaccine clinics at nova scotia high school started and why public health moved to that so we've been doing uh uh uh some clinics uh uh when as we've had cases in schools uh since september when one of our responses when we have uh supporting individual schools and their surrounding community uh we bring in our mobile lands both with testing and and in junior high and high school and unfortunately we haven't had very many schools uh you know of those schools but when we need to because those age groups are eligible for vaccination we also bring in vaccine opportunities along with along with the the testing in in in some communities that have had as we look at local level vaccination data we've see you know some communities where there's been lower vaccination rates we've taken the opportunity of using schools as a convenient site to bring in vaccination clinics and it's not just for students we invite all of the community uh to come into the school so we've also used schools in that manner as well uh in certain communities as a as a convenient and easily accessible uh place to uh for the whole community to come and get vaccinated next we'll go to chelsea ghoul from saltwater go ahead chelsea hi there dr strang are the exposure notice is the exposure knows that from the north academy of brookdale related to the faith-based clusters um i'd have to go back and ask that specific question it might well be but most of the cases we've had in the last uh 72 hours have been related to those clusters so recent exposure notices are probably associated with that but i'd have to you know i i don't i can't specifically say certain for certainty that that's that that that specific exposure notice is go ahead chelsea if you have a follow-up yes thank you this month we're getting into remembrance day and the santa claus parades for places who have opted to do outdoor parades do you have any messages for people in terms of covet spread well we've gotten a number of questions we're saying we have specific uh rules around gatherings that are allowed indoors and outdoors uh that that you know for you know that information and the rules to follow were there i would certainly uh one thing to say if you're like a like a christmas parade or any kind of seasonal event if you can do it outdoors outdoors is a lot safer than indoors uh that's a starting point uh but beyond that it's like uh make sure you're following the what's required and all the measures and we have lots of information on our on our website around around that we'll come back to the room for a couple more questions just oh sorry just on the vaccination numbers for health care workers i just noticed the latest numbers that you just put out there's been quite an increase among some of the sectors but the nova coastal health authority remains at 91 percent of health work is there a particular sector within within that number that is problematic uh just wondering why that number is the only one besides the the iwk which is at 99 that has not really changed yeah drank doctor yeah i think i mean we can remember there's preliminary numbers and you know 91 of people who so far reported is i think is a very good number i think overall we're seeing of of those that we're we know of that reported we're having very good vaccine coverage rates we're still going to you know we have the month of november to get more reporting and to get into more

detail uh you know we set a deadline of uh of uh november 1st for those organizations to report with us so they're coming in with preliminary data uh on monday and today's you know today's fridays we've had some you know we haven't had a lot of time to get into the into the details so we're going to be working with them to explore that by more refined data whether it's by location by uh you know you know a type of uh of staff whatever to get a better uh i guess a more granular picture of what the the overall vaccination rates are telling us certainly i know that the health authorities are and others are looking at that uh we we asked them preliminary to report us their overall number but they're already looking at a much more granular level and where they may need to have uh you know have uh you know prioritize in directing their their resources to uh to certain areas to improve vaccination rates is it possible though that there are still a number of uh people who just haven't reported so when we get the overall reported numbers those numbers will just drop yeah i mean i think there's a big check we're hearing some stories i heard one from the premier earlier today you know people who are just saying for whatever reason i haven't yet reported so i think a big chunk we got we still we have the month of november we've got lots of people reported and good vaccine coverage there's a big chunk who have not yet reported so we'll be able to by the end of november we'll be able to have with much more certainty like what is that small number who are just not vaccinated versus they just haven't reported their data yet so just to clarify because i thought earlier you said it was the institutions that were reporting and the people are self-reporting or they have to report to their employer their employer the employer whether it's nova scotia health authority iwkw home care organization ehs there we've had they we've said you need to then report that to the department so we can and in education it's the same the individuals report to their uh to their regional center for excellence who reports to the department of education in terms of the um sorry in terms of that november 30th deadline i'm still just i'm hoping you can just clarify what happens after that if somebody's placed on leave and then they decide they still want to go forward with getting the vaccine at what point can they return to work is it after their first dose or is it after 14 days after their second dose that's that's one of the detail you know working out with you know that's really at the front line with the human resources about that but we're being very clear that if you're not i mean i at least started your vaccine series by november 30th you will be on administrative leave how then at the at the i'll call it the front line the occupational health human resources work with those people are as the premier said our objective is is to get people vaccinated and get them into the workplace we do have to have some deadlines so but and people have to understand what their consequences are if they choose not to be vaccinated but if people put themselves on a path to get vaccinated we're going to be there to support that the health system will be there to support them to get them backs and get them back into the workforce we'll take one more question go ahead paul when you say the the employees report to their employer but are they actually showing a vaccine record or are they just saying yes i'm fully vaccinated or no i'm fully vaccinated like does the employer just going by their word or i don't know the detail about it you know we're very clear that yeah it's not just you know word that people have to show some reliable proof of vaccination uh whatever process the employer has in place for them that's all the time we have for questions go ahead premier you guys i'm pretty good ish

all right thanks everyone uh vaccination vaccination vaccination will dr strang and i in public health and everyone else will say it as many times as are necessary if you haven't been vaccinated please get the shot get it today get it tomorrow it's as easy as making um an appointment at your local pharmacy it's safe it's effective it protects your family your friends and your community so please please get vaccinated and have a good weekend everyone thank you

you

uh

afternoon and welcome to today's covid19 update i'm heather fairbairn and i'll be your moderator today before we begin allow me to introduce the honorable tim houston premier of nova scotia and dr robert strang chief medical officer of health for nova scotia take it away premiere thank you so much thanks for joining us everyone i want to start today by acknowledging the four nova scotians who lost their lives to covid since we were lost here i can't express enough how upsetting it is that we're still losing people to this virus it's even more upsetting when the cause of some of them is an outbreak that never should have happened um i also want to say unfortunately one of my colleagues has recently been diagnosed with covid i have spoken with minister masland she's fully vaccinated she's been being regularly tested and has done everything right and i will say that when i spoke to her she said that she couldn't imagine how she would be feeling right now if she wasn't fully vaccinated she's she's not feeling very good um so she is of course working with public health on contact tracing and we're wishing the minister of speedy recovery covid is not going away easily we're seeing cases around the province and we are seeing cases of course related to the faith-based gathering in the northern zone in late october where it appears that many of the people who participated were not vaccinated more concerning is that our hospitalization and icu numbers have taken a jump and of course nova scotians have died as a result so like many of you um i am absolutely appalled at the comments uh uh of some of those who were allegedly involved in organizing this gathering the comments downplaying the seriousness of what's happening the comments minimizing the loss of life are completely unacceptable and totally disgusting lives were lost i can't imagine that at this stage in the pandemic with the devastation we've seen to families and to communities that we have people who believe that they can pick and choose which rules they follow a fine has been issued in relation to this event my understanding it's it's the maximum fine possible to me it's not enough we'll be looking at changes to the level level of fines the question that we've been struggling with is are the cases that are coming from this event a result of a policy issue or is this more of an enforcement issue and in talking with dr strang we feel that it's primarily an enforcement and compliance issue uh my gut tells me that whatever rules were in place this particular group of people would have simply done what they wanted um so that that means it's it's really down to enforcement and compliance and i am concerned about the delays and enforcement in this matter i don't understand what took so long and i don't understand um why only one person has been charged so i i want i can't stress enough we're reviewing that and certainly i'm asking a lot of questions we will get to the bottom of the enforcement delays and we'll fix it we will do we will do that and we are in the process of asking those questions of the compliance team right now but i can assure all nova scotians that the message has been sent loud and clear that enforcement delays are not acceptable this entire situation only confirms the need for those who work closely supporting others to be vaccinated if anyone needed another reason to go and get it done here it is sadly three times over so the time to act is now before you're sick and before you put yourself and others at risk so all of that said i will i will say that i am encouraged by the latest update from the sectors impacted by the mandatory vaccine policy we've heard from the majority of employers in these key key sectors and the vaccination rates are are very good of the data reported 94 percent of nova scotia health authority employees have at least one dose 99 of iwk staff 93 percent of long-term care staff 89 percent of this will all be in the release 89 percent of home care workers and 97 of those in education and 99 of workers in emergency health services so so those numbers are are good all things considered we need to we need to keep working to get them up a little higher and we'll have an update uh next week on i guess a final update after the november 30th deadline so my sincere thank you to all those employees who have been vaccinated and who made the choice about choice that protects the health of the people that they care for at work every single day and again my uh sincere condolences to those impacted by the selfish acts of others dr strange thank you premier and good afternoon everybody i also want to extend my sympathies to the families and loved ones of the four nova scotians who died since our last briefing

as of today we have 236 active cases of covid 19 in the province nova scotians need to be prepared to see ebbs and flows in the number of cases across the province in the weeks and months ahead unfortunately from what we are now seeing in canada and other countries this fourth wave is likely to stretch well into the new year that means we all need to be prepared to continue with current public health measures through the winter we continue to see cases in all health zones and evidence of limited community spread in northern nova scotia and the hrm area the cases in hrm are related to an ongoing but stable cluster in a defined population involving mainly children who are not yet able to be vaccinated and we're also managing outbreaks in northern and western nova sco health zones related to the face-based faith-based gathering that occurred in late october the outbreak in western zone has been contained to people who attended the gathering or were in the home uh faith uh communities uh of people who went to that gathering and does not appear to

have spread in any substantive way further within that zone this is not the case in northern zone we're seeing secondary transmission in workplaces schools a group home and a long-term care facility and most concerning of the deaths of three nova scotians increased hospital admissions and an outbreak at east cumberland lodge all of which are linked back to this initial multi-day face faith gathering i am both angry and frustrated people chose not to get vaccinated they gathered with both vaccinated and unvaccinated people against existing rules and these choices have had significant impacts upon others i understand that no one intended for this to happen but if we give covid 19 a chance to spread it will and as we know it can be deadly

to those who say that our proof of vaccination protocol and other public health measures infringe on your freedoms i'd say that freedoms come with responsibilities your personal freedom has well established ethical and legal boundaries when it creates significant risks to others in a pandemic we all must do whatever we can to protect ourselves and one another from this virus and those responsibilities include getting vaccinated and following public health measures and protocols

even with the low-level community transmission and a highly vaccinated population the virus has made its way in into a long-term care facility despite being fully vaccinated the frail elderly are more susceptible to the virus 31 residents and 10 staff have been infected and two of the infected residents have died that is why getting third doses into long-term care residents those who are immune compromised and nova scotians over 70 is very important a third dose will give these groups either the same protection that most adults get from two doses or boost waning immunity the impact on the east coast lodge long-term care home has been significant but without vaccine it would have been much much worse as i've said before no vaccine or any other medical treatment for that matter is one hundred percent effective some people will get infected with covid 19 even though they are vaccinated the reality is that as more people get vaccinated we will see lower overall case counts but a greater proportion of the of the remaining cases will be breakthrough cases what we expect is that the vaccine greatly reduces the risk of severe illness hospitalization and death when it comes to cases in unvaccinated versus vaccinated people national and international research shows us that when compared to unvaccinated people fully vaccinated people are 80 percent less likely to be hospitalized and 66 percent less likely to die as a result of the virus and within our own country data from the federal government shows the stark contrast between those who are vaccinated and unvaccinated the average rate of new covid cases among unvaccinated people in canada is seven times higher and the rate of covid in hospitalization in canada is 23 times higher for those who are unvaccinated and among people 12 to 59 years of age unvaccinated people are 45 times more likely to be hospitalized than those who are fully vaccinated the data clearly shows that vaccines work we cannot be complacent when it comes to covid the outbreaks we're seeing now are examples of how quickly the virus can spread and the impact it can have on both those who are unvaccinated and those who are vaccinated but more susceptible to the virus i cannot stress this enough and lives depend upon it we must continue to follow public health measures to prevent the spread of covid 19 including wearing masks in indoor public places staying home when unwell requiring proof of vaccination for discretionary gatherings and most importantly getting vaccinated against covid 19. and i'm pleased to say that today of our official number we have passed we're at 80.6 percent of of the of the total population which means 90.6 of those who are eligible you take away the kids who are under 12. though so we're at the first time we're at that level who have been had received two doses of vaccine they're fully considered fully vaccinated and we have another four or five percent with one dose and many of them are already booked to get their second dose so for all those nova scotians the vast majority of nova scotians who have answered the call and are getting vaccinated a huge thank you to those who could be vaccinated but aren't who are focusing only on themselves believing misinformation and false narratives and more and more reacting with inappropriate anger shame on you you want to share in the benefits of nova scotia's strong covid response but you're not willing to carry your share of the

work earlier this month we adopted the national advisory committee on immunization recommendation on booster doses nasty has recommended that booster doses be administered administered six months after the final dose in the primary series so today i'm happy to announce that starting november 23rd you can schedule your booster dose six months after your primary series if you are 70 years of age or older if you receive two doses of astrazeneca vaccine if you're an adult frontline healthcare worker who received your first two doses less and there was less than 28 days between those two doses so if you're in any of those groups you are you uh starting november 23rd you will be eligible for a booster dose and you can schedule that online or by phone however i need to emphasize you can only schedule your booster dose once uh if first of all if you fit into one of those eligible groups and there has to be at least six months passed since you had you finished your primary series so again this means that on november 23rd anyone who received their second dose

uh as of uh june the ninth can schedule a booster dose if you rescheduled your second dose before this sorry if you receive your second dose after this date you are not yet eligible and you can't book in advance you have to wait for the six months to pass booster doses will also be available soon in first nations and african nova scotia communities across the province clinics will be oregon are being are being organized in partnership with these communities and along with support from local public health members and the booster doses continue to roll out in long-term care facilities across the province and in addition to addition to the residents designated caregivers are also are also being included in the booster rollout if they received their second dose less than 28 days after their first dose of vaccine so again if they're in that group that had a very short interval between their two primary series and again for the caregivers there has to be at least six months after they finish their primary series designated caregivers who qualified those qualifications can also schedule a booster dose as of november 23rd online or by phone so in closing i have a few requests for all nova scotians if you're not vaccinated it's not too late go get your first dose if you're feeling on them well in any way stay home and away from others and book a test go online or call the on the phone line and get an assessment to see about getting a test be careful and cautious around who you're around until you get that test result and follow all the other public health protocols wearing your masking proof of vaccination they are in place for a reason and this week we've seen what can happen when they aren't followed the holiday season is fast approaching and that means gathering with family and friends and the best gift you'll be able to give to them is a covered free holiday and if you do all these things you will have done everything possible to protect yourself and the people you care about thank you we'll now take questions from media in the room and on the phone starting in the room go ahead and be specific about what you see to be the enforcement issue well the the faith-based gathering was a couple weeks ago and you know i'm not sure what the delay is in issuing the fines for that um so i think i just think that we need to be vigilant when when somebody breaks the rules the enforcement team should be there to find them the amherst police department told me they were waiting on guidance from public health from the province why would they be looking to the province for guidance on how to conduct a police investigation there's no real answer for that law enforcement should do their job they should enforce the laws they don't need guidance from any elected official any bureaucrats anybody in the civil servants civil service they should just they should enforce the laws that are on the books they should just do it without delay

i've had multiple meetings with chiefs of police through with the department of justice and made that very point every time we make major changes that made clear to them and we've had conversations about uh where their expectation and the role they play on an enforcement and dr strang a couple of weeks ago when we first heard you talk about this church event you said that you didn't think punitive action was the right response what has changed since then well that was at the very beginning of this and we're all in the very beginning we're trying to um we're in the process of establishing a constructive working relationship with the the number of faith organizations that were involved and getting the necessary information and supporting people around testing and uh but as time has gone on we've learned more clearly we're seeing impacts uh from from the non-compliance and quite frankly remarks made yesterday which are entirely outrageous uh push people into a corner uh and that we need to take stronger enforcement action i wonder about the initial uh alerts on this and the fact that we try to balance stigma against public safety clearly in this case it appears not to work because there was no alert that went out about this meeting and that this meeting had posed a problem and we're in the situation we're in i'm wondering if you have any thoughts on that should we reconsider that reconsider in the sense of if there's if there's an event involving uh a situation where there's been an identified problem in relation to covet that people should be told about the event in terms of this is the event this is when it happened this is what you should be aware i i think go ahead and go on here so we do that all the time that's why we have all the exposure notifications we only use those when there's been some kind of circumstances where we can't in other ways contact people who were who are at an event at a setting and were exposed in this circumstance we knew who was at the at that event we knew the faith organizations that were involved and we were able to reach out and communicate in other ways without having to do a public notification we were able to go to the home and tell them that perhaps there might be somebody who works there who might have been exposed to this event we at the time the initial beginning of the of that we did we had we had no indication that there was an individual uh that we would go to that was employed in that facility that goes to my point if you don't say publicly that there was this meeting sponsored by this baptist church in the amherst area on these dates you know there's no alert that goes out to anybody perhaps somebody at the home knew that somebody went to that and could have taken steps everybody who was at that event was then contacted directly or intervent indirectly and said you've been in contact here's the steps you need to take in terms of testing isolation that occurred after the horse well the card was after the horse as soon as they had that event and contravention of the rules i think public health did what they could in the in the early stages as they kind of tried to find information but clearly look at the information that's come out since including the comments from the pastor over the last couple

days so i think this is i think this is a situation we're probably going to learn a little bit from this one to be honest i'm personally right now focused on on the enforcement side i my personal um hope is that a lot more people are fined the lack of information because on this side of the fence we certainly do that's why we ask these questions to begin with first question we asked where where did it happen we didn't know no one knew and then all of a sudden we're getting we're getting told about a spread and then eventually deaths as a result of this does that anybody look think about you've got to do something a little bit different here well there's a lot of public notices of of exposure sites uh will we continue to look at how we determine whether a public notice should vote of course we'll continue to look at that and and make decisions on that but um you've looked at if you look at other outbreaks in different communities they were able to contain them you know because there was a lot more cooperation maybe with public health so look everyone everything every decision that dr strang makes at public health make that i make is all in the interest of keeping people safe if we can make better decisions based on more information we'll make better decisions based on more information but as we learn more i think what you've seen as we as we've done more i just want to add one more thank you i hear what you're saying and we're starting to look at that but also we've got to understand that it's not that you should ignore covet until you're notified that there might be covet we've got covet all around us that's why every day we need everybody to be thinking about what do i need to do long-term care facilities have protocols in place about their staff their visitors that are followed every day that and so a notification of a possible exposure should be layered onto all these other things but i guess that that sort of goes to the point then why bother telling someone that there was a potential exposure as a walmart if all those people should have been following your safety guidelines anyway do you see what i mean there's an additional recommendation for those people for if you're potentially exposed around potentially testing but our approach is always when if we can reach the people that we need to reach who will we judge or have been identified as close contacts and to be not

people you available and and everyone they had come into contact with and everyone they had come into contact with i mean you're the ones who've been telling us how quickly the virus can spread yeah it seems like there's a bit of a double standard um i don't agree that there's a double standard i think that the public health instructions are clearly communicated to people um we hope and expect that people follow them but we have some people in our society that don't and i think what we're seeing is the result of that right now in this particular case but look um i don't want to be dismissive of the questions um we'll we'll look at um we'll look at how we how we communicate going forward for sure outbreak two of the other recent outbreaks were around faith communities as well is there a concern that uh our policies around uh uh faith communities isn't strong enough well i'll let dr strange come in but this and this is this has been the topic of discussion um i think what i think what's what what we've seen um to date is the regular services the epidemiology doesn't suggest that there's there's issues with the regular services anything outside of the regular service is meant to follow the public health rules um so a finance committee meets on thursday night at the church supposed to follow the rules right um and this was a gathering where the rules should have been known to these people and would have been known i would i would submit that's my opinion they decided not to follow them so the regular services themselves um we haven't seen we haven't seen an issue with them but it's an ongoing discussion um doctor strange if you look at the epidemiology we have this event we're talking about clearly non-compliance and that spread to a number of other uh you know churches who they were spread within those churches the major issue there was was that they had very low they don't believe in vaccination by and large a very low vaccination rate um we've had one other event the ongoing spread in hrm involves it's it's complex it's not just the faith community it's more complex but if you look at i don't know what the number would be every week how many uh regular services are there at churches synagogues mosques temples we are not seeing those regular services as any significant drivers of transmission of the virus the vast majority of faith organizations are working really hard to follow the public health rules there's been some outliers we need to deal with the outliers not not paint everybody in the faith community with the same brush because the epidemiology does not justify that taking a uh a broad brush approach uh to this yes

i mean that's why we're talking is it policy or is it enforcement whatever policy we would have in place i suspect this group wouldn't have followed them the pastor sorry the pastor insists that he believed he didn't have to as a faith organization so are you saying that he's not telling the truth uh well look i don't want to speak to what what he what he said but i i personally believe the rules were well known in the faith-based communities and across nova scotia i've i've yeah i've met many times with the faith uh faith leaders i've got an email distribution list of uh you know well over a hundred people uh and they were i can i have the email thread that show clearly i communicated what to the faith leaders that i'm able to communicate with there are some faith organizations that are very independent and and quite frankly are very hard to communicate too but we did everything we could to make sure the rules were very clear and it

was very clear this type of multi-day retreat absolutely required proof of vaccination to be applied and it wasn't done it was either you or your deputy who told us in the last couple of weeks that that community had a 70 vaccination rate you just said a moment ago the vaccination rate was very low is it lower than 70 percent i don't know i don't know the numbers i don't know what it must have been dr deak's in in it's but certainly what i do know is that we've you know there's a number of faith organizations in different in western northern nova scotia who are at this retreat and they've gone back and by reports from my the public health team that the majority of people in those uh in those organizations the majority of cases that were that we were seeing were were people who could be vaccinated based on aids but weren't dr sherry i want to ask you about hospitalizations the numbers have increased significantly in the last few days can you explain what's going on there and are any of those people hospitalized uh children and lastly um the the number reported for people with active cases and i'm wondering um how much the the hospital system is being impacted by hospitalization by people who are no longer considered contagious and are we starting to are you starting to worry about capacity so you know there's a lot of questions in there so first of all certainly we've had uh some increase in hospitalizations um not unexpected because when you see an in a surge of cases it can often be a couple of weeks before you see the surge of hospitalizations because it often it takes people in it's later on in their when in their disease before they get severely ill what we've seen has created a little bit of pressure in our uh in the capacity in western zone uh but certainly we look on a daily basis is what are the number of of medical beds and icu beds for covet patients and what we have right now is well within the capacity within the province there and i'm not aware of any children being hospitalized so that we as as i said earlier in my remarks we yeah we watch the daily case counts but i'm much more focused on what is the trend that we're seeing in in cases and then where are we at in terms of capac you know uh you know coveted cases and where how does that match up within capacity within our hospital system and fortunately we are still well within that capacity doesn't mean there may not be some local pressures because some of our small yarmouth hospital i think only has a couple of icu beds and and both of them have people with covet in them right now but if we needed to we have lots of room to transfer people in the briefing saying that the fourth wave would go into the new year does does that factor in the concerns around hospitalizations in capacity well i think we you always i'm always concerned so that's one as i said that's one of the things we the key things we're looking at in a daily weekly basis is what are the trends that we're seeing in terms of cases the number of cases how those cases are occurring what are the transmission patterns and then what's the level of severe disease so when we look at hrm and it's we're fortunate that the large majority of the cases we're seeing in hrm are kids who have a much lower risk of severe disease and we'd have no kids in the hospital doesn't mean we we we were complacent about covet because if you're complacent then it spreads broadly but we i've said many times we can expect and we can tolerate a certain level of spread of covet and that's that's inevitable but we need to protect against that and then one of the key reasons we need to protect against it is that if you don't you overwhelm your hospital system like we've got lots of examples in other canadian provinces we are in a fortunate position that we haven't even come close to that yet and my one of the key priorities is for us to never get there can you give us an indication of how many people are in hospital who had coveted but are still suffering but are no longer considered active cases i don't have that breakdown in front of me there may be some people especially in the icu who are there for prolonged stays but i i can't i know the overall case number but i can't give you that broken down right now between early in their admission and it's still you know prolonged stays in

going to move to the hospitals and we'll come back to the room before we have to end okay so moving to radio canada adrian blanc thank you i wonder what is done to prevent further spread and especially in the north of the province like increased testing or rapid testing or asymptomatic testing or mobile testing so we've had uh as i said here you know our our testing strategy in the fourth wave is to not have asymptomatic testing for everybody but we still have symptomatic testing we have workplace testing in over a thousand workplaces across the province i think over 200 of those are in the northern zone and that is asymptomatic testing it's a surveillance system and then when we do see signs of of of early spread in the community then then we move in uh increasing asymptomatic testing in our primary assessment centers moving in our mobile vans working with our partners like praxis who do asymptomatic testing all of which we've done in the last few weeks in the in amherst and other parts of northern nova scotia we've where a lot along with that we're bringing in vaccine and and at our mobile testing we're also giving out take-home testing kits as well and we have the you know the school-based testing program of testing kits being sent so we have multiple streams of testing which we ramp up uh in any communities to increase access to testing and that has happened and will continue to happen in northern nova scotia the mobile units are going back up to amherst yet again this weekend to increase access to testing and i will say that we have we have lots of capacity in those mobile units we haven't even come close to maximizing the daily testing volume that we could do in northern nova scotia so you've got lots of opportunity though folks in northern nova scotia that potentially has not been taken advantage of we have way more capacity sitting in those mobile vans this

weekend so come out and use it please adrian do you have a follow-up yes i would like to know if right now if somebody haven't had their first or second dose they can have it immediately or they need to wait i have mixed information and i i talk about the northern zone especially no are our priorities still in our vaccination program even though we're talking a lot about boosters and additional doses our priority remains and will always remains people who want to start their primary series and all they need to do is go online and book a book an appointment uh through our online booking system and they will get them you know as soon as you book your appointment we'll get you in there moving on we'll go to the laker pat healey go ahead pat hi uh this question is for uh dr strang what can you tell us about the current exposures at hances royal high do we know how it got into the school their uh emails home from the school suggests transmission do we know if that is the case so it hasn't been brought to my attention in all you know in schools they always start out with exposure somebody hap was exposed somewhere else in the community and either staff or student then they're then infectious when they're in the school i think there's a very low number of cases i think it's three in that high school uh i'm it hasn't been brought to my attention that there's any uh indication of uh of transmission within the school at this point in time do you have a follow-up pat yes i do is there any talk of uh opening up the testing site again in mjo with these cases at hand teeth well i think local public health will always look at the epidemiology and where uh where we might see indications of increasing spread in the community and then mobilize our resources to do that so i think it's i'm not involved in those those kind of detailed decisions but i'm i'm confident that if local public health looks at a situation and there is a need for increased testing in that community that will happen moving on we'll go to truro news chelsea gould hello to you both what is your response to liberal leader ian rankin's call for proof of vaccination at all based surfaces including regular well i mean i've got you know i gave the epidemiologic explanation on that why why it's just not uh for me everything comes back to the what's the science what is the epidemiologic rationale and i don't feel that there's any solid epidemiologic reason for that at this point in time if it becomes that way i'll be the first one to bring that recommendation to premier houston chelsea do you have a follow-up yes thank you would you consider making any requirements for non-regular faith events to be perhaps registered so the province is at least aware of them when they're happening to help with enforcement

i mean i think i continue to work with faith faith leaders and uh and as in the vast majority are doing uh really hard work and making some difficult decisions around applying all the public health regulations and following the rules and and their focus is when i talk to them they're well aware and their focus is like mine keeping people safe keeping their congregations their their members safe uh i'm going to continue to have conversations with those faith leaders some of them have reached out to me and said what do we need to do we don't want to have the proof of vaccination so what more could we potentially do to keep our faith services uh safe so i'm going to continue to engage in those conversations with the faith leaders and have working together uh so i don't think something like creating a list is uh is necessary that the vast majority have uh we're all on the same page and it's about keeping nova scotia safe yeah and just just on that i think at any given time there's lots of events and gatherings happening across the province around the province and they follow the rules so everyone should follow the rules moving on we'll go to cbc's preston mulligan yeah question for the premier uh premier i gather that you've watched um uh pastor smith's sermons and i just wonder what your thoughts are whether you think a fine of two thousand four hundred and twenty two dollars is sufficient given the kind of defiant tone he took in those sermons and and the and the spread that's allegedly connected to those services i do not think the fine is sufficient and we're looking at ways to change the fines going forward uh we're also looking at ways i've asked the compliance team to look at um at looking at maybe if other people should be fined as well other leaders that were part of the gathering and um if there's if there's more times to apply the fine you know could it be one per day or something so i would say i'm not um i don't believe the fine is sufficient and um i think the tone that was taken subsequent to then and is just just really disgusting preston do you have a follow-up yeah i'm just curious whether you have personally been able to reach the pastor since viewing his sermon i have not moving on i will check in with linda pinozzo linda are you there

linda

we'll return to the room for a few final questions noting we have a hard stop at 1 45. go ahead with the cumberland east lodge in pugwash do you know if we're still seeing unvaccinated workers uh working in that long-term care facility i'm i'm not we're still working like everywhere on the vaccination policy people have until november 30th uh to uh to uh to get vaccinated or show their intentions to be vaccinated that that that facility would be the same as anywhere anywhere else so we're not going to put it on any priority list to get booster shots for example well we're not talking about booster shots what we're talking about on our health care worker policy is people have until november 30th to get to uh as a

health care worker to get vaccinated if they're not by november 30th then they're on uh they're on you know on unpaid leave some people with that faith gathering insist that the person who was in attendance and was exposed who then went to east cumberland was fully vaccinated and called

could still go 811 work um because on the chart it just says you know if you're vaccinated have an exposure just get a test and you don't have to isolate so is that something you need to look at or is that being confirmed that that's what happened i don't know the details on that but certainly our protocol is and and where i've asked people to look at this is that because of the low risk it's not zero i mean this is all about you know that people who are fully vaccinated if there's been an exposure they don't need to isolate but we still recommend them to be tested remembering that there's also even somebody working in a healthcare facility it's not just about vaccination there's all the masking and other personal protective equipment infection control steps that are in place to also protect it's unfortunate that we've had this circumstance but again it it shows why in general we need to keep levels of virus low and minimize the chance of even you are going to get breakthrough cases but minimize the chance of an un of a vaccinated person and having another event like this should maybe healthcare workers have to self-isolate if they've been exposed if even if they're fully vaccinated just in case there are there are increased requirements for care workers whether in hospitals or long-term care facilities i don't have all the details in front of you about this specific case the fine was levied by the department of environment and not by the amherst police was this an action of the provincial government uh taking action where they failed to see that the local police did not take action yeah i can't understand honestly why the police haven't uh haven't advanced their investigation or taken up on that file but yeah to answer your question yes um the the compliance and enforcement part group of the department of environment is kind of a backstop um to to the to the police the police should be doing they're doing their job they should be enforcing us

how did that decision come about yeah i think so i think that given the cases given given the the situation that was there that the the compliance team started starting an investigation i will say that i certainly put a lot of pressure on him to make sure that that investigation happens

any action you're going to take or the department of justice will take in regards to the amherst police department's non-action okay not specifically right now i mean um i don't have enough information on that and it's it's um the separation of of you know with the judicial system is is for a reason as well uh personally um um i have a lot of questions as to why it might not have but that's not for me that's that's for them do you have any numbers pastor as an individual and not the organization which could have incurred a much heftier fine than an individual that that part of the investigation is still is still ongoing as to whether this is kind of an official organization um so we just don't have enough information but believe me if we can we will there'll be more fines if possible i was wondering if we have any numbers yet to accompany the percentages so that we have an idea of how many workers actually need to get vaccinated so you were in the release and the premier's remarks you know that of the people reported and then most already there's there's a high percentage of reporting uh we don't yet have we'll have that more as we get toward to november 30th with specific numbers well how many people are are going to be expected to be you know having to go off and leave we still have a couple of weeks and we're and i know the healthcare organizations are still working to try to get those people to start their vaccine series there is a business person in downtown halifax that's being harassed uh on a regular basis by protesters does that fit in with your frustrations police were there in force did nothing about it and quibbled with the business person about where his sidewalk started and where his patio did does that fit in with your frustrations with how law enforcement is dealing with that kind of situation it fits in with the just with the frustration of the the general attitude of those who don't want to get vaccinated i mean we've heard about these roving protests outside a number of businesses is completely disappointing i mean these people are just trying to make a living and run a business um they're just they're just following the laws that that we make so um it's i really don't have uh i do have the word that i'd like to use but i can't use it in this form we'll take one question we'll take one final question in the room did the burton edinger elementary school open up his plan today that's my my understanding from yesterday i was that it was planned open today i haven't heard anything differently nothing further than that i you'd have to check with education but i said i get i get high level updates and my understanding from my team was that it was due to open up today that's all the time we have a question today

okay um thank you so um thank you thank you for the questions dr strang has has told us that the fourth wave will likely last a little longer than certainly anyone expected or wanted but it's clear that kovid isn't going anywhere anytime soon and that's bad news but the good news is that it's pretty easy to give yourself the best chance against this virus you just

need to get the vaccine so whether you're eligible for your first second or booster shot and just book your appointment get it done as i said earlier the time to act is now before it's too late and before you get sick and before you make someone else sick so thank you for joining us

you

good morning my name is marla mcginnis i will be the moderator for today's news conference before we begin i'd like to introduce the honorable tim houston premier of the province of nova scotia and dr robert strang chief medical officer of health for nova scotia go ahead premier thank you marilla good morning everyone uh before we get started today of course i'd like to start by talking about the the situation in eastern nova scotia and cape breton as a result of yesterday's storm um pretty pretty a pretty scary situation there for sure the nova scotia emergent emergency management office is working with the affected municipalities and other partners including the department of public works and health and wellness to coordinate response efforts in in picto and ignacion vernas and victoria counties so we urge we urge people to to please please check with your neighbors excuse me especially the seniors in your community and we will continue to work with our partners to keep nova scotians safe and my thoughts are with all the all the residents of the areas impacted now on to covid i want to acknowledge that yet another nova scotian has lost their life to the virus since we were last here my heart goes out to their family and to their to their loved ones if ever there was a reason to get vaccinated to follow public health measures this is it as we continue to see lives lives truly do depend on it and in a few moments dr strang will update you on the situation uh with covet in nova scotia but but for uh for me i'm pleased to say now that things things uh appear to be stabilizing for now public health has advised us that the outbreaks in northern and in the northern zones and the western zones are under control and cases in those areas seem to be trending down which is good in in other in other good news appointments are are now open for those eligible to book a third dose and we're expecting vaccines for children aged 5 to 11 to land in the province this week and the team is putting the final touches on the rollout parents and gear and guardians should be able to start booking appointments for their children very soon the benefits of the vaccine are clear regardless of of the age this in this wave we are seeing more cases in children so please get your child vaccinated to protect them against the virus protecting them also protects their family their grandparents their friends and their and their community thankfully the choice to get vaccinated is is the choice most employees who who look after and care for vulnerable nova scotians have made our latest update from the sectors included in our mandatory full vaccine protocol continue to be very good most employees who have reported are fully vaccinated in fact 95 percent of nova scotia health uh nova scotia health employees are fully vaccinated and another four percent have one dose over at the iwbc 99 of iwbc staff are fully vaccinated in long-term care 95 percent are fully vaccinated with 3 percent partially vaccinated for home care it's 95 percent as well for ehs 99 are fully vaccinated um and 97 of employees in the education system who have reported are fully vaccinated so as as for employees who work for the province in nova scotia 97 of those who have reported are fully vaccinated so those are those are encouraging numbers we're paying close attention to the percentage of staff in all sectors who have not yet reported but i know employers are working hard to determine the intentions of these employees i'm concerned about this group that's not reported and i hope the fact that they they haven't reported doesn't mean that they don't intend to get vaccinated but if it does mean that we will deal with it at the end of the day we absolutely believe we're completely convinced that people who work in these sectors must be vaccinated to protect the people they care for this is more important than having to deal with the impacts of staffing and services if people choose to leave rather than investing um in rather than taking the life-saving vaccine i will say that um sectors are are planning for the employers are all planning for how they will handle potential staff shortages for or service disruptions but right now um there's no employer that is expecting any major impacts to service delivery they they have to deal with and they'll have to deal with isolated issues for example in education they're anticipating that there could be areas where busing is an issue due to driver availability but these are all things that are being planned for by the by the employers so we'll we'll have the the final update in early december but i'm hopeful that we will still be able to say that we expected minimal impacts um and that that's what we actually experience when the time comes so so we're we're optimistic uh that people are getting vaccinated particularly in those sectors and and we we feel that there'll be there will not be any major impacts on service deliveries but um but we'll have the final number soon so um with that turn it over to dr strang thank you premier and good morning everybody and uh my thoughts too are with those who have been significantly impacted by the weather event and and the subsequent flooding as of today we have 172 active cases of covet 19 in the province and i also want to extend my sympathies to the family grieving the loss of a loved one due to covet 19. while our overall case numbers may sound high we are seeing some very positive signs the epidemiology is stabilizing in the western zone there are still some sporadic cases but we have a handle on that the situation in the north northern zone is also stabilizing but we do continue to see low levels of community transmission i want to thank east cumberland lodge and the nova scotia health authority public health for working together to reduce the spread of the covet-19 virus in that long-term care home i know staff at the home have worked very hard to provide excellent care for residents under very challenging circumstances in hrm the cases are shifting from central halifax into suburban and semi-rural areas in and around the city most cases are in children under 12 and that is having an impact on some schools but with a rollout of vaccine for children aged 5 to 11

we can expect to see less activity in the new year and we're fortunate that most of the illness continues to be mild in children and vaccines will reduce this risk even further i know parents and guardians have many questions about the vaccine for young nova scotians who are age 5 to 11. as your chief medical officer of health i am strongly recommending that all children who are eligible get vaccinated while this virus does lead to mild in children most of the time police don't take a chance with their health or the health of others around them the rate of severe illness in children from covet is similar to similar to that of a number of other infections that we routinely vaccinate our children against one example being polio this virus spreads very easily and quickly among unvaccinated groups and having children vaccinated will really help to prevent further spread in our province and protect those who are at greater risk of severe illness it will also help us avoid school closures and the restriction of social and extracurricular activities that impact the physical social and emotional well-being of children and their families achieving good vaccination rates in the 5 to 11 year old group is the next and very important step in moving out of this pandemic and we are putting the final touches on our vaccination program for this age group we're having the vaccine from the manufacturer repackaged into smaller shipments so it can go directly to pharmacies across the province instead of us doing this from a central uh warehouse locally we are adjusting our online booking data collection and product management tools to accommodate this new age group and a new vaccine we expect vaccine to start arriving this week and once we have certainty of the delivery date and time we will open up appointments and this will be announced publicly pharmacies in the iwk health center will be our main vaccinators and they will be ready to start getting vaccine for children on december 2nd so here are some important details around childhood vaccination children children will still need two doses of vaccine and are considered fully vaccinated 14 days after their second dose the time between the two doses will be a minimum of eight weeks evidence now shows that a longer interval results in better and longer lasting protection if your child turns 12 during the eight weeks between doses the second dose will be the age-appropriate adolescent or adult dose and children aged 5-11 should not get other vaccinations and the covet 19 vaccine at the same time if possible other vaccines will need to be given 14 days before or after their covet vaccine and as their parents and caregivers if you do have to make a choice makes the covid19 vaccine a priority if your child is 12 and older they can receive their covet vaccine and any other vaccines at the same time or closer than 14 days apart i emphasize this point because we are hearing that some grade seven and eight youth are deferring their routine school vaccinations so they can get the covet vaccine this is unnecessary children and youth like adults may experience mild side effects like sore muscles feeling fatigue mild fever or sore arm where the vaccine was injected this is normal and it means the vaccine is working and teaching their body how to fight the virus the iwk has some great resources on how to talk to your children about vaccination and tips if your child is afraid of needles so i would encourage people to go to their their the idk website for that and a reminder please do not call pharmacies directly looking for appointments you can only book through our online uh tool or if you do not have access to that through our 1 800 line if you don't have access to the internet for as i said someone you can book for you can call but there will be some weight as this line has been extremely busy the same applies for people who are looking now for their appointment for the booster dose so if you're at all able to or have someone help you to do you make your appointment for a booster dose or for your child online please do that we need to preserve the 1 800 line for those who have no other ability to book their appointments and and speaking of booster doses i'm pleased to be able to say that we opened the booking a day ago and as of last night we'd already have tw we've already had 12 000 people uh book their third doses a reminder to people that are looking for their booster doses that you have to wait six months after your primary series has finished to get a booster dose so as of today if you received your second dose as of june 9th you are now as eligible for a booster dose so you can please go and book if you aren't yet eligible you can still book an appointment but the system will not allow you that appointment to be booked before your six-month mark long days and colder weather are here and that means more indoor activities for the next few months this is when covet 19 looks for opportunities to spread and as the holidays approach and you start to get back out enjoying larger events like concerts and sporting events we need everybody to be extra careful vaccination is the best way to protect ourselves but the vaccine is not 100 effective it will help you from becoming seriously ill but following public health measures is another necessary layer of protection for all of us and as much as i'd like to be on everyone's shoulder reminding you to wear your mask or wash your hands pointing out risk and helping you steer clear of them that isn't realistic and actually sounds a little bit creepy we need to take each of us need to take responsibility for our own actions and activities and as we move indoors and begin seasonal events and gatherings this becomes even more important we all know that the best ways to shut covet 19 out of our festivities whether at home or at larger gatherings but we all need to follow these measurable measures carefully and closely mass continue to be required in indoor public places and there there are just going to go through there are a few situations where people are actually allowed to take off your masks in an indoor public place if you're doing a physical activity that's difficult in a mask like a fitness class if you're actively eating your drinking and i emphasize the word actively it doesn't mean that simply having a drink in your hand or nearby during a

concert or a hockey game allows you to take off your mask if you're someone giving a performance as a singer or playing a wind instrument no mask is required if you're publicly speaking or officiating at an event if you're having formal photos like an id photo a wedding photo or a session with a photographer if for some other reason you need to confirm your identity and if you're in a courtroom jury room or secured area in a courthouse but with those aside it's really important for everybody else that we all of us strictly adhere to the requirements for masks in indoor public places and even if you're in one of those activities that allow you to take your mask off once it's done you should need to put your mask back on right away it doesn't matter if you've shown proof of full vaccination it doesn't matter if you're seated or standing how many people are present if you're keeping distance the the necessary and appropriate and proper wearing a masks is critic is an important layer especially as we move into more indoor activities and we have larger groups of people getting together and i do have to note that the proper wearing a mask is important you need to have a mask that's at least a two layer mask three layers are even better that properly seals around your nose your cheeks and your chin i still see far too many people that their masks are below their nose if your mask is not kept properly covering your nose then then you're you're fully allowing virus to spread out in the air around you so in this fourth wave having a well vaccinated population means we're preventing severe covalent illness and limiting the need for strict public health measures that doesn't mean that we can become complacent and allow widespread of the virus however so far in nova scotia with a few exceptions we are finding the right balance but the next few months are critical please continue to keep being careful and responsible keep on doing what nova scotians have done since day one of this pandemic to keep each other safe thank you very much we'll now take questions from the room before going to the phone go ahead sorry just wondering dr strang you say that the vaccines are going to be here this week but you can't really say when they're going to go in arms why can't you no i did say december 2nd is when we start going into arms what we've said is we can't give a definitive day when people can start making appointments and because we don't have a definitive uh date and time yet for delivery of vaccine once we know that for and once that's confirmed with our federal counterparts there will be public announcements and using social media and other other mechanisms to let parents and caregivers know that when they can start making their appointments but we are we know we're going to get vaccine very soon we're we can we're very confident that we will december 2nd will be the day that that we can actually start vaccinating the five to 11 year olds just for the entire five to eleven age group or will you go with like an age-based approach to that we have we have uh we've worked with our pharmacies we have lots of capacity with our pharmacies the iwk because you know a large proportion of of this age group lives in the hrm area the iwk is standing up a clinic for this age group as well dr strang some provinces such as new brunswick and pei have already received their vaccines and having their booking programs on the go i'm just wondering why the delay here or the perceived delay the without the key for the delayed deliveries we're asking at the federal level to as i said break down the the bulk shipment into smaller shipments to go directly to pharmacies over time that efficiency of shipping directly to pharmacies will stand us in good stead we're also doing uh like we did when we stood up for adult program we're investing in the infrastructure our online booking system our data collection systems uh our bio you know our biologic management how we manage the distribution and and supplies of those product all of that is online that needs to be a tweak to accommodate a new product a different age group we know that having that infrastructure over over time proved its value for nova scotia it's not how quickly we start it's how quickly once we start what how efficiently and effectively we can get vaccine available for families and children we'll have lots of ability for people to get immunized in the coming weeks in december nova scotia's courts are refusing to tell us if there are judges who are not vaccinated and they won't even say what their policies are what the policies are for courts for judges getting uh mandatory vaccine i'm wondering for both of you if both of you could comment on that if you think that's the point for you you want to go ahead first yeah i think we as it uh it's important that uh that those officials are in our court system that's part of our you know uh part of of uh of government and agencies that work along with government that uh we would expect that uh that uh judges and other people working in the court system would be vaccinated like everybody else we'll continue to work through the department of justice on this to try to understand uh any any issues or challenges they may have i would say just just on that i would say i would say that uh nova scotians uh judges play an important role in our in our society but um they're no different than every other nova scotian they should be vaccinated nova scotians often don't have a choice on whether or not they're going to be in court is it fair to nova scotians that they don't know if the judge who's sitting in the same room with them is vaccinated i i would uh no uh it's my strong opinion that judges should be vaccinated and uh we'll we'll we're gonna we're gonna dig into that and find out but if if we can if we can extend the policy to that which i hope we can then we'll make sure judges are vaccinated they should be vaccinated finally i'm wondering if dr strang can you tell me if the courts have submitted a copic plan last year employers had to uh had to submit quota plans to your office do we have one for turkey yeah forever through each wave we've had it and then in the recovery from each wave uh the courts have developed their plans that uh that have had input from public health and uh and ultimately i get i get a chance to review those have they submitted anything

regarding the vaccination judges they have i haven't had anything for them specifically about vaccinations for judges as the premier just said we are we have a position on that so that they should be vaccinated like everybody else and we're going to uh work with the department of justice and and and the judiciary to understand it more dr stein what's the children start getting vaccinated will the proof of vaccination requirement be uh extended downward in age to them so certainly not immediately that our proof of vaccination requires people to be fully vaccinated so five to 11 year olds will take a minimum of eight weeks uh from uh you know their first dose on an eight week interval than their second dose um that um given that it would be in february uh that we'd start to yet so they start to have children who are fully vaccinated at which time then we're going to continue to look at the need for proof of vaccination in general so we'll continue to look at uh but certainly we are not going to require proof of vaccination uh in these early stages because that's not fair to kids they haven't had time to get fully vaccinated and that was my follow-up question as children get vaccinated at large percentages do you foresee a time when the proof of vaccination requirement will be dropped so we're going to continue to look at the epidemiology and and and do we and and once we get to a point where large numbers of the five to 11 year olds have had time to get fully vaccinated maybe we're in a position where we don't need the the the the proof of vaccination in general so we'll continue to look at that but i think reassurance for the parents that we are not going to impose something immediately uh when when they have not had the the adequate time to uh to get the two doses pretty much um why not vaccinate kids in schools given that you've shown hesitance towards the idea so we we work through this i mean uh for a number of reasons that uh one of the key ones is we we have a well-developed and a well-proven uh efficient system of vaccination large numbers of people through the through the the roughly 250 pharmacies across uh the province it provides an opportunity for parents to be with their children uh when they get vaccinated the logistics of immunizing multiple classrooms of of of kids in a school uh we do that in our grade 7 immunization program and eve that that has some substantive challenges of disrupting a school uh doing every every grade from one from p to six in a school as a much greater challenges so we've worked with education we'll certainly use schools so our approach is going to use our proven pharmacy model part of which allows us one of the values that we have all the online booking system the data collection systems we can closely monitor our vaccine uptake at a local community level and if if there are indications that some communities may need additional supports we may use the schools we will certainly look at things like our mobile units in partnership with schools to provide additional opportunities for for children and families where that may be necessary for this give us a snapshot of what's happening in eastern nova scotia and cape breton we know roads are cut off communities are cut off what are you doing and what's the province doing to connect these communities what's the timeline on that yeah i think i think the last the information i have whether somewhere in the range of 3 000 people without without power but certainly huge huge impacts on on roads and bridges there's no question about that so we have a public works is on the ground there kind of analyzing analyzing the damage and and we'll try to determine the path to restore some of that we're particularly concerned about some of the you know there's people without access to ehs and access to medical services so we're we're deeply concerned about what's happening there and there's a there's a significant effort to to properly assess it and then come back with like how do we how do we how do we get things corrected up there but i will say that the um the federal government reached out immediately this morning and and um offered that should we need some assistance that they'll be there for us so so right now it's uh you know first priority is to make sure that uh every nova scotian has access to you know should they need should they need health care should they need you know other other support but assessing the the uh public works is actively assessing the the full extent of the damage to your roads and bridges and we'll we'll have some more information on that after that's done

towards issuing fines to other organizers involved in the amherst faith gathering are you looking still to find additional organizers in addition to just robert smith i think the the the investigation is uh still ongoing as to you know how how broadly we can reach out there um so i would say it's it's still an active file

is there any way to quantify the impact of that gathering at that baptist church at this point in terms of the spread of the virus in this province

we could certainly go back and look at actual numbers of initial cases and secondary cases we know that there was a large contribution in the in the last couple of two three weeks that drove a lot of the case numbers that we were seeing in western zone as well as some of the impact in cases in eastern zone including the east cumberland lodge including the residential care facility so we there has been a significant impact in terms of the actual case number that we i haven't set down and done the math and give you a you know total number of cases but uh you know there's no doubt it was a major driver of uh transmission in both uh western zone and northern zone in the last few weeks fortunately that is uh

coming to an end and things are much more stable now four deaths have been attributed to the spread from that gathering uh that was the last information we had is that still the case have any other have any other deaths been attributed no just before unfortunately unfortunately you shouldn't say just the four four four deaths or are four too many but uh no no more back to cape breton is there any early indications that you may have to apply for federal disaster relief for that fund that they have yeah i i we're certainly not ruling it out um but i mean if you've had a chance to see some of the pictures and hear some of the accounts there's pretty extensive damage there so um as i said we're you know we'll assess we'll assess uh what's necessary and um the the the federal government has already reached out um to say they would be there for for support so uh we won't hesitate to take them up on that should it be necessary but right now first priorities really really make sure people are safe um and and then assess how we go forward dr strang with the vaccinations my children i'm wondering how um it fits into the overall uh plan to get as many nova scotians as possible vaccinated how critical is the child component to that i think it's it's very important we have uh 65 000 nova scotians who are five to 11 years old we're seeing especially in the halifax area where where we certainly have a uh the majority of of of people in the age group are living in the hrm area the major the most of our cases happening in the hrm area are are our kids who are in that age group and it is impacting some schools so certainly by having good vaccine coverage rates uh in that age group will uh be a major uh addition to our ability to limit the spread of the virus uh and as i said it's it's not just about protecting kids from getting severely ill they can get severely ill from covid uh but it's about also their ability to spread to others who have greater risk for severe illness and i think when people think about children's health we need to acknowledge that that uh many of the necessary things we put we've had to put in place to limit the spread of covid whether it's closing schools restricting anti-activities have had substantive physical social emotional impacts on children's health so the way we get out of this is uh having those kids vaccinated so i think we need to think in in broad or beyond just about the risk of the virus and any possible risk of the vaccine and acknowledge that that the having our kids immunized is a is a substantive benefit to their health uh and to others by by playing a major role in as i said the next step in in really achieving the highest possible vaccination coverage rates which is the way out of this pandemic we're going to jump over to the phones now we'll start with daryl cole with amherst news go ahead darryl

hi there my question for dr strang um since september there have been dozens of covet cases at an amherst area school parents report receiving close contact notices nearly every day and some students have been in class for up to a month they're asking why there hasn't been a decision to close that school for a circuit breaker yeah so i i've had a number of uh reach outs correspondents uh this week from parents i i had a discussion yesterday with uh the medical officer of health who's uh leading uh the you know the work by public health uh on schools and about this school specifically there have been a number of cases over the last few weeks right now there's only four active cases in that school there has been really no indication of spread within the school and almost all the cases uh have occurred from exposure outside of the school so the work talking to uh the medical officer and and public health and their work with with the school with the with that school and the principal that they're that we feel that's that school remains safe there hasn't been a need to close that school down what they're seeing is a reflection of some of the community transmission in that part of the province which is starting to uh to tail off i certainly recognize that the the imposition and and uh the the um disruption that it occurs to children and families have who those who are identified as close contacts and having to be home for a week uh but there hasn't been any indication of a need to close the school in general and have everybody home i have to come back to make the point that the way out of this situation with school in this school and other schools is to continue in the short term continue the work that we're doing but it's vaccinating kids so if you're concerned about your own child and the impact on your child in in schools make sure your child get vaccinated do what you can do to support other children getting vaccinated that is what's going to allow our schools uh to have the the fewest possible disruptions uh in the coming weeks daryl do you have a follow-up yes please i know there are five schools in amherst three elementary schools and junior high no high school but when you talk about community spread it just seems that there's only one school that the cases are coming from i guess my question is what does it take for the province for public health to decide to close the school so we have certain criteria and really it's evidence of of of uh transmission within the school or if we have a case uh where we've had uh an exposure that of any of that involves multiple classes and and and then a significant disruption to the school we have not yet met those criteria in the school in question next we'll go to pat healy with laker news go ahead pat hi this question is for senior houston dr strang it's been reported that dalhousie university is not enforcing their proof of vaccination or proof of negative tests for students and teachers to be on campus something they announced they would be doing to ensure campus safety back in august what are your thoughts on this so i'll as the first i've heard of that so i'm going to take that and through my uh colleagues in the department of uh advanced education uh we'll raise that and then try to understand that more from from dalhousie uh the or the housing universities administration and their perspective pat you have a follow-up question yes i do uh dr strang what is the process for

essential workers in healthcare to present their proof of vaccination to their employer and is it being done effectively are you aware of anyone that have been using fake proof of vaccinations so first of all i'm not aware of anybody uh using uh fake vaccination in in this uh you know i've heard some reports of that but i've got nothing's come to me as definitive proof um each employer has their own specific process about how they would get that proof of vaccination uh i think that's been working well clearly as you the numbers that the the premier presented uh show that we in in healthcare and education other other other sectors where we were have this uh vaccination policy that the large majority of people have presented their vaccine uh information and and a very very high percentage of those uh are vaccinated and we as the premier said we're going to though they're going to continue to work uh and we will uh over the next week or so and we'll present some final data uh on that but all the data we have so far would say that this has been a very effective program and we're getting a good update good reporting of information that shows very high levels of vaccine coverage we'll go to chelsea gould next with churro news go ahead chelsea hello thank you uh dr stern can you tell us how many doses of the kids vaccine are expected to arrive in the next week well we i i don't have the breakdown we're going to get multiple shipments uh of vaccine we have you know the the five to 11 year old population is about 65 000 so we're going to need uh that amount of vaccine times two uh there's no issues at all around vaccine supply we have lots of vaccine in canada uh and we have every confidence that we'll get the necessary vaccine uh that's that over i said it's it's some staggered shipments uh over the next few weeks as we roll it out uh directly to pharmacies and our other clinics chelsea do you have a follow-up question yeah thank you i'm i'm also wondering about the vaccine supply for adult vaccines in the province do you know how many doses there are and if there seems to be enough uptake for these before any expiration dates again i don't have specific numbers of doses uh canada has an excess of vaccine we've heard that from the federal government vaccine supply is not an issue in nova scotia or in any other province or territory we have lots of vaccine uh so that is uh and so we have lots of ability to make sure vaccine is available for for whether it's for people starting their primary series we still we still have a few nova scotians and encourage those who aren't yet vaccinated to do that people getting their either their their uh their third dose uh and now now for the five to eleven-year-olds supply is not an issue and finally we'll go to freelancer linda pinozzo go ahead linda hi thank you um this is a question for both of you uh during the third wave and now the fourth wave there have been health canada authorized monoclonal antibody treatments um that were meant to be provided early for people who come down with covid and are at high risk of serious progression and hospitalization and during the third wave the province had 150 doses of bam lavinimad which was effective against the alpha uk variant which was the one circulating here at the time mainly but only one dose was used and health canada's recently sent nova scotia new monoclonals that are effective against the delta variant saskatchewan and alberta have made the treatments available to those at high risk in alberta it's being administered by paramedics in people's homes and there's also a pilot project in hamilton my question is why aren't these treatments being offered routinely to nova scotians to help them keep stay out of the hospital and potentially save lives so we have a team uh nova scotia health uh our our cove with therapeutics team uh experts in infectious disease has been led by dr lisa baird they're looking at all the evidence around various treatments for for covid uh uh we'd not have to defer to them uh of of they're making the evidence-based decisions around uh what treatment uh modalities we have uh available here in in the province for people who require um uh you know uh and hospitalize and require uh you know various medications for treating covid linda do you have a follow-up question yeah i do um the state of emergency which has now been going on for 20 months was first declared to help contain the spread of the virus and the proof of vaccine policy was also described as being time limited to help us get through the fourth wave and you did just touch on this dr strang but i just wanted you to expand a little bit what do you need to see happen and what are the metrics that you're actually using to decide when to lift each of these measures so i think as i've answered before we look at a number of of uh things it's uh it's not just case number it's what is the pattern of uh the time trend uh you know the seven day average of case numbers where is that trending um the the percentage of cases that that we don't have any indication of where they might have been exposed uh we look at our level of hospitalization both medical and icu beds that are people with covid um we look you know looking at our vaccination rates but a lot a lot of it is also it's not just numbers it's i i'm in regular mostly daily communication with the medical officers of health who are there supporting the public health investigations and for them i get a we all look at what is the context in which the transmission is happening uh is very important uh beyond just the numbers so we will continue to look at that uh one of the most important things or there's two key factors we still need to uh have the five to 11 year olds immunized as we just talked about in detail that's the next key step uh we have to understand that there's a lot of virus activity it's well controlled in nova scotia but there's lots of virus around in other parts of the country other parts of the world uh we're moving into the winter months lots more indoor activity so i think we have to take all that into consideration and the reality is that to get us through the next few the winter months safely we're going to have to stick with the program if you will of the measures we have in place are working proof of vaccination indoor masking are critical we talked today a lot about the personal responsibility for

all nova scotians doing what they need to do and their personal measures that's we need to continue that to get us safely through the winter months and then we'll really start to look at where we're at coming out of the fourth wave we'd hoped that would be sooner but the fourth wave in all reality is here through the the winter months and we'll have to continue to do what we're doing for a few more months we can come back to the room for a question or two we'll start with john yeah dr strang how long do you think it'll take to vaccinate although 65 000 kids or obviously not all of them are going to get vaccinated but the vast majority i would assume yeah with our capacity uh with our capacity in uh in our pharmacies we looked at the numbers we there we should be able to get uh get through the first dose uh if people come everybody comes forward get a high vaccine coverage rates uh before we get chris to get to christmas we know that the you know people will be less likely to come out and get vaccinated over christmas but we have lots of capacity through our pharmacies through the iwkw uh and and in secondary measures we if we need to bring them in that there's there will be opportunity to get anybody who's five to eleven-year-old to get vaccinated in the coming weeks before christmas how far are we away from vaccinating people who are newborns to four years old so so that that data is still being uh uh uh i guess accumulated through some clinical trials uh uh you know we're probably we're and there's no timeline on that we i was on a national call yesterday and that question about under five-year-olds when they might get vaccinated uh there's no timeline at all yet from health canada on that because you know data hasn't been submitted the clinical trials are still ongoing just to follow up the before christmas reference means like how many do you want through before christmas you have the ability our target is 80 so we have the ability if uh to uh the eighty if we're of eighty percent of that sixty five thousand uh we certainly have capacity in as i said our pharmacies the iwkw clinic uh to uh to get that that 80 to vaccinate and if it's higher than 80 uh we'll make sure we have the capacity there as well we have that's why we've chosen to go with the pharmacy model it has shown that it has that it works it's efficient and effective and we look at the number of pharmacies and the number of doses that they can deliver within their schedule we have lots of capacity for for the five to eleven year olds uh prior you know prior to christmas dr strange just a couple of technical questions when when people make appointments for children will they automatically be booked for the eight weeks out as was done with adults um for their second channel i have an answer i'm assuming that i'm assuming that's part that we're doing that uh but we can confirm that okay i also have readers asking me when the age limit will be dropped for the third doses from below 70. the nasa but that will be based on nasa recommendations right now nasty is recommending 70 and above that there is still no scientific evidence that would say we need to be providing boosters for the general public for people below that 870. despite many jurisdictions u.s and others doing that there's no evidence that would say that's necessary this time we'll our our approach has always been to follow the uh recommendations the science-based recommendations from nasty from the technology i was wondering if i could ask you why you got rid of the chief of protocol position yes since we since we were sworn in we've kind of made a few changes in different departments and that was just part of a changing just a little reorganic governments we want to make sure that everything is effective and efficient and we saw a need to make a change there so we did person in that position uh your party criticized a patronage appointment years ago um was that part of the reason for getting rid of the job no the person's been in that job for a while is that that's that wasn't uh you know it's not a reflection on the on the person or their abilities or certainly a political background it's just just a structure of the government that's all time for questions today uh go ahead premiere um thank you thank you so much everyone this uh further for the questions and dr strang has reminded us of the importance of personal responsibility i would say that was kind of a stern reminder delivered in dr strang's kind way but time and time again nova scotians have stepped up during the pandemic to do what's right to keep themselves and others safe and we need to keep doing that wearing masks getting vaccinated and the other public health measures are what has allowed nova scotia to return to where we're at which is you know pretty near normal compared certainly to other areas so but the reality is um and this is where the personal responsibility comes in is covet is still here and that means we need to keep we need to keep stepping up especially as we enter the the holiday season and spend more time in indoors around family and friends so uh please just continue to do what you've done what makes us bluenosers do do what you need to do to protect yourself and those around you so thank you so much

you

good afternoon and welcome to today's covet 19 update i'm heather fairbairn and i'll be your moderator today before we begin allow me to introduce the honorable tim houston premier of nova scotia and dr robert strang chief medical officer of health for nova scotia thank you good afternoon everyone um before we begin i'd like to send my sincere condolences to three families who are grieving the loss of a loved one who passed away because of covet 19 just since our last briefing in total 110 nova scotians have lost their lives to covet 19. and nothing i can say will ease the pain of those families and communities but but please do know that our hearts are with you during these difficult times it was two years ago this week that the first cases of covet 19 were being seen in china and today here we are hearing about a new variance of concern so we need to see what the science tells us about this variant but no matter what we know that vaccination is the best way to protect yourself and your family vaccinations began began this time last year with health care workers and now 84.9 percent of nova scotians have at least one dose and um somewhere in the range of 81 i think was 0.19 0.7 something like that 81.7 are now fully vaccinated so and thankfully some of those will start to include the children uh five to eleven years old so thank you to all of those who have made uh the right choice and have gotten vaccinated and i also send my thanks to those who are employed under vaccine mandates who stepped up got vaccinated and put the the people that they are working to support first so thank you for that our frontline providers showed their leadership and care with a 99 vaccination rate for those who have responded the civil service stepped up to and got vaccinated with also 99 of those who are responding uh having at least one dose so thank you to to each and every one of those people the mandates uh were were successful and we haven't seen any widespread impact on our systems since the november 30th deadline it's also been wonderful to see parents and guardians booking appointments and they've been booking them at a very rapid pace and dr strang will talk further about that so as a result of that we will see our overall vaccination rate rising in the coming days as the as the 5 to 11 vaccination rate ramps up i know that some are concerned about vaccinations of of younger children and that's on that's understandable that's the job of parents and guardians is too is to is to be concerned about the things that impact their children but the benefits of vaccination far away any any concerns of the vaccine is is safe and it's effective and our children have had a hard time during the pandemic they've lost time away from school they've lost time away from extracurricular activities they've missed out on playing with friends and and so many any other so many other activities we all know the impacts on on all of our families but children in particular um so we we need to get the vaccination rates up so we can continue to see the return to normalcy we we have yet at this time another school close this week um closed to prevent the spread of the virus so please if you're if you're if your child is old enough to get vaccinated please make that appointment many of the cases we are seeing now are in unvaccinated children so we can put a stop to that we just have to increase the vaccination rates so to help we are adding we're adding two days to the holiday break for students as well school will now resume for students on january 6th and i'll hand it over to dr strang now to talk about the epidemiology and really provide a meaningful update on the on the vaccination program so dr strang thank you premier uh good afternoon everybody and i too want to offer my condolences to the families mourning the loss of loved ones who've recently died of covet 19. we continue to see new cases of covert 19 in nova scotia during this fourth wave there is ongoing transmission in the halifax area into east hamps and truro and most of the cases are in children age 5 to 11. thankfully we've not seen severe illness in this age group the outbreak in a defined community in northern zone mentioned last week is winding down and that there has been no sign of spread into the general community unfortunately a cluster of cases associated with saint francis xavier university was reported last night and we expect additional cases in the coming days public health is working closely with the university to understand and manage this evolving situation however overall nova scotia continues to do well in managing this fourth wave there's been a lot of talk about the omicron variant and i know many of many nova scotians are concerned we are waiting for more real world evidence on how it behaves and what impact it may have but we already know that the way we protect ourselves hasn't fundamentally changed follow public health measures and get vaccinated whether it's your first second or third dose or a booster shot and the same goes as we head into the holiday season covent 19 loves gatherings especially when people aren't vaccinated but fully vaccinated people can also carry and transmit the virus even even if they may not get sick themselves so we all need to be cautious over the holidays regardless of our vaccination status to protect our loved ones and our communities there aren't any special or new precautions to take we just need to keep doing the things that have been protecting us all along over the past two years get your vaccine if you're feeling unwell stay home and don't have visitors and go online and book a test and isolate until you get that negative test result we are asking people to avoid out of province travel if possible especially if they're not fully vaccinated if you need to visit loved ones who don't live in the province please be careful and follow very strict public health measures where you're visiting if you have people coming to visit please make sure they follow the nova scotian rules about entering the province and encourage them to be vaccinated before they travel if you're having get-togethers at your home there is no physical distance or mass requirements but you have a limit of 25 people indoors or

50 people outdoors that's really important when we we gather more in our homes no more than 25 people uh for informal uh you know home home gatherings and be careful about the number of social events you attend and the number of close contacts you have with people outside your immediate family and workplace we can do a lot more uh this christmas and this holiday season than we were able to do last year when we were tightly locked down but we still i can't say that strongly enough we still have to be careful especially about the the type and the number of social events that we are engaged in if you're having a workplace party a social gathering in a rental space or just about any other kind of special event there are no gathering limits or physical distancing requirement but proof of vaccination is required and masks must be worn indoors in public places when you're not actively eating or drinking whether you're seated or standing and then outdoor events proof of vaccination is required uh unless you unless it's impossible to set up an entry point and we do recommend wearing masks if you're in close contact with people outside your close family or social circle even though they're not required mandatory under the under the public health order but event organizers certainly can choose to make mass mandatory on their own and a quick reminder the easiest way for businesses or organizations to check proof of vaccination is getting the app from vax check ns it gives a quick confirmation for people who are fully vaccinated and have a nova scotian or canadian qr code it's free and available from the app store or google play and we strongly want to encourage businesses and even families to get that app as a way it helps avoid fraudulent proof of vaccination if you're actually reading the qr code

and while we while we've stopped recommend recommending general asymptomatic testing a while ago we recognize it's another way to keep gathering safe over the holidays so we'll be doing an extra push to make more rapid tests available across the province this month we're just working on some final details but there'll be more information coming in in the days ahead in the meantime you can get rapid tests from pop-up sites and mobile units in communities where cases are higher and the those locations and details are on the nova scotia health authority website incoming travelers can get tests at the airport and we are starting to distribute more test kits to public school children under 12 this week people remember we did an initial round of sending test kits home for elementary kids and we're doing a second distribution this week of test kits and we've also made take-home kits available for children from three to eleven in private schools licensed and unlicensed daycares families with children at home and homeschooling families so we've expanded the availability of these rapid test kits for kids outside of the public school system as well and now for an update on our vaccine program as of today 81.7 of nova scotians are fully vaccinated and as we continue rolling vaccines rolling out vaccines to children and booster doses we expect we know that our rate will continue to go up last week i had the pleasure of joining eight-year-old jack woodhead for his first or the appointment for his first dose of covid vaccine and i want to thank jack and his family for allowing me to join them for another um milestone uh and in our vaccine rollout i have to say it was quite exciting to be there to see the first child five to eleven immunized in nova scotia that is a huge step forward now in our in our efforts to control this pandemic and so far almost 29 000 of 65 000 5 to 11 year olds and that's almost 45 percent have had a first dose or an appointment scheduled so that's quite something we've just begun immunizing a week ago i certainly recommend covid vaccination for this age group so if you haven't booked an appointment for your child please book it now and if your child is nervous about getting a vaccination that's not uncommon is actually quite normal the iwkw has a lot of resources online to help with this of the almost 46 000 people aged 70 and older who are currently eligible to get a booster dose just over half have either booked an appointment or received their booster that's good that means there's another half though who haven't yet some of them may not be you know may not be through that uh that uh six month wait uh period but many of them are so uh we are encouraging um anyone who's 70 and above to schedule their booster dose as soon as possible this booster dose will improve your protection and help you enjoy a safer holiday season so please book an appointment now if you're eligible last friday the national advisory committee and immunization re made additional recommendations for boosters and other aspects of vaccination first let's talk about boosters nstc recommends now recommends that everyone 50 and older and all front frontline healthcare workers should get a booster six months after their second dose nstc also supports booster doses in people age 18 to 49 years nova scotia is accepting all of nstc's recommendations and planning is underway to roll them out but i do want to be clear that our priority continues to be getting everybody vaccinated with their primary series and for most people that means two doses we're also prioritizing boosters for people 70 and older residents of long-term care facilities and health care workers and designated caregivers who got their first two doses less than 28 days apart these are the people who are at greatest risk of having waning immunity and the need for a booster and as we plan we also need to factor in vaccine supply system capacity the number of people eligible in any given group and making the necessary updates to our online booking system once plans are complete we'll announce the specific dates that the booster doses can be booked for nova scotians between ages 50 to through 69 and for those under 50 we will revisit boosters in the new year evidence shows that people in in this age group still have very good

protection against severe illness plus most people in these age groups are still much less than or have a ways to go until they reach that six months from their second dose and i also want to clarify that booster doses for nova scotians who are immunocompromised for those who meet the nasty definition of moderate to severe immune compromised we have already made uh made it i made you eligible to get the third dose in your primary series and now you will be eligible to get a booster dose in 2022 and just to be clear that that booster dose must be at least 168 days after receiving your third dose so that means the the people who meet that criteria for us moderate to severe immune compromised we're asking them if they haven't already to get their third dose now and it'll be likely may into june when they're eligible to get their booster dose but excuse me but we want to let them know now that we are adopting that nasty recommendation and the more we learn about coven 19 vaccines the clearer it is that mrna vaccines pfizer and moderna offer the best protection against the virus and are now the covid vaccine of choice that being said we know that some people have decided that they want a viral vector vaccine or no vaccine at all so some viral vector vaccines will be made available this month for people who won't get vaccinated any other way late next week anyone 18 years of or older who will be will be able to book an appointment online for the one dose jansen or johnson johnson vaccine there are limited doses and they will only be available at select clinics and later this month we do expect a shipment of astrazeneca and more information around its availability be will be released when we have certainty on that but i do want to emphasize that the strong recommendation from public health is to get an mrna vaccine there's also guidance from nasa on which vaccine is best for people age 12 to 29. the nasty now recommends pfizer and not moderna because the rare risk of myocarditis and pericarditis associated with mrna vaccines appears more common after moderna than the pfizer vaccine so if you're in this age category 12 to 29 and you have an appointment to get moderna we strongly encourage you to reschedule to get pfizer as we've rolled out this enormous vaccination program there have been many many people doing tremendous work to make it all happen and yet unfortunately i continue to hear stories of immunizers vaccine and symptom checkers clinicians and public health staff being verbally abused by people who are frustrated with aspects of our pandemic response the latest is pharmacists who are providing vaccine and provider provider clinical providers who are assessing people for medical exemptions i want everybody to remember that these dedicated professionals are carrying out a program that government and public health put in place they deserve our thanks not your anger this pandemic keeps dragging on and we are all tired and frustrated we've gotten this far by following public health rules and by being kind to one another supporting one another and caring for one another we can't stop now the pandemic will end and we will be here together when it does

media in the room and on the phone beginning in the room go ahead dr stern regarding the mandatory vaccine mandate when are we going to find out about the remaining 2000 or so people who have not reported yet their status what's the progress like on making those final numbers available well what i know is that many of them are off work there's always a segment a small percentage of people are off work for a number of reasons and they haven't worked in so i think the various employers are working through to clarify that but what we do know is that the vast the people who are at work uh the vast majority have reported and as we saw from the premier almost all of them are saying that they have had at least one dose of vaccine what more can you tell us about the cluster at saint fx do you have evidence that it's related to breakthrough cases there is no mandate at that school how concerned are you today's the first day of the investigation so i know that the you know the public health team was having that uh meetings today they have a meeting at two o'clock with the saint of x administration so we'll learn more as this investigation uh unfolds but i certainly do expect that we're going to see more cases in in the days ahead from this dr strange is it in any way related to the ring ceremony that was there what last week i think there's the written ceremony and then there's there's both sanctioned and informal social events uh anybody knows what happens around that there's lots of informal social gatherings among students etc so part of what we're looking at but what we do have already confirmed is that the formal events uh we're closely following the public health protocols are requiring proof of vaccination masking where necessary uh but you know we'll we'll un as we start to follow up the cases and see find out what their activities were we'll get more information on on what happened uh but we're clearly looking to make you know if there are indications of non-compliance with public health measures whether it's proof of vaccination or or large you know parties more than 25 people we'll we are going to be working with our enforcement colleagues to bring that to their attention and have appropriate enforcement actions as well we've been looking at in that cluster sorry what kind of numbers could we be looking at and i'm not going to speculate we've got we're at the very beginning and uh you know so we'll but i certainly can we will anticipating uh to have uh uh you know starting tomorrow we'll see an increase in case numbers coming from this outbreak so how many do you have now from that in that cluster my i might i have i have to go back to the office after this and get an update from uh public health as i said they were just pulling together the outbreak team and having their first meetings today and then meeting with the admin university administration this afternoon

i think it's important our understanding is that the sanctions events on campus were you know closely following the the rules in place uh obviously around around a weekend like that there's all kinds of off-campus things so um public health is actively investigating any of those situations and and i guess the message would be particularly to those establishments that may have hosted an event um if if you if you weren't following the rules the public health's gonna we're gonna we're gonna find you and we're gonna find you um and what what my message to people that that were in anagan ish on the weekend would be that um if you hosted an event where you weren't checking for vaccinations or you weren't following the rules um it's time to stick your hand up and reach out to public health and work work closely obviously there was a lot of people in antigonish for a very very exciting weekend so we want to make sure that we have all the information we need if if there's issues we're able to contain it but it's probably just as good as time as any to remind all of our operators and establishments i i i am hearing kind of third hand and otherwise of people like places that are getting a little lacks on on checking vaccines this is not the time to get lacks um we have to be checking vaccines there's no no there's no room for for easing up on that and we're also probably going to talk a little bit more about um i don't see a lot of establishments using the qr reader it's very effective it's very easy we need more more people using that qr reader it's very accurate it's it's um it's it's it's easy and it's accurate and this is the time to to start making sure we want to see more of that in place and dr strang i think alluded to it as well but that's that's an app that can be downloaded i have it on my phone so if you're hosting um even something at your house so heading into the the holidays and you could you could have that app on your phone and you could you could check your your your your 25 or less guests that are coming to see you if you want to make sure that you're you're around people that are vaccinated vaccination is the best way to protect yourself and your family so just so i want to make that point on on the same effects that uh anyone who hosted any kind of event there um who has some concerns they it's time to it's time to reach out to public health and talk about that dr sterling i hear an awful lot of anecdotal stories about fossil fueling vaccine proof of vaccine i'm wondering if your office has been tracking any of that i have one more credible story about a uh someone selling exemption certificates and i'm just wondering are you tracking that are you aware of it we're not tracking anecdote i'm aware of the antidote i can personally tell you uh that people i that i know that my wife and i were out to dinner with they were offered for fifty dollars uh proof of vaccination as they were going back to their car that's one of the reasons we're pushing the qr they're using the the qr reader because it's it the you the qr code uh makes it less you know makes it harder to uh to pro to uh provide fraudulent proof of vaccination but it only works if actually people are actually using the reader so the premier alluded to it we'll be having conversations that so my colleagues in government were looking at working with various sectors around promoting and supporting use of the actual reader because the reader greatly cuts down on the possibility of having uh having um a false proof of vaccination we're also looking at how we can have in the uh um putting more responsibility on individuals and penalties on individuals if they were found to be using a fraudulent uh proof of vaccination directly in the public health order can i can i follow up on that then so are there penalties now for people either selling fake vacs uh proof of vaccination or people who are using fake proof of acts there what we're doing is going to make that very explicitly clear in the order and there are penalties associated with that so there's no question about it at all right now that's a bit of a brazen zone so we're going to make it absolutely clear we're we're were the premier and i were we're discussing that before we came down and i'm going to go after this i'm going to talk to uh my legal supports and how we make those changes in the order on the qr uh code reader i've only been to one establishment in halifax that actually uses it i was in quebec city last month and every place i went was using it is there a reason why why there's not uptake in nova scotia compared to other places so like we've been that we have that conversation this week my own personal experience is the same so that's why i raised it with colleagues in economic development and they're going to be working with very you know the restaurant sector others uh and we're going to both promote and support that we we have we have to be especially places that people are gathering for social events like restaurants other things uh some are using it but many aren't so we're going to make it uh support them and and it's it's important that we actually use the reader because that is how we avoid these fraudulent proof of vaccinations and i have a technical question um you may not it's it's mentioned in the release but the vaccination numbers today are all out of whack with what they were yesterday there's obviously a bunch of stuff going on can you just explain that there there's i think there's a 49 case difference so that there was just some auditing right and cleaning up some of the numbers but so there's over 7 000 newly newly reported in one day is that reflecting that well i was i was informed that there was a difference of 49 and that because of cleanup so you'll have to go back with those um with with those very detailed questions then we can get an explanation for you on the booster sorry are you talking about the number of people fully vaccinated no uh the the big increase was apparently the number of first doses so as human children got back well that would have been simply because of the number of kids that all of a sudden we're going to see a bump in our first doses because they you know until they're eligible for their second note so that would explain that one on the

booster shot it's my understanding that it's 50 enough that you've decided that's the coup you're going to tackle for now and then you'll decide later about the rest or well what we're saying is we're going to adopt the nasa recommendations and we're going to be going down in incremental age groups you'll hear in the next few days about when the time frame for people first 60 to 69 and then 50 to 59 will be able to start making an appointment what we're saying if you're if you're 49 or younger then we'll be doing that later on in the new year for for two reasons most of those people are not even you know close to being eligible yet uh for their six-month period uh and also we do know and then people in that younger age group there's you know there's really solid evidence that they are at much lower risk of waning immunity than the older age group so we have to make older groups a priority as well as uh you know we you know it's the most important to me that we get the 70 plus because they're at they're at a greater risk than the 60 to 69 or the 50 to 59 so like we did in the spring age is an important factor and we have to give those who based on age are at higher risk the first opportunity to get get their booster doses as well as the immune compromised we still have to make sure that to me it's most important that the five to 11 year olds have lots of opportunity to get vaccinated the some of the exceptions that you talked about earlier in the booster will most people be getting pfizer for the third shot is that is that the intent we're gonna have pfizer and moderna and so if you're 29 or below where the strong recommendation is that you get a pfizer if you're 30 and above the the the the recommendation would be that if possible you you continue with the same mrna vaccine that you had previously so like myself i got pfizer pfizer then ideally i'd get a third my booster as a pfizer because that's the best but all but i would also say we say if that if if it's going to delay getting a booster to you to get you know to match then go go with your first appointment a lot of people in this province got two different mr

regarding the decision to offer viral vector vaccinations i'm wondering what your sense is for the demand for this type of vaccine and if you have any concerns about the efficacy well true i think the demand is low we've given our people who've already had a single dose and then fully vaccinated we have had uh that we you know we've had 250 doses of johnson and johnson vaccine which we've had for the last two or three weeks and we have been providing that for people whose employment is in some of them you know in the situations like health care workers teachers where they where they were mandated to be vaccinated so if they were saying i'm not going to get vaccinated we'll you know and refuse an mrna vaccine well it's better that they get a johnson and johnson and and we know that provides good protection not as good as mrna but it allows them to be back in the workforce we've gone through that and now we have a little bit i don't know the exact number we have a small amount of johnson and johnson left and so we're going to open that up to the very small number of nova scotians who are saying for whatever reason they will are refusing an mrna vaccine again it's better that they get some protection from a jnj or an astrozenica vaccine than no protection at all and remaining unvaccinated and so we've got a little bit of johnson and johnson and we're not we're going to get some astrazeneca and so the details on how people access that will be made through you know as we get to the vaccine and through uh press releases and when you sorry just how many um we're left over for 250 could you give someone a number i don't know exactly right it's a small number but again i'm going to make the take the opportunity to say it's in my mind it's not a great choice to be saying refusing mrna for viral vector vaccine we know now that an mrna vaccine is a preferred choice so i would strongly encourage people who are to think twice and to take advantage of the best vaccine they have available for them and get an mrna vaccine can you speak to the astrazeneca i just don't understand we're just there the federal government is in the process of procuring an additional amount of astrazeneca vaccine and then making that available to provinces and territories

who are saying i will i'd rather go un immunized than to get an mrna vaccine you know and so we're going to make it very clear to those people that the the that the the implications of the choice they're making but again at the end of the day i'd much rather they got some vaccine than none at all many of us like myself we've got an estrogenic and advisor you would recommend the pfizer as the the absolutely you should get a pfizer or a modern as your as your uh as your uh booster dose drain can you help me understand the process between somebody saying no i will not have this vaccine type i want viral vector and then getting that different type of vaccine is it made available in a different portal how does that work we're just we're on it we don't have a small amount of vaccine and so we're going to have a few clinics a few pharmacy clinics that people can go to the first 250 or less who were from this mandate how did that happen well there were people who were through their employer said i'm not i will not get an mrna vaccine and i'll use i use the example before and i'm not picking on each other teacher so again we're better to have them with a vaccine that provides good protection but not quite as good but you know a decent level of protection than no vaccine at all and by getting that then they can go back into the workforce so we did that i don't have numbers about how many but uh you know we made that available because our priority was people who were mandated to get vaccinated that clearly was our first priority now we've done that now we're gonna with the remaining vaccine we'll make available to the general public but you know

the numbers of all the requests we've gotten in that i'm aware of in the department they're very small small dozens i i don't have you know that there's you know probably in a double digits somewhere has there been an uptick in vaccine bookings in the cumberland county area following the outbreak there that led to several deaths um i don't have i don't follow vaccine bookings but kind of local geography we continue what i do know is that where we have communities where there's like that community and in northern nova scotia we have for the last number of weeks supported but increased opportunity both for testing and vaccination with our mobile vans increasing uh you know other other opportunities for those so we will continue to do that where parts of the province need extra support we'll make sure that that both testing and vaccine have increased availability somebody explained the extra two day vacation uh tagged on to uh i guess christmas break for kids in school what's the thinking behind that and what about families who kind of made plans but then we'll have to find care for those two extra days i i i was not involved in any detail in those conversations so yeah i think it's it's something that the department of education had kind of kind of come forward with um and i guess we know that um anytime there's a disruption to the school schedule there's a disruption to a lot of family circumstances for sure and we always apologize for that but uh the department just an on balance looked at what's happening around and said if we a couple more days is not going to hurt the academic calendar if we can kind of get through get through the holidays um and kind of reset starting in the new year that's that's better for for for students and teachers so they didn't loop in doctors i was involved i shouldn't say i was involved very early on to say what about this idea and i said from a public health perspective it does you know to give a couple more days after the holiday in terms of all their other operational details and where they i was just in i'm not trying to ditch my my responsibility the concept i wasn't involved when they actually landed okay two more days but the concept of delaying opening of schools for a few days that allows us to see the impact potentially of increased exposures over holidays i was involved and said yeah that from a public health perspective that makes sense where they ultimately landed and all the other reasons for that that was you know within the department of education just to clarify in terms of your recommendations for nova scotians not leaving the province are you saying no one should leave the province if they have their brothers or just those who are have not been fully vaccinated well i would say you know certainly if you're unvaccinated but even if you're fully vaccinated right we're certainly far more open than uh jean than we were last christmas but we're still in a pandemic the basic for me it's it's about we need to slow down our lives and not and be careful about how active we are there's more virus around in new brunswick ontario quebec than there is in nova scotia so now is a time that to enjoy the increased freedoms if you will and opportunities we have in nova scotia while we're still in a pandemic but also let's not go crazy now is not the time to be just thinking i'm going to travel all over the country or all over the world be careful and cautious is still our watchword and to me part of that is even within the province how much travel and how many social events and how many people are you going to expose yourself to let's be careful and cautious while we enjoy a much less restricted holiday season than we had last year we'll now move to the phones starting with john mcginnis with ctv

um hi uh this is my exposure for the premier uh mr premier is the promise going to set up a covered economic recovery plan and if so when yeah we have a we have a very detailed economic recovery plan and and we shared it with nova scotians for for a month over the course of the summer uh during a general campaign and that is uh the the path to an improved economic future in this province runs through improved access to healthcare it runs through making sure people have access to shelter and adequate housing that's affordable and it runs through increasing the population so you know these are these are these are the things that are important for an economic recovery and i think all nova scotians have had their say on that john do you have a follow-up question uh no listen moving on to preston mulligan with cbc yeah hi thanks so this question for either the premier doctor strang a few weeks ago we talked about the religious gathering in um in amherst and the premier was frustrated with the speed at which it was taking charges to be laid but police up there still say that they're working with public health so what role is public health playing in this investigation and you know if you think charges are warranted why haven't why hasn't that happened yet so i know that uh i've been involved in emails those are public health nova scotia health authority public health have have handed over all the records that have been requested uh uh from from them by amherst police department so all that information sits with the amherst police department i haven't you know i'm i've been involved with any discussion with with with that police department directly i can only assume that they're now looking through all that information and doing what police normally do do they have enough information and evidence that charges are warranted preston do you have a follow-up no i'm good thank you moving on to adrian blah with radio canada good afternoon dr strength in the case the situation gets worse what tool in the toolbox would you use first would it be restricting a travel or maybe a partial lockdown well some of it depends on what what's driving the making things worse what's driving the the the increase in cases so if it's more travel related we'd look at how we maybe need to put more restrictions at the border if it's because of uh you know larger gatherings then we may need to go back to where we were uh you know with with gathering limits uh we hope

not to do that uh but again it will depend your question the answer to your question depends exactly what are the circumstances that are behind any increase in epidemiology adrian do you have a follow-up no thank you moving on to pat healy with the laker news go ahead pat thank you this question is for dr strang can you elaborate on the transmission you mentioned earlier in these hands at the start of the briefing where and what's concerning about it we're not seeing any exposure sites or school exposures so just trying to get a little idea of where you're seeing the transmission in these hands well we're seeing some improvement there in the last couple of weeks there have been a number of schools in that east hance corridor and many of the cases were five to eleven year olds and then now seems they've moved out we're seeing more activity now in the in the tour area but i was speaking in general in the last few weeks this trend of what we're seeing moving from from really from the peninsula and and slightly off the producer halifax into more the suburban area through east hands into truro that pattern that maintains itself the virus moves from community community impacting schools impacting mostly the 5 to 11 year olds do you have a follow-up pat yes i do premier houston or dr strang why is the jansen covet 19 vaccine not being made available to all nova scotians where nova scotia health care workers already are it's available to them well as i announced earlier pat we are we've gone through those people who are under the mandated vaccine and we're with the remaining j j vaccine we are going to make available uh in the more details that come in the days ahead uh for the small number of nova scotians who are making that uh their choice of for that viral vector vaccine

moving on we'll go to chelsea gould churro news

hello thank you dr strang in new brunswick their health ministers told people to hold off and making holiday plans and of course you've just made recommendations just now for people to just slow down could you ever see yourself getting to the point of saying don't make plans at all i hope not but we will respond if necessary if things uh um don't go well epidemiologically i think our slow cautious approach uh over the last few months has kept us in a place that's different from where new brunswick is is at they're requiring stronger measures to get things back under control hopefully all nova scotians hear the message today to be to be slow and cautious enjoy the holidays enjoy what we can do but still be cautious about it and that is what we need everybody to do to keep us from getting into a worse situation and having to put tighter restrictions on chelsea do you have a follow-up yes thank you when you say select about the viral vector vaccine do you say select clinics can you clarify if this is throughout the province or in a range of communities or where whereabouts will be the others had more details to come we're working those out it's just that there'll be a small number of pharmacies you know with us with a very small amount of vaccines small numbers of people it doesn't make sense to give it in the you know the the pharmacies across the province so there will be select pharmacies that have these specific clinics people may have to be prepared if they're making this choice they may they may have a little bit of travel for them to get to one of these clinics moving on we'll go to linda pinozzo linda hi yes thank you dr strang a couple of weeks ago i asked you why federally authorized monoclonal antibodies effective against the delta variant were not being used in nova scotia for high risk patients and early treatment of covid and you deferred to dr lisa barrett in the therapeutics and prophylactics advisory group i've reached out to them over the last few months and i'm still not any closer to having any answers and i also recently contacted the nova scotia health authority to find out if these treatments were deployed at the long-term care facility in pugwash the site of the recent outbreak linked to the faith gatherings and i received no response doctor strange non-voting member on the advisory group and i'm just wondering what can be done to ensure that those nova scotians at highest risk of hospitalization can get access to this potentially life-saving treatment so i'm this is not my area of expertise and one i defer to the clinicians who were actually treating people and that would be the nova scotia health authority but i do know that we are for select patients who who do meet their appropriate clinical criteria we are using the monoclonal antibodies as appropriate uh but but for that's all i can tell you again i defer to the clinicians who are responsible for treating patients and and i would encourage you to continue to ask through nova scotia authority communications do you have a final question linda yes i do um the proof of vaccine policy and the vaccine mandates have led to in my opinion a worrying stigmatization and segregation of a segment of the nova scotia population for instance last week i was told about an unvaccinated person who went to get an ultrasound at the bridgewater hospital and was publicly shamed in the waiting room by both the receptionist and another person waiting there so these policies do have ugly societal consequences at the same time we know that vaccine protection saves and that fully vaccinated people with delta breakthrough cases can can efficiently transmit the virus including to fully vaccinated contacts my question is twofold dr strang given that vaccinated people can get and transmit the virus how can mandates and proof policies that exclude the unvaccinated be scientifically justified and finally have either of you considered that these policies could be doing more societal harm than good so there's a lot in that question so first of all it's unfortunate if people were i can continue to ask that that people regardless of the choice they make are treated

with with care and kindness that we certainly know that uh we've been very clear that people are not to be denied access to health care regardless of their choice around vaccination and those those uh those policies are in place in our in our hospitals and our other health care facilities um i would flip it around and say that being unvaccinated has puts other people at risk and what about the consequences of that what we do know and i've said many times vaccines are not 100 percent that there are some people who get breakthrough cases and may be able to spread it to others but we know clearly with canadian data that if you're unvaccinated you're eight times more likely uh to become infected if you're unvaccinated you're i think it's about 28 times more likely to end up in hospital and if you're 18 to 50 i think it's 50 years old you're about 45 times more likely to now end up in hospital vaccines work not just to protect individuals they protect each other and having vaccinated vaccine high levels of vaccination protect our health care system other provinces that haven't been able to achieve as high vaccination coverage rates have had significant impacts on their health care system where to the point where there are many people that are now suffering for non-covert related uh issues because they can't get appropriate health care so i think you flip it around and say what are the impacts on all of us by people who choose not to be vaccinated rather than and we need to have we're in a pandemic we need to have strong measures i wish we didn't but we do and if we all think about each other then the choice to become vaccinated to me becomes very clear our final reporter on the phone steve mcarthur go ahead steve

steve are you there come back to the room for one final question question dr strang you've mandated that doctors nurses people work within the public health system be vaccinated however obviously there are private practices there are dentists there are other health service providers who provide up close and personal care or services why don't they have to be double facts to provide that kind of care so we made a deliberate choice to start within the healthcare sector with people in facilities long-term care facilities hospitals where it's not just about one-on-one care there's you know there's a chance to to expose lots of other people we've all we've said that we would look we'd get through this first round and look at if we needed to add others uh we're still we've just gotten through uh the first round and i would say if you really look at our high vaccination rates that there may be a few health care providers who are you know in their private community based practice uh but by and large uh you know our our high levels of vaccine coverage would argue that they're that those numbers are going to be small i think it's perfectly uh appropriate for a nova scotian who's going to a private community clinic whether it's their family doctor a physiotherapist their chiropractor ask them are you vaccinated and certainly you should be comfortable making the choice about i'm going to i'm going to go seek my care elsewhere if that health care provider either won't disclose their vaccine status or tells you that they're unvaccinated sorry how many child care centers do you know of that have been temporary temporarily closed during the fourth wave can you provide any insight there i'd have to go back i don't believe there's been there may be one or two but you know there has cha daycare centers have not been a major issue in this in this fourth wave sorry that's all the time we have sorry thank you the holiday season is is now in full swing it's naturally a more social time of year first off hanukkah just ended so a belated happy hanukkah to jewish nova scotians but this is a very social time of year you know we had a couple of questions today i think preston and chelsea ask questions along the lines of what what happens if things get worse well let's not let them get worse dr strang has given us um good good advice over the course of the pandemic when we've when nova scotians have followed that advice nova scotia has done well we've uh we've we've gained a lot of recognition for how we've handled the pandemic in this province so there's there's lots of ways to protect yourself and protect your family vaccination is first and foremost so so we continue to stress if you haven't been vaccinated please get vaccinated it's never too late and as dr strang said slow down as much as you can during the holiday season so let's all let's all have a safe and enjoyable holiday season but we can only do that if we follow public health so thanks everyone

you

my

good afternoon everyone my name is marla mcginnis and i'll be your moderator for today's news conference before we begin i'd like to introduce the honorable tim houston premier of the province of nova scotia and dr robert strang chief medical officer of health for nova scotia we're also joined today by the honorable michelle thompson minister of health and wellness and mla for anaganish she's joining us by zoom from anaganesh go ahead premiere great thank you uh good afternoon everyone unfortunately the kovid situation the province is changing uh very quickly and we know that people have a lot of questions and concerns the reality is across the country cases are up and we hoped to be immune here in nova scotia but we're not the omicron variant has arrived in our region new brunswick has also just announced its first cases um and i can confirm that as of today we also have a number of confirmed cases of the variant in nova scotia i've been in contact with the other atlantic premiers and i can assure nova scotians and everyone in the region we will work together to do what is necessary to keep covid at bay but here we are entering our second christmas of the pandemic and our case numbers are the highest that we have seen since the third wave i understand your anxiety and your frustration i feel it too but we are reminded how fragile things really are in this pandemic the people of anaganish and the surrounding communities the students the residents and the businesses are especially on my mind it's a stressful time for everyone in every corner of the province so but let's distill it down to a few facts um here here is what we know uh the first thing we know uh we know the last 10 days or so have shown that this virus does spread very quickly number two we know the incubation period seems much shorter with symptoms showing up and tests being positive within just two to three days of exposure so this again means that the virus spreads very quickly and acts very quickly uh and the third thing uh thankfully cases so far the cases so far that we've had uh have been relatively mild illness and of the hundreds of cases that we've announced since the outbreak at santa fe there have been no hospitalizations there are there are many rumors but the reality is that if there were any hospitalizations we would know and we're not aware of any so this is good news um but also we have to be mindful that so far the majority of cases have also been in younger people so in summary the variance spreads faster but it appears to be less severe we also know that the vaccines are an extremely important layer of protection but despite that and our and our and our and our encouraging vaccination rates we we need to slow we need to slow the the spread of the variant down there have been many many questions about uh fines and enforcement and i think my my personal feelings on this are well known and but what we can say today is that the investigation um continues and as that um invest that investigation will continue but today the focus is on keeping people safe and that that has to be that has to be our focus today on dealing with what's in front of us right now so our immediate goal is to slow the spread and dr strang reminds reminds me reminds all of us uh that we've been here before and what worked in the past will work again that means people using common sense but it also requires uh some government guidance so that means bringing back some of the restrictions that were in place for phase four which helped to to blunt the third wave in particular and dr strang will will will give you the details um but but starting friday gathering limits physical distancing you know tightening up on the masking all these things will be back in effect um we're also getting a lot of questions about schools for some there will be a public health reason to close the school but when that's the case it will be communicated to those communities for the rest there's no public health reason to close your school and your school will remain open so i i understand we understand we know that there may be some operational challenges with schools but we'll we will continue to to monitor throughout the week and if there are any changes we'll we'll update but other than that school school continues as planned we have high vaccination rates and that's a good thing the variant does not trigger as severe of illness in most cases as some earlier strains and that is also a good thing but still it would not be appropriate to do nothing in the face of such rapid spread so uh we we're taking action and dr strang and the minister will speak to that um but uh just just remember that together we will get things back under control i have no doubt about that so i'd like to um ask the minister to step up now

thank you premier i wish i could be there with you in person i'm here in annie ganesh it's important to me to be here while we deal with this outbreak locally there is much anxiety here right now and even some anger and those are normal emotions in a situation like this but we can't let the our emotions consume us instead let's change those emotions into actions get tested wear your mask and watch for symptoms if you haven't been vaccinated book an appointment now if you're eligible for a booster book it now for parents children 5 and up are now eligible for vaccines again please book your appointments while omicron is very contagious if we work together and follow public health public health guidance we will reduce the spread and contain the virus it will mean some sacrifices like not being able to do all the things we want and not having big get-togethers over christmas and new years but that's how we will protect our

neighbors our community and the province that we love a key action is testing anyone who has symptoms is a close contact of someone who's confirmed case or was at an exposure site at the time listed in the exposure notices should book an appointment online

uh that goes for the same effects community the broader community and anyone who is visiting i've seen the line ups at the local testing centers and i want to say thank you to all those who've gone to get tested the anagony testing clinic on church street has lots of appointments for per testing public health's mobile testing unit has been at the keating center doing per testing and handing out take-home rapid tests the university has also has a substantial supply of take-home rapid tests that it's distributing to student students who are isolating because they tested positive have symptoms are closed contacts or we're at exposure sites need to follow public health direction you can't stop isolating until you've got your negative test results or you've been told by public health that you're free to go home we understand that this may impact your travel plans but it's important to follow these rules to prevent spread for any students who haven't been directly impacted by the outbreak public health has asked that you take a rapid test and have a negative test result before leaving for the holidays again this may alter your travel plans but it's important to help prevent the spread for the broader community the library on main street will have rapid test kits beginning tomorrow these are intended to help with safer gatherings over the holiday season and i encourage local residents to pick a kid up for your family there are limited supplies though so students should continue getting their rapid tests on campus for nova scotians rapid testing kits will be available in libraries family resource centers and at the mobile outreach immunization clinics throughout the province nova scotians should expect that the availability of rapid tests will be within 20 to 40 minutes of your home testing is important to identify the virus and discover where it is early finding that out is critical for such contagious variants we need to continue to protect our health care system protecting our health system means our doctors nurses and others can treat the ill those with covet and those without a health system overwhelmed by covid has to make choices we are still trying to catch up on surgeries and procedures postponed by the last wave earlier this year our health care workers are tired they've been focused on the pandemic for two years they are our friends our family and our neighbors the health system isn't all of our responsibility so let's protect it and our loved ones and do what we can to stop the spread now dr strang will now tell you a few more details thank you

thank you premier and minister and good afternoon everybody today we are reporting 114 new covet 19 cases we've had three digit case numbers for several days with the majority in eastern and central zones and many are tied to the outbreak associated with saint francis xavier university nova scotians should expect to continue to see high daily case numbers and cases will go up before they go down we are also unfortunately announcing an outbreak at a combined long-term care home and a retirement living facility in antigonish one staff member has tested positive at the long-term care home mary's court and two staff members and two residents have tested positive at the attached retirement facility parkland antigonish public health is working closely with the operator and staff to manage these cases unsurprisingly we are also now confirming that 40 of the samples that we've submitted to the national microbiology lab have been confirmed to be the omicron variant and we can assume that a growing percentage of our cases will become this variant what we do now in response to the new variant is no different however than what we've done in previous waves and with other variants as they've occurred and i've been asked why do anything what's the panic if we're seeing mild illness and we're all vaccinated my answer is this there is no need to panic but there is a need to be cautious we don't know enough about this variant to wait and see what happens we cannot take the risk of wider spread into more vulnerable groups like seniors and those who are immune compromised and potentially putting a pressure on our health care system so we're focused so so sorry so we're going to focus on tightening up in three key areas to try to get to get things under control masking gathering limits and physical distancing i do see these restrictions as an interim step while we learn more about the variant and get more people vaccinated restrictions will come into effect this friday at 9 00 a.m we will monitor how this goes over the holidays and re-evaluate in early january our goal is to have the fewest amount of restrictions for the shortest period of time i know the timing couldn't be worse with the holidays around the corner we just seem to be getting some sense of normalcy back into our lives and now there's a new variant and things are changing yet again this pandemic is not kind i understand that people in businesses will be disappointed frustrated and fed up we are too and we wouldn't do this if we didn't believe it was necessary but it is so starting friday we're bringing back the physical distance requirement this means places like restaurants and bars fitness and recreation facilities stores and malls museums and libraries can operate at their maximum capacity possible while ensuring that physical distancing is maintained and we've done this before how we are lowering the informal gathering limit from 25 to 20 people indoors and outdoors and we're also asking nova scotians to go back to socializing with a consistent social group pick your closest your your 20 closest friends and family and keep that group consistent as the premier noted for right now 20 is

plenty and to line that up with that bars and restaurants will have a limit of no more than 20 people per table and again uh those it needs to be that consistent group of 20 and the bars and restaurants will have to there will have to be the required physical distancing between the tables and between groups we're also bringing back the formal gathering limit for events and gatherings hosted by recognized businesses or organizations including faith organizations so the limit will be 50 of uh in maximum indoor capacity to a maximum number of 150 indoors or 250 outdoors and this applies to things like regular faith services special events meetings and training and audiences for sports events and arts and culture events for people like players coaches and referees who are participating in sports practices games and regular league play within their home region there's a limit of 60 whether it's indoors or outdoors the same goes for people like actors musicians and directors who are participating in arts and culture rehearsals and performances tournaments and competitions whether in or out of the province will not be allowed at this time and just a reminder that children age 11 and younger are are have not been allowed to leave nova scotia or enter nova scotia to participate in sports and arts and cultural events for the last few weeks and it's also important to note that proof of full vaccination will continue to be required for all discretionary activities even if gathering limits and physical distancing now apply we are also tightening mask requirements masks are once again required in areas will once again be required in areas of workplaces where physical distancing cannot be achieved and they will continue to be required in common areas and areas where people serve the public and also if there's a workplace with poor ventilation starting friday the public must be seated to remove their mask for eating or drinking all other mass requirements in indoor places remain including wearing them when seated for other activities in indoor places so this means that if you're at a late night bar or a nightclub you must be and you're not in your seat you must be masked and we'll be working with our sport facilities so i'll use the scotiabank uh people they will be have to create a seated area up in the concourse by the concession stand and that is the only place where people will be able to take their mask off to eat and drink they will not be able to be in seats watching the event and also con also eating and drinking as the premier mentioned we're doing some cleanup in the public health order to make sure it's clear that it's not just the individual's responsibility to wear their mask but also that businesses and organizations will clearly be identified as having the responsibility for ensuring masks are worn as well

enhanced restrictions are also being introduced in our schools as of tomorrow all schools will move to enhanced public health measures to reduce mixing and movement and so those are the measures we have been using for the last few months when a school has some uh isolated identified coveted cases those will now be applied in all schools and this means that that things like after you know school sports assemblies and non-essential visitors will now become more restricted and certainly more information will be shared with families later today by the department of education we know that in shifting to long-term care facilities we know that visits with residents in such facilities are extremely important especially around the holidays they will still be allowed to happen but we need to put extra layers of safety we already have a full vaccination requirement in place for visitors except for end of life visits and masks are already required now that physical distancing is in place again visitors will be limited to having a quick close contact like a hug but then the remainder of their visit will need to be distanced and mass need to be worn throughout we'll also be limiting the number of visitors at any one time to to a resident residents will cannot well can only will only be able to leave their facility for overnight visits if they are fully vaccinated and we also strongly recommend that they don't leave for these visits unless they've had their third booster dose as well as i said we're also limiting visits to two people at a time and are strongly recommending that the visitors do a rapid test within 24 hours before visiting and as of today i'm pleased to announce that rapid test kits are will are available uh at libraries uh throughout the province the supply is not unlimited so please just take what you need and don't stockpile but that's another point of access for rapid test kits for the public i want to talk now about how we're reporting and investigating cases by public health we are reporting lab confirmed cases at this time because there are simply too many cases to be investigated and entered into a timely manner into our public health in information system panorama the spread of this virus and the volume of cases has exceeded public health capacity and given hey high case numbers could continue for a while we are focusing our efforts on cases that involve vulnerable people and settings like schools long-term care facilities and health care facilities public health is still making an initial call within 24 hours of a confirmed positive test result but in most cases this may be the only contact with public health during those initial calls the majority people will now be directed to uh you know self-management advice where and and there's a lot where we have rapidly developed a lot of online materials that people can use to follow what's required for them in terms of testing and isolation and also how they then go about contacting their own close contacts if people have been told you're positive we're asking people to go to the government coveted website where this information is at and and also start the close contact uh contacting your close contacts and not even not waiting for that initial contact even from public health and if you were at a site the listed and a coveted exposure notification or even if you just believe you were being in close contact of someone who has coveted again don't wait for

public health to contact you go to our covid website and all the information self management information is there but in essence if you believe you've been in contact with covid isolate immediately and monitor yourself for symptoms even if you're fully vaccinated and you'll need to book a pcr test for at least 72 hours after that your exposure has ended and if it's negative you can stop isolating if you're fully vaccinated if it's positive you'll need to continue isolating and follow the public health direction that you'll be provided with a positive test although we are seeing high case numbers we are not seeing severe illness and that is very good news the vaccine is giving us protection against this new variant and that's why it is so important to continue to be vaccinated if you're a parent and your child hasn't had vaccine yet please book an appointment that's for children 5 to 11. there are thousands of available appointments for this age group across the province and while it might be inconvenient to do it before the holidays it will be much more inconvenient if your child gets covid and your family has to isolate if you're eligible for a booster dose if you're 16 above or if you meet the criteria which is moderately to severely immune compromised and that is specific conditions or medications which are again on our covid website and if you're having a hard time booking an appointment for before january we are working with our pharmacy and nova scotia health colleagues to increase availability as quickly as possible and just before i came down today i got a text message that within the space of a couple of hours a significant number of additional appointments have already been opened up through uh through the hard work of our pharmacy colleagues so we are working rapidly to increase availability to appointments in the short term i want to end by reminding nova scotians how far we've come when covid arrived in nova scotia i'm sure many people thought we wouldn't be able to bounce back from its impact but we did then we did it again in the second wave and again in the third wave and we've been able to get through this fourth wave with vaccine and few restrictions up until now it's been 21 months and nova scotians are still setting an example for the world to follow with our pandemic response you've all responded with resilience and strength and caring throughout this pandemic and i know this new variant uh will will uh will will will uh um sorry and i know that all of you will respond in the same manner to this new variant and we will not let it win timing is horrible but let's not blame one another and point fingers it won't do us any good omicron is here and we have to adjust we need to put our energy into working together to stop the spread of a new variant we don't know enough about yet so we can protect our grandparents and our young children and our health system once again this needs to be not focusing on us but focusing on others focusing on those more vulnerable in our community while we perhaps have to restrict our own activities for the short term it's about all of us together our collective common health and safety marla thank you so much we do have a number of reporters on the line but we'll start in the room go ahead dr strange with respect um was it a good idea though for a university to hold a ceremony in which thousands of people attended uh at this stage at this time in this place so they were following the we can ask about that but they were actually what they held was based on the gathering numbers that were allowed the requirement proof proof of vaccination where there's ongoing investigation about whether was there appropriate adherence to masking and i know that our enforcement folks with local police are looking into that nobody could have predicted that omicron was going to arrive just at the time for this big event it's unfortunate that timing but by and large though these type of events were allowed under our public health rules uh so i don't think we want to as i said let's not spend a lot of time pointing fingers and blaming it is what it is omicron is is is is what we want to put our focus on it's unfortunate it's here but it is and so now we need to limit its ability to spread any further did you did the university ask your office uh for permission to hold this event did they have to no there there's no requirement uh for an organizations of events to uh to uh to get permission uh you know there's certainly a requirement for them to understand and follow all the public health uh you know what's in the public health order around an event and as i just articulated by and large they did there's some questions around masking that are actively being uh followed up by our enforcement uh folks dr strange speaking of the severity and hospitalizations of this wave um isn't it a bit too soon to say that there isn't uh hospitalizations and past waves it's been two or three weeks after a large increase in numbers before we see an increase in hospitalizations can you speak to that well with the time frame of when people would become you know normally become ill in our short incubation period we're at a time where we where we should have started to see hospitalizations we have seen none at all from the the recent cases the last hospitalization we had was december 7th and also the experience around the world is again we're seeing by and large mild illness however there's a lot of caveats around that it's early uh you know it's uh many of the cases are in young people uh people that are vaccinated so and and so there's still a lot we have to look at before we're completely comfortable to say yeah omicron produces relatively mild illness but all the signs to date locally and and wider are suggesting that so that's that gives us some comfort and when we try to find the balance about how far do we go to control this uh knowing that everything we put in place has its own impacts we have to factor in in uh you know that the the mild mildness of the illness we're seeing but the reason we're taking the actions we're doing is we know that we can't 100 rely on that and do nothing and there's been new cases at the long term care center and the cases announced over the weekend at doubt are they directly traceable to the same effects uh outbreak yes ma'am the the the long-term

care resident you know seniors residents there the staff have had direct you know uh connections with saint of x and my understanding of well from dalhousie those students on dalhousie at least the initial cases have had direct you know we're at you know direct con exposure rats in in antigonish for that uh the x-raying weekend so we can say for sure that the omicron variant was the prevalent variant in the uh cmdx outbreak that's the reason it was so widespread so what we know we've had 40 isolates so far we have a number of other specimens still being tested but uh uh i know some of the other isolates again just before i came down and there's also been a number of isolates detected as delta as well so you know omicron is here all the all the signs would say omicron is now likely very quickly going to become the dominant uh strain ontario's predicting within two weeks in ontario based on their their evidence so it's here it's very infectious what the level of severity of disease is as we've just talked about you know there's still not not enough certainty to have total comfort on its only mild disease so we have to be careful about it uh and we can expect it is going to spread because of its high infectiousness so we have to be extremely cautious over the next few weeks while we learn more and we still have we still have a lot of work to do around people you know five to 11 year old getting vaccinated people who need booster doses because of age people who are immune compromised and need a third dose those are the things we have to focus on over the next few weeks and we'll learn more in january we'll understand more about this variant and what is necessary moving forward in the new year clear in terms of uh sports competitions um mooseheads games is that the same thing as sports competitions are they all gone so we're allowed to have games whether it's minor minor hockey all the way up to moose heads we have a professional uh lacrosse team they're allowed to have games there are limits on now how in the audience and how many people can be spectators but what we've said is no tournaments so individual games and we're really you know so that should be and limiting travel so certainly for minor sports it's within your community or between communities no no no bringing people together from across the province for whether it's a basketball or a hockey tournament or for a dance competition uh but still they can practice and they can have their individual games and you know individual theater performances or dance performances those are all okay but the most heads traveled to cape breton

that's a distinction of that that's a level of hockey that and they have all sorts of protocols that go along with their travel if it was found that there were a number of students on sandovax campus during these events not wearing masks uh and not holding drinks or eating what would the consequence of that be given what the rules were then versus what you're making them now that's an active point of investigation with our enforcement folks and the local law enforcement and the the penalties are there in the public health order that if there's clear evidence of non-compliance as individuals they can be fined you know that all i can say is that is an ongoing point of investigation at this time between the government our enforcement colleagues and local law enforcement what's your understanding oh sorry go ahead thanks dr sorry i'm wondering if it's at all possible that this outbreak is impacted by waning vaccine immunity there's no suggestion of that we know that certainly the people that are uh by and large the cases are an age group where we're really they're they're still very well protected by by their two doses of vaccine even in older people where still there may be some waning immunity and we need people to get a booster dose but they're still getting good protection and getting very good protection against severe disease so we still have with our high levels of vaccine coverage we have very good protection in this province especially against severe disease but it doesn't mean that we don't now have to focus on third doses on for those immune compromised booster doses for those who are 16 above because they are we're now they're entering a time where there are at more risk for waning immunity but again that's more about protecting any infection even those who have some waning immunity all the evidence would say with evidence mrna vaccine especially you have very good protection against severe disease does this encourage you to ramp up the eligibility for booster doses given that sort of middle age group may be probably waiting to be sued no there's no evidence after you for those like under especially 15 under there's actually no no evidence that would suggest that they have uh any substantive increased risk from waning immunity ultimately they will they will they're going to be eligible for a booster dose but right now we need to focus our efforts as i said on kids uh who need their primary series 5 to 11 anybody else who's not yet had their primary series and then the immune compromise with the third dose and 60 and above who are at increased increased risk for waning immunity and therefore increased risk of severe disease so those who are i'm getting lots of emails from people 30 40 whatever be patient you're not vulnerable the vaccine in the next few weeks needs to go to those who are more vulnerable you will get your turn but but you need to be patient just so i understand this so for larger gatherings whether it be a church group whether it be a moose's game it's half the capacity to a maximum of 150 that's it or help me out here yeah so you've got it exactly right if it's a small facility it's a 50 they're they all have like a legal fire code kind of capacity so it's 50 up to 50 of that to a maximum of 150 very large facilities and we did this again in the fourth wave very large facilities like some of the very large churches like our large sports arenas within a with an approved plan they can have multiple groups of 150 and but they have to have the space and the and the and the entrances and exits and the

number of washrooms and all that stuff so though each individual group of 150 remains separate from other groups

they've already got that they had plans and the community cultures and heritage and there was already working out and you know they've already had approved plans and they can go back to those those plans uh we'll be talking with them i have a consultation with the arts sports sector tomorrow morning to talk in more detail about this premier your tone around the need to hold someone accountable for the outbreak it's going to at in andy ganesh is very different today than it was last week why i don't think so i think what i've always said is um if if you if you if you broke the rules i think the exact language i used was we will find you and we will find you that's still the case uh i think what the investigation is ongoing so i mean there's really two two main points in my mind one is were was proof of vaccine being checked uh where it should have been as was people searching for it and the other one is is around the masking and um what we're finding out on the masking is there's potentially a bit of a gray area in the order as to who's responsible if people weren't wearing a mask appropriately is it the individual and or the the organizer or is it just the organizer so these are the types of questions that um that we're looking into so if we need to tighten up the order going forward we'll do that but but i i feel very very strongly that if if people were ignoring the rules intentionally or breaking the rules intentionally that they should be fined and i still feel that way dr strang what's the uh situation with the 5 to 11 vaccine rule out the last briefing it was around 45 uptake what's the situation now do you know yeah i don't have an update i i missed my vaccine update call this morning a regular weekly call but as we're getting making decisions and getting prepared for uh today's announcement so i don't have an update on that but uh if you submitted a question through comms then we could probably we could get you that doctor you said these high case numbers have exceeded public health capacity with regards to panorama and reporting i'm wondering what's different this wave can be compared to the third wave when there may have been 150 daily cases that were going into panorama well we had the same uh pressures uh and and and quite frankly we we used uh very tight restrictions to get things under control and and uh and uh and not and and and to be able to think bring things back under you know public health capacity with the vaccine that we have providing the layers of protection uh we don't need to have those very tight restrictions but because and also within you know we're not trying to prevent uh every illness we can be much more tolerant of the spread of of this the of the both the delta and the omicron variant with vaccine knowing that the you know that the vaccine is very good protection against severe disease so that means we're going to we're in the process of adjusting our public health follow-up that over time we may not need to pay as much attention to every individual case and what we're doing is already giving people the tools so they can manage themselves much more and then focusing public health resources in settings and situations where there's increased risk so you know schools as i said long-term care facilities hospital-based cases those kind of things dr shad i get the sense from your attitude and your demeanor this time around compared to previous outbreaks that you're you're you're less worried that uh you see this as a kind of a evolution of the pandemic that's going in in a more positive direction is that a fair assessment well i i'll i'll qualify that a bit i think it is the evolution of the pandemic and essentially we can be uh perhaps not as acutely worried because of vaccines and i can't say this vaccines is what allows us to be in this position so anybody who doubts the importance of vaccines better give their head a good shake uh but i'm not not worried as well this this always concurrently types of events because if we don't manage them well if nova scotians don't step up to the plate and i have no reason to believe they won't but there's always the risk that we've gone for so long people are tired people are fatigued and they just want to just get on with life and that we just ignore uh you know the need to to pay attention to uh to covert protocols that would be a mistake so i am worried uh and concerned well not worried but i'm concerned that uh that uh you know if not if we don't respond yet again this has the potential to have uh you know significant negative impacts but i'm at the same time i'm confident that yet again we will respond um and and do what's necessary uh to get you know to keep things to control to the level that vaccines uh will protect us uh and then and minimize severe illness minimize any risk on the health care system of the 40 omicron uh cases are all of them from antigonish that's the yes those are the of all the ones that were submitted a number i don't have the total number of from the anti-condition investigation 40 of them came back as omicron there's more being submitted we'll get more results as i said i know we've also got some positives for delta coming back just confirmed this afternoon as well so it's not all omicron i wouldn't expect that but as i said earlier we can expect to see a growing percentage of our cases being omicron counterparts in other provinces to determine how this uh spread from any ganesh has affected other provinces because i'm assuming people who went home carried at home so yeah we've had lots of conversations and it's not clear-cut there you know certainly we've had some cases now linked in pi new brunswick who were in antigonish but we're also starting to understand there's the potential that uh this is linked initially to uh a large outbreak that's happening at queen's university in ontario so we'll work together uh you know across the country to kind of put the pieces together but there i guess the reality is it doesn't matter so much now where it started where it stops omicron is here in canada it's going to spread it's going to become our probably our predominant variant so let's make sure we have the right things in

place to to a limited spread but i i come back to what we're doing now is is really um a short-term measure don't ask me to define short-term but it is a short-term measure while we understand much more around the science of this variant and if we if we can confirm that it actually is generally does it produces milder illness and there's least reasonable coverage from from the vaccine then then in the new year we're in a very different position that we may be able to say okay we can become a little bit more relaxed again but it'd be premature or it would be wrong for us to take to take that relaxed position now there's just too many unknowns and i'm not prepared and i don't believe the premier's prepared to put the take that risk and and put our and put more vulnerable nova scotians and our health care system at risk now we'll start with keith doucet with the canadian press go ahead keith uh yes you see there for the premiere for dr strang i'm just wondering um you did kind of touch on cooperation with other provinces is there any talk because of the holiday season and it's right upon us about reinstating tougher measures uh at the boundaries and i can maybe start then doctors trying to elaborate but no that's not something that's being discussed right now um obviously with air travel there's a lot the world's different than it was before you know you have to be vaccinated to travel and there's all kinds of all kinds of safeguards there and um the same the same is true for the for the land border in terms of what's happening the other problems is but there's no real discussion of that dr strange you want to yeah you know now to get on a train or or a plane even domestically across the country you have to be fully vaccinated we still maintain in nova scotia if you come in here you have to be fully vaccinated otherwise you're going to have to isolate for a period of time and be tested that's still important we have that i think more rather worrying about border restrictions we have to appeal the nova scotians and and across the country to canadians again as i said last week now is the time for us to slow down let's really rethink think our travel plans even within the province how much traveling do we really want to be should we really be doing across across the province if we stick to our 20 as plenty and consistent within that 20 you that should help you guide really about how much travel you're going to be doing in the next few weeks keith do you have a follow-up question yeah i'm just wondering do we have uh the total number of cases that are related to anaganesh uh it was 114 on friday so i'm just wondering what the number is now i believe and i again i i was being busy with other things today and having to be able to confirm this i think it was up to 172 or something over the weekend okay we'll move to ross lord with global go ahead ross

ross are you there thank you i am here hello um so with students from engineers going home for christmas break which is already happening to what extent uh from your evidence is the outbreak at x still spreading into other communities and provinces i mean we've what we've seen mostly is uh as cases here in the central zone but it was people who were by and large were up in that in the weekend for that extreme ceremony or their maybe close household contacts back here in the halifax area as i as i answered to a previous question we are working with the university and with the students to those who are known to public health and have specific isolation and testing requirements have to finish those before they can go home the general other general students were we're strongly asking them that they do a rapid test in the day before they leave to go home they do a rapid test and don't travel home until they get that negative from that rapid test russ do you have a follow-up question i do yes premier houston i think you mentioned if i heard you correctly a gray area in the order about who's responsible for breaking masking rules individuals versus organizations if that is what i heard should we anticipate you changing the order to clear up any confusion yep thanks ross and and it is what you heard it's it's it's not so much who's responsible the people who weren't wearing the mask are the ones are responsible but who's accountable and who can be fined for it that's what that's what we're looking at so is it is it the is it the responsibility of the organizer that people inside the event weren't wearing the mask are they the ones who held accountable or is it um is it the the individual so we're looking at it we're we're we'll change we'll change the order as necessary to make it uh crystal clear going forward um that's something we're looking at actively the investigation is ongoing for sure okay next we'll go to adrian blah with radio canada go ahead adrian good afternoon dr strength i talked to parents of dubai school and they are wondering whether there was spread in the school or not could you clarify that so uh i called moasant as their their that school was closed down uh and one of the criteria we have for for uh closing a school down is evidence of spread within within the school as well as multiple exposures within the school adrian do you have a follow-up question yes parents were told that classes would resume in person on december 16th could you explain why that date and if public health is considering just not resuming classes before the new year so that date is based on we usually give a week uh of time a week of uh including you know the and and the five days of classroom days uh i think there'll be ongoing conversations between local public health and and the education system about reopening that school there certainly would be if they're clear as long as there's a you know um no ongoing concerns and from a public health perspective we would say we're okay to open that school there may be some administrative or other considerations that that the school then may use to make their decision on whether they open the school or not next we'll go to pat healy with the laker go ahead pat hi uh for dr strang you talked about significant negative impact if we don't

manage this well what could some of those significant negative impacts be if nova scotians don't manage this well and do our part well the biggest thing that we we have worked all along throughout this pandemic is keeping the spread early on we had we were focused with no spread but in the last you know the fourth wave and now it's about keeping the spread to a level uh that minimizes uh the level of severe disease so really our goal and what i'm concerned about is if we don't put some restrictions on now we have really unchecked spread which then puts people who are at higher risk of severe disease based on age or underlying health condition at risk and then we already have a health system that is uh that has a lot of pressures on it and if we get this if we start to get significant amounts of severe illness from covid then we're going to put that that health system under under even more stress and if you look to see what's happened in other provinces the things you then have to close down to deal with covid has their own set of impacts on people's health in terms of missed surgeries and all those kind of things so our goal is really focused on limiting the the the possibility of of of of a significant amount of severe illness pat you have a follow-up question yes i do also for uh dr strang if a person was a close contact of say the cobot exposure at waverly memorial and they played through with their sports team over the weekend would all those players on the team be determined to be close contact as well so your your essentially their contacts of contacts they really depend on then uh the individual who's the the contact about uh they would need to be you know getting tested uh and monitoring themselves for symptoms and appropriate testing as guided by local public health uh to determine whether they're the the people they were in contact with um we're also you know we're also potentially being exposed if that's the case what the example you've given really is that shouldn't happen if people being identified as a close contact then they need to follow public health rules i and if they're fully vaccinated they need to isolate and then at at least 73 days 72 hours take a test and they have to stay isolated until they get that negative test everybody needs to understand that and follow that and if they're not fully vaccinated then they have a longer isolation period okay we'll go to corey leblanc next with the guys bro journal go ahead corey i guess for dr strang in guysborough county testing center opened today the first one were some concerns from from the public about something not happening more quickly i guess can you explain why one wasn't open uh more quickly in that area so i i don't i was involved in the specific decisions around that we've always had the objective that uh having uh both you know testing centers uh around the province that our goal is to have within 20 to 40 minutes of any community that people have access to a testing center and along with that we have uh we have you know we've always looked at where we might need to increase access through rapid testing or our mobile units and now today as i said we've now in libraries across the province expanded access to uh rapid testing cory do you have a follow-up question uh yes just in regards to schools dr strange i know from today's list there are four in anagenash county and and continuing in uh shed a buckle education center in geysburg academy i guess what are the criteria if you will what do you look at in terms of i know the goal is to keep the schools open but i guess what are you monitoring at this point so if there are cases within a school and and we've had many of those most of them are exposure outside of the school that's when we put on enhanced measures and those are the same measures now which starting tomorrow will be in every school uh but if we see to go further and to even close down the school what we look for if there's multiple exposures within a school like we've had circumstances where one person has had created exposures in four or five classrooms or if we're seeing signs of spread within the school those are the things we really look for to say do we move have to move from enhanced measures to actually closing a school down so far all even though there have been some exposures involving schools in the antigonish area there have not been any schools that have that have really had any even that were even come close to our thinking we we need to be considering closing them down under public health requirements right now fully recognize that there's other challenges in schools in that area in terms of from you know workforce and things like that okay we'll go to drake lathers with the port hawkesbury reporter next go ahead drake from what we've learned over the weekend is the oat break and anagan ish on par less or more than what you originally thought last week

so certainly the case numbers i'm i'm seeing are more than i anticipated i think what we're actually seeing is uh is how transmissible and how easily the this omicron variant can spread drake do you have a follow-up question and now that there's two outbreaks in anaganish with now the second at parkway are you anticipating more case numbers coming from from that parkland outbreak i don't anticipate that uh that you know we have very good vaccination rates in our long-term care facilities and and then if you look at our general vaccination rate in in seniors i would anticipate a very high vaccination rate in even in the uh in the assisted living part of that of that facility um and we've got very good at vaccine coverage rates in uh in our health care workers as well that uh you know both of those are protective we uh they're you know with omicron and we're clearly we're seeing some breakthrough cases but now with the enhanced testing measures in place uh i think our long-term care facilities are are well protected but we have to continue to be extra cautious uh around that and that's why we you know as we've talked about earlier today uh in increasing restrictions on on on visitors uh as i mean and extra measures around visitors uh into facilities over the holiday period

okay next we'll go to ken kingston with news 989 xfm and anaganesh go ahead ken thanks very much um just had a question in regards to uh the uh the parkland and ignition what measures are they trying to taking right now to kind of mitigate that spread there well we have a whole series of measures when there that are applied in terms of uh when there's even a single staff member who's identified as a case we you know testing all the staff uh increasing the the the the strength of the infection control measures uh if there are residents that are test positive they are isolated uh and and you know and and kept restricted from the rest of the facility so you know we've had uh our experience uh you know uh by and large with long-term care facilities we've had in the last few months you know a a fair number of of people mostly staff who have been tested positive occasionally some residents and we have uh with one exception have had little to no spread within within facilities can do a fall question uh yeah i i i do there's um we we talked uh uh on your briefing there on friday about when you thought maybe this um this outbreak would would crash has your guidance really changed much any or do you think maybe it's going to climb a little bit longer before it starts to crest and go down again well i think what we're seeing uh over the weekend and now with the confirmation of omicron uh would say that uh you know that that certainly there was wider spread than initially anticipated within the you know the saint of x community and then the events around the x-ring uh and what we're watching for now is they're spread beyond that but uh again that part the reason we're putting the enhanced measures back in place uh you know to announce today starting on friday is to provide those extra layers of protection that we need to have on top of the existing you know really protection that comes from vaccination to minimize any of that uh further spread uh i'm i'm a realist we will get some spread but again the whole point is to slow down the spread keep it to a level uh while we get more understanding of the virus build additional doses of vaccine uh and to keep those extra layers of safety and and to keep those most vulnerable protected and keep our health care system protected next we'll go to elizabeth mcmillan with cbc go ahead elizabeth dr strang what do you have of that spread beyond people who were exposed at x-raying events i'm wondering about people who were in terms of numbers of people who may have been exposed in the anaganish community or other communities beyond anaganish well that will tell we've you know we we know we've had some uh student teachers in some schools you know we've we've just talked about the parkland facility so we've had some health care workers we'll monitor and see what kind of spread there there have been other uh you know workplaces which now have people been exposed we've had other you you now have dalhousie university there's also a handful of students at acadia who were associated linked back to the saint of x event so we'll we will we'll be looking and monitoring that but again fully expect more spread but this is why we're putting the extra measures in place that we're announcing today to slow that spread down keep it under control elizabeth do you have a follow-up question yes i'm just wondering if you could clarify the potential link to queen's university do you have a sense of did someone did someone from who was outside of x bring it to kingston or vice versa what we do know is that they've declared there was a collegiate men's rugby championship there a few weekends ago that has been declared as an outbreak or as uh by ontario associated with that the dow men's rugby team was at that event so we don't have any direct connections there but that is potentially a link between uh that large outbreak at queen's university back here into nova scotia so we'll we'll we'll we'll we'll be looking at that over time but the reality is if it didn't come that way it was coming to us at some other way you know a micron was inevitable that was going to get here so now it's here now we have to focus on our response moving forward and finally we'll go to natasha pace with ctv go ahead natasha thank you um just wanted to check dr sharon do you have an idea how many people are currently isolating at st the vax in connection to the outbreak i believe yesterday the president said it was somewhere around 125 i'm wondering if that number has increased direct number uh with me today natasha do you have a follow-up question i do um you spoke a bit about this dr sharing but i'm wondering with public health overwhelmed and only able to contact positive cases once are you concerned that people may not follow the rules or clearly understand them or follow through with proper contact tracing now that that the onus is being put on the individual who has contracted the virus well i would you know there is some risk there but the onus has always been on the individual even if they get a multiple calls from public health ultimately public health gives uh you know recommendations and tells and tells people what they need to do it's up to people than to do do that that hasn't changed so this is where we need nova scot we're just delivering that information in a different way to make sure people get the information they need to keep themselves and others safe again that that target of within 24 hours and we're committed to doing that but ultimately this is a challenge for all nova scotians who are in those situations to take on the responsibility to do the right things that public health is saying are necessary to limit the spread that's all the time we have today uh go ahead premiere

short snapper mr thompson um minister what is being done in anticipation of the spread that dr strang is talking about in terms of hospital services or diagnostic services or anything like that is there is there a move now to further delay those or what are you doing so right now we have not seen a big um impact on our health care system certainly locally we are very well connected with our kova directors and physician leaders to understand the impact on the local hospital and

local services so so far we haven't really seen a lot there are pre-existing plans that were in place since the beginning of the pandemic that are easily scaled up and scaled down in terms of of what the actions would be uh so we haven't seen that yet but we continue to watch it very closely okay and now we're done nobody nobody ever wants to go backwards um and and so it sucks to be going backwards right now especially at this time of year but i want to thank the the the minister who's also the local mla i know she's under incredible pressures but i want to thank her for her leadership and the leadership of the department which on the weekend was working very hard to secure additional rapid tests to come to nova scotia so thank thank them and of course the work at uh public health i thank the public health and under dr strang's leadership which uh we can all we can all feel very confident um in our management of this pandemic thanks to your leadership so thank you dr strang and your team uh we'll we'll get we'll get through this we'll get this we'll get this under control uh we'll get it under control if we keep working together and doing what nova scotians have done so well uh throughout the entire pandemic so get your get your vaccine book an appointment if you're eligible for your booster or get your child their first dose follow the measures that are that are being put in place to protect all of us wear your mask respect the gathering limits and physical distancing and remember heading into the holidays that 20 is is plenty for for small gatherings so thank you so much

you

Arabic

foreign good afternoon and thank you for joining us my name is Tina Tebow and I will be your moderator for today's covid briefing joining us today The Honorable Tim Houston premier of the province of Nova Scotia and Dr Robert Strang chief medical officer of Health for Nova Scotia go ahead premier thank you Tina good afternoon everyone the pandemic continues to make a mess of things across the province including almost 400 new cases today and almost 300 yesterday this week we've reported the highest case numbers we've seen during the pandemic Nova scotians were not used to high case numbers and we don't like them but the reality is is that the case numbers will continue to stay high we expect to see sustained High case counts over the coming days for sure the sheer volume of cases is putting incredible pressure on public health and also on our dedicated lab professionals they are doing amazing work under extraordinary circumstances and I want to thank each and every one of them uh we were all hoping that theirs and our and our holiday break would look differently everyone looks forward to a break over the holidays um and and I feel for our health care workers in particular they really need a break but as we've seen with this pandemic things can change very quickly uh we're we're seeing Workforce impact we're seeing the workforce impact of the broad transmission we're seeing that in in education we're seeing that in healthcare we're seeing that in in our small businesses uh the the impact is is very real uh to slow the spread we we have to individually slow down I know it's the holiday season but we really need to slow down it's it's that simple it's time for each of us to step up and take more personal responsibility for protecting ourselves and protecting our family so we're asking you to be even more vigilant if you're sick isolate and get tested and if you find out you have covid or you're close contact do what public health advises um and um if if you are positive then inform your own closed contacts we're all tired of covid but it's here and it's spreading rapidly across the province so far so far I believe it's fair to say the symptoms appear less severe than previous variants but it's still covid and I I I hear that there are those who still think that covid is a conspiracy they're vocal on social media but but here in the real world we must stay focused on protecting Nova scotians even if the symptoms of this variant do happen to be less severe uh think how your elderly parents your grandparents or neighbors would manage or the immunocompromised or the very young think about what would happen if things changed and people started to get hospitalized or if the record numbers of uh or if record numbers of health care workers paramedics or police started to get sick and had to isolate think of all these things and and be smart it's up to all of us to protect the most vulnerable among Among Us Among Us and and to protect our health care System I know that this is where most people's minds and thoughts are and that they don't need to be reminded but As you move around realize that there are tens of thousands of Nova scotians who are watching the calendar are counting the days and hours and wondering if they were exposed they are replaying in their minds how close was I to so and so did I see so and so over the last couple days it's torture and it's mentally exhausting and then if they do test positive it's a it's another level of anxiety did did I pass covid to a loved one to a friend I mean these are these are the things that are happening around the province for tens of tens of thousands of Nova scotians and this is a a very very painful mental exercise uh I know this firsthand I can tell you that um I have been doing a lot of calendar watching and clock watching this week as I myself was at an event last week where people have since tested positive I do not have covid but I certainly understand the pressure of awaiting results while thinking of those that I had been around in the days proceeding including my my own parents and in-laws and family so I have personally closed my Social Circle and I'm focused on working with with and supporting Public Health as we as a province work through this so that said I have little patience for those who are dismissive because but I also know that for each of them there are many many more Nova scotians dealing with the mental impact of covid and I can assure you that even if the um even if the physical symptoms are less severe from this variant the mental anxiety of covid in general is not less severe so I urge you slow down limit the chances that you will find yourself in the in in the situation of calendar watching and clock watching we know that the pandemic has been has been challenging for everyone and certainly for our for our many businesses across the province the latest restrictions we announced on Monday will have a significant impact on many businesses during what would typically be a very busy happy time of year we've we've listened to the businesses we've spoken with many businesses we we see the need and we want to help so we we're announcing today these sector impact support program this program will direct assistance to businesses to the businesses most impacted by the latest restrictions in the form of a one-time Grant up to 7 500 dollars we um we expect and we hope that this will help small business owners like restaurants bars gyms and recreational facilities and there'll be a full list and the criteria will be promoted widely over the next couple days but we need to also understand that no two businesses are the same so in order to be more flexible the program has has different tiers of grants that are based on on on payroll anywhere from 2500 to 5 000 or 7 500 will be the grants that will be available I know in the past funding from these types of programs hasn't come fast enough and we're working both internally and with Dalhousie in the hopes of speeding things up this

time around the pandemic is not over and as we go forward we will work with the business sector to be flexible and to understand the ongoing impacts on their operations and and we will support them in in closing I've been asked many times about enforcement about the enforcement investigation into the situation at San fax I can tell you that this morning two summary offense tickets both in the amount of 11 622.50 which is the maximum penalty we're issued to Saint a facts and the saint a fact student union for failing to comply with Dr strang's order the offenses stem from the failure to comply specifically with masking requirements so there's a lot going on it's a heavy it's a heavy time in this province but we will get through this and uh Dr Strang over to you thank you Premier and good afternoon everybody at this joyous time of the year I wish I had better news but I do need to be honest I told you Monday to prepare for things to get worse before they get better and unfortunately they are we've had a week of record high case numbers people are worried and I understand that we're in a tough situation and will be for a while we're in the midst of when a Mike Omicron wave and and there are still also cases of the Delta variant the case numbers likely aren't reflective of just how much disease we have Omicron is spreading faster and easier than any other variant thankfully what we're seeing so far and elsewhere in Canada is relatively mild disease we've only had two new hospitalizations so far despite the high number of cases there are a lot of unknowns about this variant and the and the concerns that the vaccines aren't doing their job but the evidence and experience to date is showing that people who are fully vaccinated remain with good protection especially against severe disease vaccine is a critically important layer of protection we also know that an additional dose is necessary for those who have conditions or who are on certain medications that significantly impact their immune system or or who are those who have less robust immune systems because of their age and we also need to make sure that we get vulnerable populations like children 5 to 11 and newcomers with their first and second doses as well booster doses for all Frontline healthcare workers are also critical given this variant is more transmissible and they care for people who are sick almost all of our vaccine appointments for December are booked and we are adding additional appointments all the time and we are expect to have a significant number of uh appointments opening up for January and we continue to work to maximize all of our capacity to keep vaccine flowing as quickly as possible I know that people younger than 60 are eager for a booster dose different provinces are taking different approaches when it comes to boosters we will continue to follow recommendations from the national advisory committee on immunization as we have done throughout this pandemic we're focused on getting boosters into the arms of older Nova scotians who are most vulnerable those with chronic conditions and health care workers and getting younger children and others vaccinated with their primary series and as soon as we can we will reduce the eligible age group so more people can receive their booster dose we also need to continue with and strengthen some of our Public Health measures we're adding extra layers of safety with stronger masking rules and physical distancing and gathering limits are back in effect as of nine o'clock this morning I know it may be hard to understand why we need restrictions if we're seeing mostly relatively mild illness but to be clear mild illness just means we aren't seeing people in hospital or the ICU it doesn't mean that people aren't sick and as the premier reference there's a lot of mental health issues around Co I mean a case or even a contact when people are sick or they have been exposed to cover they can't go to work or care for children or their loved ones so it's easy to see the ripple effect of of an even so-called mild illness and that impact becomes greater if the people affected are nurses paramedics police officers firefighters and others who work in areas that we need to keep functioning we also have to think about the people around us who are more at risk our grandparents those who are immune compromised and young children who can't get vaccine or or have only had the opportunity to get one dose It's Our obligation to protect them and also we don't know enough about the Omicron variant to just let it spread unchecked we need some extra layers of protection in place while we learn more about this variant and get more people vaccinated with their primary series and boosters

I firmly believe that what we have in place is the right balance to help us slow to help slow us all down and protect those most at risk we know that restrictions have their own set of significant impacts and so we are watching closely and will adjust as necessary if we need to go further or if it looks like we can loosen up we will for almost two years we've announced case numbers almost every day people use those to judge how good or bad we're doing against the virus High case numbers unfortunately scare people Omicron is pushing us to our limits Public Health reached capacity several days ago and now our testing program and the lab have also reached capacity the assessment centers are again running seven days a week and the lab has suspended some other types of routine testing it's still not enough we are past the point of full control of this variant we need to change how we manage and respond we need to focus much more on severe illness and less on the overall numbers of cases and infections there is going to be a lot of covet and a lot of spread it is inevitable but we can limit the impact of Omicron by focusing our resources in the health system on limiting severe disease and that means directing testing and vaccine to those who are most vulnerable and most at risk as long as we have limited amounts of severe illness we can be more comfortable with High cases and a fair degree of community

spread we're planning now and we'll have more details we'll share next week but I can tell you today that it will mean changes to who and how we test just like we have already shifted the way cases and our contacts are managed but we also need the help of every Nova Scotian it's going to mean many of you who are positive will have to self-manage your case without Hands-On support from Public Health right now the best we can do is to make initial contact and make sure you have the information you need to protect yourself and others it's not ideal and I don't want Nova Scotians to think that we're giving up on them or we're giving in to covid we haven't we are changing our response to deal with Omicron if you know you have covid we need you to identify and notify all of your close contacts and a close contact is anyone who's been exposed to someone who has tested positive for covid-19 while that person was infectious people are infectious 48 hours before they get a test or develop symptoms and close contact means you're you were within six feet of a person for at least 15 minutes while indoors that you care for that person at home you should you be shared Cutlery your dishes with the person the person coughed or sneezed on you or near you and that and the person was close enough to have touched hugged or kissed you all of those if you've had those exposures to somebody who's a case mean that you were now a close contact and if you have symptoms you need to start isolating immediately and book a test do not contribute to the spread by thinking you may just have the sniffles or a cold right now if you if you have uh you know cough fever sore throat runny nose you have to have to assume that you have Omicron and if you know you're our close contact start isolating immediately away from others wait for 72 hours and then get a test and if you need a test be prepared to wait to get that test and then wait for your results before you come out of isolation or start having close contact with others this is our reality at the moment I'm also asking businesses and employers around the province for your help I know that restrictions and mean short staffing is extremely difficult but please support your employees in following this the directions that I've just outlined if they have covid or if they are a close contact aside from protecting your community you don't want omocrine in your workplace our situation is serious but it is not dire we are going to have to make some tough decisions about our next steps and we're going to have to ask even more of Nova Scotians and the people on the front lines working to keep us all safe we'll we will have more to say next week around especially around testing but in the meantime I know that Nova Scotians will step up and do what we're asking you have continued to meet every challenge covet has thrown at us for the past 21 months and of every confidence that you will do so again this pandemic has been a long road we are all tired and we have some difficult days ahead of us I want to thank everyone from the bottom of my heart for all you have done and will continue to do to businesses and employers for continuing to be part of the solution no matter how hard it has been on your livelihood to people working in the lab and public health and the public health teams managing cases the volunteers who have put tests together and are handing them out of the airport into pop-ups the warehouse team who are receiving and shipping Chambers of Commerce and Regional Enterprise networks and the many workplaces Family Resource Centers and libraries Distributing rapid test kits to immunizers the public health nurses Pharmacists and others who are working incredibly hard to get vaccines into arms as quickly as possible and the screeners and vaccine Checkers who are trying to keep sport facilities events health care facilities and other public places safe and healthy and to cleaners and Health Care Facilities workplaces schools and offices and to my many unseen colleagues working in Department health and wellness and across government to support the coveted response and many other policies and programs I thank all of them and but most of all I want to thank Nova Scotians who have sacrificed so much to this pandemic and continue to come together every time a new obstacle is thrown in our path the timing of Omicron could not be worse it is placing a major damper on our holiday spirit however I continue to be reminded how lucky we are to live in this province time and again throughout this pandemic Nova Scotians have shown up to support one another to care for one another and to show love for one another this support caring and love is the core of the holiday season we can do this Tina thank you just a reminder we'll take one and then follow up from reporters on the phone and the allotted time that we have for today's briefing we do have a fair number of reporters on the line we have 17 reporters so we will take as many questions as we possibly can we will start with Heidi patracek from CTV go ahead Heidi thank you um Robert tests take-home kits are flying out the doors um do we have enough to kind of keep that place up moving forward we're starting we're working uh to procure uh our more rapid test kits and again as much as we can uh part of our what we'll be talking about in more detail next week next week is how we uh how we may adjust how we use those rapid test kits to to make sure that those who are is most important that get a test are tested Heidi with your follow-up we talk about public health uh maybe stepping back a bit from managing cases of covet how will they keep an eye on those who may develop serious covid symptoms so if someone is diagnosed you know you talked about notifying your own closed contacts and things like that but but how will you keep track of you know who gets severely ill so that we know there's not people at home kind of suffering when they really should go to the hospital so when we first Contact people from public health they they are giving information about you know symptoms to watch for and what to be concerned about if you know what for getting worsening we also have the Nova Scotia health authority and in partnership with iwkw had do have teams of people that

are that are checking uh uh in different ways uh with by phone or by virtually and uh and and supporting people who especially those who are more at risk for developing severe disease and doing some some you know virtual if you will monitoring of individuals and supporting them uh and so if people who are showing signs of worsening illness are identified quickly next we'll go to Jean Larosh from CBC go ahead John good afternoon Dr um doctoring I'm just

I'm just more to their own devices if they test positive do you still have the the people you need to continue to advertise the exposure sites because not everyone would know when they were at least 15 minutes in close contact with somebody they may not know in a bar or a restaurant or some other place where they've spent some time

so we're still we're still uh focusing our goal and we're now using a text to reach out to that that uh everybody who has a lab confirmed positive then gets at least one contact from public health and we haven't been able to do it always but our goal is to uh to do that within 24 hours and part of why we're reconfiguring some of our work is so we can make sure that as much as possible if people get at least that one contact within 24 hours we collect some information at the time around exposures as part of it and then we would do notifications on that but I also think that it's now is the time for uh Nova Scotians uh to think that there are there's a high likelihood that there might have been exposed uh if you're out and about if you're in close contact with especially indoors without masks being worn uh lots of other people then there's a high possibility of being exposed so that's one of the reasons we need everybody to slow themselves down reduce their close contacts make sure they're masking all those other pieces to minimize the chance of exposures especially exposures when there's large numbers of people involved ahead John with your follow-up

and you've had said a number of times at recent covet updates that really it's the epidemiology that drives your decisions I'm assuming it's the same for other provinces but other promises have moved quicker to provide boosters for those under the age of 60s and boosters for those for young people so how do you explain why we're doing things the way we are in other provinces or doing this way and the things the way they are given we seem to be epidemic epidemiologically speaking in the same boat so I think you know I follow the science I can't answer to why other provinces make decisions they they weigh out factors but here's what we do know that uh despite some of the some of the commentators out there who would suggest that there's that that unless you have a booster dose you have no protection against Omicron I don't believe that we still know that uh that uh having two doses of vaccine gives you uh some protection especially against severe disease um and so and so that that's important and that what we also need to know is that we are we everybody will get an opportunity but like we did with our the in our first two doses our whole vaccine program has always been based on who is most vulnerable who is at highest risk of severe disease and they get to go to the front of the line and and we will move through that uh as quickly as as we can and then get to the next group so right now we're those most vulnerable are those who because of age are more more likely to have waning immunity and therefore more likely to be need the protection of a booster dose those are immune compromised and need a third dose in their primary series and we still need to have make sure we have capacity and are focusing on the 5 to 11 year olds those are our priorities we expect that in early in early to mid January we'll be able to start those who are now 50 to 59 we'll be able to start making appointments and as we move through those groups then we'll move to though that the lower age groups but I'm very comfortable saying that if you're 30 years old and you've got two doses of vaccine your risk of getting severe disease is low and therefore I'm going to make the decision to prioritize that the vaccine goes to those who are at greater risk of severe disease we will get to you but it's about prioritizing who needs the who needs the the to be made to get it first and then everybody else will get uh get an opportunity as we roll things out other provinces are are having different approaches but when you we had the same concerns when we started to roll out our program uh and if you look at how we got through age groups and ended up with very high vaccination rate our approach worked many many other provinces even though they made an announcement people have lots of challenges of actually getting appointments so when at the end of the day we may well be in a place where if you're 30 to 40 you'll actually get your vaccine uh quicker than another Province who may have already announced you're eligible already next we'll go to Callum Smith from Global go ahead Callum thank you Dr Strang you've said Nova Scotia will continue to follow NASA's guidance on boosters and you just alluded to prioritizing the vulnerable groups but I wonder what timeline we could expect to when we do open up and and have the supply or 18 plus especially given the transmission of Omicron so I said as I said we expect based on uh both capacity and Supply that early to mid-January will be of those 50 to 59 will then start to be able to make their appointments and again depending on how much you know what uptake is uh and and other things and we'll give them a reasonable chance and then we'd go to the next age Court in the next next age cohort uh it's not that we're saying you won't get vaccine but it's again prioritizing and and moving through in a sequence in a sequential Manner and that that that approach paid off and showed its success in the first couple of waves

so there's I don't see any reason why we would move away from that today go ahead Callum with your follow-up

symptoms are people who are fully vaccinated uh presenting and how severe are they with they would understand there's only a few hospitalizations but can you elaborate on the types of illness that people are experiencing yeah there's a range of people some people asymptomatic and they're still testing positive to people with especially in kids may have the sniffles or something and but a number of people by reports you know they're having a what they call a flu-like illness you may have several days of a fever headache aches and pains cough uh it's not pleasant but when we say severe and it means that you're not sick enough to end up in in the hospital doesn't mean that it's we can just dismiss that illness as well as what the premier has said before about that you know the mental health impacts and and what the consequences of of having covidar to those around you who then have to isolate as well it's you know we're not being dismissive of this but we're also saying with that we have to focus on the less on the number total number of cases and more on are we controlling things enough and limiting the severe severe illness and and we're you know so that it's about taking those are at greatest risk for severe illness as well as protecting our health care System next we'll go to Danny

Daniel I know that the Queen Elizabeth II hospital is moving back some of the non-urgent surgeries because of Staff who may have been exposed to covid 19. I was wondering if their if the province is looking at reducing the isolation time if a staff member happens to to get what happens to test positive for covid-19 so that there isn't um sort of a dearth of of Staff members for hospitals or will they remain having to isolate for the full two weeks no we're not asking to isolate for the full two weeks if people are fully vaccinated which is the vast majority of healthcare workers are they have to isolate for 72 hours and then have a negative test um but but you know and we want to maintain that standard as possible the the health authorities do have protocols we call them work isolation where if there's critical shortages uh that healthcare workers can come to work uh if they're still in an isolation period in asymptomatic make sure they have rapid testing but you know before they start their shift and extra precautions around PPE masking and things but you know we only use those where there's critically critical shortages it's important that way as much as possible we follow the the procedures that are in place to minimize the chance of a health care worker being infectious when they're at work go ahead Danielle with your follow-up um yes this is for the premier uh just to slightly change tracks here what do you make of the legal claims by Northern pulp that the province owes it a billion half a billion dollars sorry and that it conspired to stop it from meeting a January 30th deadline for a new effort treatment plan um I've been very vocal on this in the past um I've always you know as much as the company wanted to enter settlement discussions with the province I always we said no to that and said if they had a case to bring they should bring it before the courts they've now decided that they have a court case to bring and they brought it before the courts and we'll let the courts decide on that next we'll go to Paul bacon from all Nova Scotia go ahead Paul Premier uh the business grant you announced uh earlier that domini is coming from the unspent fund that's administered by Dao that was set up by the previous government is that correct yeah that's correct there's somewhere in the range of 10 million dollars at DAV Halsey that's we we never closed off any of those programs that money was still there and and that's the money we'll use that to start uh if we need more we'll put more there we're going to be there to support the businesses as much as we can go ahead Paul with your follow-up

not enough people to administer the shots or is it vaccine Supply or something else no I mean we have lots that we're getting maximizing our capacity uh it's really about making sure that each age core cohort gets a reasonable time to get immunized uh and we're starting with those who are at greatest risk we're at 60 plus uh which is a big chunk of our population and we're those who are immune compromised and we're doing 5 to 11 year olds so we're still immunizing lots of people uh and we'll get to the younger age groups as sequentially uh as as we uh move through time and uh and have you know we have you know the ability in in our in our system but we have lots of capacity to immunize people and we have lots of vaccine next we'll go to John McPhee from The Chronicle Herald go ahead John thank you

I've given the the case Spike such as perhaps reducing the maximum the maximum number of people at a household Gathering which is now 20. uh built in the Sun so we only put measures in that come into effect today uh every layer of restrictions has their own set of impacts so as I said we have really we have the right balance uh for today uh it'll take us about a week to see the impact uh of that and uh what's what's one of the key important things is that we need Nova scotians to buy into this and everybody to slow down uh it doesn't take restrictions uh us us restricting things to get everybody to slow down um but we're going to be patient we'll watch things carefully as I said it'll take about a week to see the impact of our restrictions but always uh we are we are continue to assess uh things in terms of our

hospitalizations are there impacts from Staffing on the Health Care system on a daily basis we have conversations with the premier's office on a daily basis and if we need to uh you know uh make further changes we will do those but I don't you know again this is about a balance we've set a pleth in place we have to have a little bit of patience to see what is the impact of what what came into effect at nine o'clock this morning

thank you and this is again for Dr string the rate of full vaccination uh two doses uh has been stuck in the 82 percent range for a while can we assume that's going to be it in terms of the vaccination level in The Province and given the contagiousness of uh of the Omicron variant is that a concern well I'd like to get it as high as possible and that you know I think yeah there's always going to be a a a a small proportion of the population which is not going to get vaccinated and we believe that maybe around five percent uh we're getting close which would mean that for those who are eligible that we should you know we're we're 95 percent of us should be immunized and we're getting up there or today we're at 82.4 percent and when hearing anecdotally that with concerns about Omicron and other things we're still getting people coming forward to start their vaccination series but that last few percent I mean every percent is ten thousand people it is so that's not going to move very very far or very fast but but it we are we are among we're leading along with a couple of other of our Atlantic uh provinces colleagues we are leading the country in our vaccination rate and and I think we we can we have to uh trust that that uh that the not that we can re you know rest and not continue to vaccinate but our what we've done in the work the Nova scotians have done to get to that high level of vaccination is going to have a substantive positive impact in limiting the uh the severity of this Omicron wave just on that as well I think it's important to note that as much as we're in the 82 range we still have about 10 percent of our population that is under under 11 years old a great majority of them are getting vaccinated we're pretty encouraged by the vaccination rates are happening there but none of them are second dose yet they're all first dosed and they're in that so once we get them through the second dose you'd see that percentage jump into the range that Dr Strang is talking about so I don't want that to be lost either next we'll go to Eloise Rodriguez kissy Bash from Radio Canada go ahead Eloise hi uh Dr Strang we're seeing numbers that we've never seen before seeing how fast the spread is do you suspect that most of these cases are on the cross and how many samples have you sent off to identify if it is this variant Joe I don't have a number we continue to send isolates off to uh to uh the National Lab and we're also working at developing our own capacity to get the confirmatory uh um a test here locally uh we do know that the initial one sent off there were some were Omicron some were Delta but if we're you know we look around the world uh we we fully expect that a growing proportion of our cases are going to be uh going to be in the Omicron strain over the in the days ahead go ahead Eloise with your follow-up thank you um so I'm hearing a lot of frustration among Nova scotians because there's been over a thousand cases this week and yet the number of people in hospitals is quite low so if you're not basing yourself on Hospital capacity to put in these restrictions um can you explain to these people what you're basing yourself on so as I said we're uh it's we can't just um there's too many unknowns and then we can't uh we can't just uh sit back and let Omicron spread unchecked so we put what is a balanced approach of going back to phase four restrictions was there a significant reduction in how people move about and their especially their social activities all of which have major major impacts so we don't do that lightly and we're not going to do that unnecessarily um as but what we we have we have to slow things down and we can't just let Omicron spread unchecked because of the uncertainties uh and that's why we continue to watch very carefully where we're at in terms of the whole goal of doing this is to uh is to start to have an impact on slowing down the spread and and and and and starting to see over the next week or so the case numbers at least plateauing and that's where we need the help of all of all Nova scotians I again all of us need to slow down and be more cautious and careful about our social contacts um but again if we did nothing we put too much of a risk of putting those who are vulnerable at risk and putting our Health Care system at risk so we're taking this balanced approach and we'll adjust as necessary next we'll go to Tim bousquet from the health oximeter go ahead Tim

this morning the New York Times reported that the AstraZeneca as I've seen is essentially uh close to worthless in terms of dealing with the Omicron variant there's an awful lot of people out there including myself who got one shot of AstraZeneca and one Mr RNA vaccine we're not in any position now to get a booster shot which would effectively just be two vaccines that work against omicron should should there be a new approach for people who got one or two doses of AstraZeneca know my understanding of the evidence that we've got a what's called a mixed schedule uh that you get very good protection and in some people some of the experts would say you have the best protection because the type of protection immunity you get from the uh viral Vector AstraZeneca or Johnson Johnson vaccines is slightly different from what you get from an MRI vaccine uh well I think that I haven't seen the evidence or the paper you're talking about but I think it's people who are only immunized only had a viral Vector vaccine uh and the majority we have some but the majority of Nova scotians have have had mRNA vaccine or at least had the mixed mixed schedule that we believe

uh are comfortable that there is still good protection uh especially against severe disease from either those mixed schedules or uh or two doses of mRNA vaccine go ahead Tim with your follow-up yes um I wonder if she could speak about the coveted notification app we we all kind of got rid of it because there was so little uh coveted in the province and it was eating up our our phone batteries um should we all uh reinstall that and make use of it I It's Curious that no one's even mentioning it so that was a federal initiative and I haven't I mean a lot of that depends on how effective it is and useful it is depends on the uptake and I I to be honest I haven't heard uh anything from the federal government about that uh notification for quite a while next we'll go to Pat Healy from the Laker go ahead Pat hi this question for Dr Strang realizing this has been going on for almost two years realistically what is the Benchmark for us to learn to live with Colby well I think you know right now we're faced with another challenge because of the variant with a lot of unknowns uh uh but it's uh you know the hope and I think there's a you know a lot of people would say that we get through the Omicron uh wave over there over the coming weeks uh and we continue to use vaccine to whether it's two doses or three doses where necessary that we get and we get I think one of the key things is getting those five to eleven and even under five fully immunized that puts us in a much better position with uh with high levels of of immunity to then really make the transition to uh to moving away from uh from a pandemic response and lift you know having to use you know mandatory kind of restrictions and measures but we're not there yet go ahead Pat with your follow-up

Premier Houston and Dr

in the past 21 months they saw the light at the end of the tunnel now it's the last couple of weeks and even the last few days it seems the light is further away if Nova scotians are feeling exhausted how are each of you and your teams doing as the case number surge well I'll be honest I'm tired too uh and I get it why people are disappointed we thought we were here you know getting here in the fall and then now we thought we were getting here in Christmas but you know the pandemic isn't kind but we still have to respond and I I have teams of people and people across the Health Care system that are exhausted um that is why we all have to dig deep but people have to understand how hard my colleagues in government Healthcare System have worked for the last two years almost and that we that's what we need everybody to dig deep now uh and and we need all Nova scotians to do what they can just to uh support the though my colleagues who have been working to to take care of you uh for the last two years thank you thank you Pat for that important question I think all of us questions are definitely exhausted by it but um I'm particularly concerned about our about our healthcare workers and the folks at public health and and their families you know who are you know it's constantly on the mind um were they exposed or are they safe are they you know are they able to keep their colleagues safe so so it's been a it's been a it's been a long run for everyone uh and you're right that light does seem a little further ahead a little further away at the moment and it is a little further away but it's still there uh and and we just keep going forward we deal with what's in front of us and uh that's what makes us balloon ours is we uh put our put our put our head down and get to work and that we'll get through this next we'll go to Lindsay Armstrong from the coast go ahead Lindsay thank you very much what is your advice for Nova scotians who are planning travel within Canada for the holidays so I would say people have travel plans slow down um uh stick close to home even within the province if we're really going to focus on uh having small social numbers we saw everything well how many people even we're going to uh have for our Christmas dinner uh how many social events are you going to go to and and you have to think about is that travel really necessary at this time at this time of the year uh it's it's all over it's uh it's an obligation of all of us to make really safe choices for ourselves for our families and for our fellow Nova scotians just a reminder if you've just joined us please ensure your lines are on mute if you're not speaking um go ahead Lindsay with your follow-up thank you thank you very much for that I'm wondering if you were looking at border restrictions or isolation requirements at the borders given the Boost of cases canada-wide well we already have uh you know restrictions that if people are coming in here they're not fully vaccinated they have to isolate and be tested before they can come out of that isolation uh the reality is is that uh that uh you know Omicron is here and it's spreading within Nova Scotia so there's right now I don't see a much of a value add to tightening down herbar or borders but if we have to go further and look at further restrictions we would certainly be looking at the border along with other things that as as what is the value of of of tightening those down but I don't see that at this point in time next we'll go to Lois and Dort from the guys bro Journal go go ahead yes hello good afternoon thank you for taking my question um I'd like to ask how many rapid tests does the province have to distribute and will they be funneled toward areas with an outbreak such as the Antigonish Community Health Network so I don't have a number in front of me of a number of test kits we've had a significant Supply but we're going through it rapidly we're certainly looking at different ways whether with the federal government or ourselves as the province procuring more test kits and as I said we're I mean I have teams of people actively looking at and bringing forward to me recommendations in the next few days about how we prioritize and how we use both our lab PCR testing and our rapid

testing and we'll have more to say on the specifics of that uh by middle of next week go ahead Lois and on your follow-up okay thank you

thank you we have the staff to do contract contract facing as we did earlier and customer limits reinstated in businesses like grocery stores particularly in outbreak areas such as in the Anakin disguise Road Community Health Network so it's always about balance all the measures you say uh closing schools as we know we've learned the last few years closing schools has a significant impact on on on on on young people not just their learning but their social emotional development has impacts upon families so every restriction has its own set of impacts so we always work to as I said on Monday always trying to find the least amount of restrictions necessary and when you do apply them you use them for the shortest period of time possible but things have changed quickly so what was what was appropriate and necessary this week is different from what was appropriate and necessary even last week next we'll go to Drake lathers from the port hacksbury reporter go ahead Drake wondering what the most we've realized or discovered coming from the recent outbreak here in anaganesh do you I didn't catch the first part of your question uh just what were the most concerning thing that we've discovered coming from this most recent outbreak in any Ganesh well I think it's really an understanding that uh of you know when that in the confirmation that we know from other places that how infectious and how easy uh easily spread the Omicron variant is and how quickly that expanded go ahead Drake with your follow-up and does the problem have a handle on how the virus or the virus spreading outside of of the same effects and Antigonish outbreak so I think what we understand there was a lot of you know a lot of people were in uh from the Halifax area in other parts of the province were in Antigonish for that weekend it's we have lots of ex-grads throughout the province and it's an important event for them uh and and so there's lots of movement of people and the virus moves with people and uh and and now especially in the Halifax area and from there it started because it's so highly infectious it started to spray it spread from there and that's all the time we have for questions today go ahead premiere thank you Tina thank you Dr Strang um it's not supposed to feel like this on the on the Friday before Christmas but as we enter the holiday season remember uh slow down 20 is plenty uh I wish everyone a Happy safe and slow holiday season and encourage you to to make the most of it under the under the circumstances whatever comes in 2022 with the strong guidance of Dr Strang and his team at public health and the amazing commitment of Nova scotians I know we can handle it thank you

moderator for today's news conference before we begin i'd like to introduce the honorable tim houston premier of the province of nova scotia and dr robert strang chief medical officer of health for nova scotia go ahead premier thank you marvel good afternoon everyone i'm speaking to you from my home in pixar county well we're seeing firsthand how quickly things can change that's why we're here today between the high number of cases we're seeing between the hospitalizations we're seeing and healthcare workers being off isolating as close contacts we need to go further than the restrictions that had already been announced we need to tighten up to make sure that we do what we can to minimize the spread to protect our vulnerable and to make sure that we don't overwhelm the health care system so dr strange will go into some detail on some new restrictions but but i want to point out a couple of things off the top uh number one we need to change our approach to testing we've been leaders in testing and nova scotians love to test thank you for that uh but the reality is we don't have an unlimited supply of tests and we need to continue to lead in testing but this time we need to be uh leading in very focused testing so right now is the time to make sure for that we have tests available for those that are symptomatic uh we need to do this to support our lab team so we'll talk about a testing strategy but please don't hoard the the self test the home test uh we'll continue to lead but it'll be it'll be leading in focused testing uh number two the uh the omnicron data is coming in from around the world and there are really they're differing opinions on the severity of the illness our reality here in nova scotia is that we are seeing hospitalizations we started to see hospitalizations this weekend and now we have 10 people in the hospital uh since the outbreak started um two weeks ago 10 people might not sound like much but it's but it's certainly an increase against the backdrop of the well-known stresses that were already on our health care system and so we need to take steps to support our health care workers and we need to take this increase in hospitalizations very seriously and the third thing i want to talk to you off the top is you know we're seeing human resource issues impact service it's not necessarily that people are extremely sick but it's not they're having to isolate so we're seeing this in healthcare but not just in in healthcare other critical systems uh and first uh first responders and essential services we're seeing it in police fire transit we're seeing it in many places there's a lot of people that are off work because they're isolating so we have to take steps now to to really slow down the spread and to protect all of these services so all of these all of these facts point to the need to tighten up so so tighten up is what we'll do it's that simple covet has asked a lot of our essential service teams they've been flat out for almost two years they've had no slow periods no breaks these are our family our friends and our neighbors they're hurting um they're under pressure mentally and and physically and have been for a while so we're asking a lot of nova scotians uh we're sorry to do that uh i'm sorry we have to do that um but we have to we have to tighten up the restrictions um there have been many questions about boosters i will tell you this public health is working to do whatever it takes to get booster doses in eligible arms um it's it's important to these boosters are important to combat the variant but they're also extremely important for our collective mental health um the the political decision almost the easy thing would be just to simply say we'll get doses in everyone's arms right away um but that's not the right move uh not only is it at odds with the science it's just not practical the supply is not there um look at the um hunger games type environment that we're seeing taking place in other jurisdiction other jurisdictions that benefits no one so saying you can get a booster just so that it sounds good it doesn't it doesn't help anyone the right move is to stick with the science just like we always have here in nova scotia and the science um we focus on is advice from uh from nasi and we we we have um in dr strang we have we have the best in the country so we'll continue to listen to dr strang and focus on the science it's always served us well in the past and it will serve us well going forward so what the science does say is that the booster doses are most effective for anyone 18 and older um if it's if it's been at least six months since their second dose so we'll stick to that six month guidance um but here's here's the here's the reality by mid-january almost 640 000 nova scotians will tip over that six-month mark they are not all there today but over the next few weeks they will be uh and those people are our primary focus but we don't have 640 000 booster doses we're working with the federal government to increase our supply but so is everyone else so today we have around 100 000 doses so for for this reason and to avoid the hunger games type scenario here in our province where we're the most vulnerable um we want up the most vulnerable to get their booster first so what we can do is we can open up uh to those over 50 and over six months and we can do them we will do that tomorrow uh effective tomorrow that that cohort alone over 50 and over six months since their second dose we will that will consume those hundred thousand doses uh for everyone else uh i want you to know we're working uh with the federal government and we hope to have the necessary doses in time to meet the need over those next couple weeks we've requested those doses um and as soon as we get those massive quantities we will open it to everyone that meets the nasty eligibility um of of six months but between today and then we have to be we have to be smart with what we have if nasty changes its guidance we will too and again we'll be working with the federal government but we're not in the business of doting nasi uh we're not there's no need to to dote the six-month eligibility uh criteria uh we won't and and you shouldn't either um six month is the trigger and we're working with the federal government to get those to get

those doses so um and i can i can promise you that the team at public health and the department and and our team we're working tirelessly to ramp up it is going to take time but it's coming um it may take time to get your appointment um but we're looking at the supply and once we have the supply we'll we'll get we'll get we'll get things really rolling so it doesn't do anybody any good to allow appointments to be booked only to find out later on that they can't be filled we don't want to go there that wouldn't be fair we will have new appointments opening as soon as we have the certainty over the supply minister thompson spoke with the the federal minister yesterday and has and and again today and i think those discussions are probably happening right now uh we're we're pushing for those doses so um we'll work to increase the speed of those boosters the team has accomplished a lot this this month already i don't want to give the impression that there's not a lot of boosters have gone in you know as children became eligible they were getting their shots the immuno compromise those who live in long-term care homes those that have been over 60 front line health care professionals these have all been the focus and that was the right focus and now we'll expand that focus and we'll continue to push for supply so i don't think anyone would argue that getting these key and vulnerable groups back with their boosters and vaccinations first was the right way so so we'll expand the focus the boosters are coming um i can tell you that dr strang and public health and myself we met with um we met with ian rankin and gary burrell this morning and we have a few takeaways from that meeting uh some great some great points were raised there one of them was around paid sick time and we've already we're already working on looking at ways to stand up the old program again and we've reached out to the federal government so we can all be on the same page as we were last time so there's a lot that that's moving that's moving um the ask of nova scotians um is just be extra cautious while you wait for your booster be extra cautious in in limiting your your contacts that's that's something that's in your control that's your decision so please slow down please be cautious uh i know you will and and we appreciate it dr strang

thank you premier and good afternoon everybody if you'd asked me in november what i thought of the holidays would look like i certainly would not have come close to imagining uh where we are today uh until omicron nova scotia has uh or we were set to have a relatively smooth holiday season uh instead we are battling a new variant and moving backwards unfortunately not forwards what we know about the omicron variant is impacting uh our our province uh and and how it is doing that is changing as fast as the virus is spreading the restrictions that we announced last tuesday just will not be enough to protect our health care system at our most vulnerable the cases continue to rise hospitalizations are starting to increase and we now have outbreaks in two outbreaks in hospitals and several in long-term care facilities and we have staffing shortages throughout our health care system and other critical services with many people uh either being sick or isolating so this is just not sustainable and we need to lock down even further to lessen the impact and make sure that we have the staff that we need to provide care to nova scotians when they need it so new restrictions will be come to effect uh 6 a.m on tomorrow wednesday uh december 22nd and will be in place at least until january the 12th we will continue to monitor things closely and regularly reassess the need for any further changes so i'll give you an overview of their new restrictions now and you can find full details in the press release that has been issued today as well but first of all the distancing and masking requirements and uh announced last week remain into effect we are lowering the informal gathering limit to 10 people from the same household or in a consistent social group i know this is not welcome used to people with big families but our goal is to slow things down and limit our contacts larger groups larger groups do the opposite they give the virus more room to spread festivals special events sports events and in-person performances will be paused groups of 10 indoors and 25 outdoors can participate in sport practices and training but spectators games and tournaments will not be allowed and the same group sizes uh will be allowed for arts and culture rehearses rehearsals and for virtual performances but again no spectators uh no no performances or competitions and no in sorry no competitions and no in-person performances will be allowed for events held by a recognized business or organization the gathering limit uh will now be 25 percent of legal legal capacity to a maximum of 50 people indoors and outdoors so this includes things like faith services wedding ceremonies funerals and associated visitations movie theaters meetings and training uh for weddings and funerals uh receptions will not be allowed but uh we we allow the actual ceremony and with funerals associated visitations for uh it's important at this time of year but in-person faith services will only be allowed to have one person singing uh we'll not allow choirs or congregational singing and that's simply a reflection of singing significantly increases uh the likelihood of spread of virus into shared airspace and food and liquor license establishments like bars and restaurants if they have performance will only be able to have uh one singer places like retail businesses malls museums libraries and recreation and leisure businesses and organizations will be able to continue to operate but at fifty percent capacity and for for them that they previously established plans to uh with directional arrows and other things that help control the flow of people and keep distancing uh we're asking him to put those back into place as quickly as possible to manage that 50 capacity fitness and recreational facilities can continue to operate at 50 capacity and that's in recognition of the importance of of people uh to have opportunities to

maintain their physical and mental health and we will allow one-on-one personal training to continue

uh food and liquor license establishments uh can continue to operate but at fifty percent capacity uh and there needs to be a physic required physical distancing between tables and there will now be a limit of ten people per table and as well they will have to stop dine in service at eleven p.m and close to seated uh any seated service at midnight but take out and pick up will still be allowed beyond midnight personal services like hair salons we'll be able to continue to operate at their maximum capacity with physical bussinessing but services that require the removal of masks by the client will not be allowed to be offered we also need to make some changes to the restrictions that protect vulnerable residents and long-term care homes we will now have a limit of two consistent visitors per resident so uh we'll still the importance of still allowing social interaction but families and friends will have to choose two consistent people to be the visitors and one or both of those could be also be the designated caregiver residents will only be able to leave the facility their their residential care facility for medical appointments uh or for a drive in a facility vehicle or a drive with one of their uh one or both of their two consistent visitors um even if those people the residents are fully vaccinated uh and res it will only be residents who have had a booster dose uh that will be able to access service providers within the facility for recreational activities and personal services like hair styling it's it's certainly much easier to read off this list of restrictions than it is to implement and follow them but i'm asking for everybody's support and your help to follow these to understand them and follow them to help us slow down uh the spread of this uh very infectious uh variant of of covert 19 to protect those who are more vulnerable in our health care system and other critical services

next i want to talk about some of the important changes to our testing program these changes do not come easily we have built our pandemic response uh with a key component of testing and that has been uh recognized nationally and internationally and certainly the commitment of nova scotians the testing has been uh has been incredible but omicron and the challenges it's is presenting is forcing us to change our approach before i share the details i do want to address some concerning behavior that's been reported from staff and volunteers at our various testing and distribution sites there have been numer numerous reports of people being physically uh and verbally abusive uh making physical threats and even stealing test kits this is just not acceptable we've gotten this far caring about and supporting one another by making personal sacrifices for our collective well-being so please let's not stop that now we do not have an unlimited supply of rapid test kits we are working rapidly to get as much as we can but it's not unlimited across the country it's not unlimited and we only have so many people who can staff assessment centers without borrowing from other parts of the health care system and our lab has limits as well these are facts we can't change we have to deal with them therefore we need to change our testing program to make sure that the people who need tests the most get them first that means we'll be limiting pcr testing to people who have symptoms or are close contacts and are at increased risk for severe disease or live in a congregate living setting or integral to keeping our health care system running for everyone else even those with symptoms who aren't in one of the above groups you will need to start using rapid tests if your rapid test is positive you will not you'll no longer need to do a follow-up pcr test you assume you have covered and then follow with isolation and notifying your close contacts people have become used to using rapid tests i acknowledge that and using those to make sure they don't have coven we encouraged you to do this to stay safe uh over the last number of weeks and months but that was before we knew what omicron would bring with the volume of cases we need to prioritize our supply and prioritize our whole testing capacity to ensure that those who need a test get one and get a timely return of their results well this means we will no longer make rapid tests widely available we won't be restocking public libraries or any other places where we've had uh ready access to uh rapid tests we're also pausing our workplace testing programs in lower risk workplaces so if you're going to hospitals or pharmacies looking for rapid tests please stop you won't find any there either and please do not hoard or stockpile the existing rapid tests you have only use them when you need to and please share them with others if you have a supply if they need one for the testing reasons that we've outlined above i certainly appreciate all nova scotian's commitment to testing we have done uh you you've done this because we've asked you to do this but we now need to change uh simply because of this have the pressures and the requirements of omicron

we'll have more to say about this later this week we're working out some of the final details that including how exactly we will distribute rapid test kits so those who need who need them because they're symptomatic or a contact you know they they can get a rapid test kit uh our newer pro this new approach will take effect december 22nd but i want to reassure people moving forward that if you meet the criteria for a test whether it's pcr or rapid test kit you will have access to one but we have to put limits on how we're using uh other types of testing that are lower priority

the situation with omicron is also making a booster dose that much more important the premier's asked us all in the health system to pull out all the stops to make this happen more quickly and we're talking to all our partners in urgently working on solutions to get booster doses into arms as quickly as possible as soon as people are eligible at their six-month mark we've already opened up additional appointments for booster doses for those 60 plus in the last few weeks and later this week 75 000 appointments will open for early january also in january any unfilled pediatric appointments at the iwk clinic will be converted to appointments for adult booster doses and then our mobile outreach team will start giving out more than four thousand uh a fourth we're sorry we'll give out about four thousand more vaccine doses every week so starting this thursday uh december 23rd booking will open to those age 50 to 59 who have reached the 168 days after their second dose of covid vaccine we asked everybody else those under 50 to please be patient we are working as hard as we can to get more vaccines from the federal government and to add more clinics and appointments our goal is to open booster dose appointments to those under 50 as soon as possible and then you in the new year but as the premier said we have always followed the principle that we can't we will not open appointments until we had certainty of vaccine supply uh from the very beginning of our vaccine program that has served us well we have not had the confusion and disappointment and frustration that many other jurisdictions have had about by getting their appointments ahead of their vaccine supply but we are working as diligently as we can to increase our vaccine supply as quickly as possible i want to end today speaking to you from my heart this is a worrisome sad and frustrating time as your chief medical officer of health i feel immense pressure to make the right decisions to protect nova scotians and to find the best balance to minimize harm from covid and covid control measures i'm not going to get it right every time in retrospect perhaps we did not get things quite right last week things are changing fast with this new variant and there is limited information but please know that my recommendations and decisions always have the best interests of all nova scotians in mind so again i'm asking for your help and your continued support to our pandemic response what we're asking you to do now is probably the most difficult requests we have made yet this is a long two years and there's a lot of disappointment about having to do this yet again in the holiday season but that we have that that is our reality and we have to deal with it so i hope you take advantage of a quieter holiday season to slow down and reflect on what is most important friends family and good health hope is fundamental to the true meaning of christmas and so i ask all nova scotians of all faiths and beliefs to keep your hope and your love for one another care for one another be kind to one another support one another and we will get through this and i'd like to pass on there all nova scotians my sincere wishes for a happy healthy and slow holiday season back to you marla

thank you dr strang and thank you premier uh we'll now take questions from reporters we have a number of reporters on the line so we'll do our best to get to as many as possible in the amount of time that we have we'll start with graham benjamin with global go ahead graham hi there thank you question for the premier um how close are we to imposing border restrictions with the other atlantic provinces we've seen newfoundland and uh prince edward island take these measures um are we close to doing that before christmas um a lot of doctors trying to kind of elaborate but but the answer is we're not we're not focused on border restrictions right now obviously i respect uh newfoundland's decision and and pei's decision um they have a bit different situation their islands you know their bit different stage um in this kind of outbreak but but where we are right now i mean we have 500 cases a day for for four four plus days now a record number of cases we we have we have a lot of covid around us um and that's not a great certainly not a great feeling it's a reality so the border the border measures um tend to be effective when you're trying to keep covid out but we we have it here now so we're focused on on the restrictions and and just don't forget that we we the border there's border bin border restrictions in place all along um if you're if you're not vaccinated and and you're coming into nova scotia you still have an obligation to to isolate so um it's um i'll get dr strange to elaborate but it's not it's not been a topic of our recent discussions that that border uh restrictions at this stage would help us get get further get up get through this actually i know the premier's right i mean uh the border is and what pei and newfoundland are doing is to help uh keep the virus out and you know i talked with dr morrison in pei earlier today and they're still seeing most of their cases are coming from people traveling into the province so they're they're in a very different place unfortunately we were one of we are we are have a much different and higher level of covid and in fact we were exporting covid to uh new brunswick and pei a couple of weeks ago so we always you know say is any restrictions we put in are they necessary are they needed um and certainly at this point in time border restrictions have a lot of negative impacts and are not going to have a any real substantive benefit to our covid response ram do you have a follow-up question i do yes i just wanted to ask dr strange just about um the testing strategy and the changes there just uh we're seeing for example this morning just five over 500 people in bedford all waiting for rapid tests you also said there's some stockpiling of testing happening as well do you feel that there's just been this over emergence of um like just uh reliance on rapid testing um over others health and safety measures like masking sanitizing physical distancing things like that so i mean we i think nova

scotians we've asked them to add in regular testing to part of their their covert response and we've done that for the last year so um you know i'm not you know we don't we're not blaming people for that we're they're doing what we've asked but circumstances are now different but it is also important that you know people are i'm certainly hearing anecdotes or people are saying uh i got a i got a rapid test that's negative therefore i'm okay uh omicron uh is even more because it's so infectious you could have a rapid test today and be uh and be negative and tomorrow you'll be positive in fact we're dealing with a cluster of cases that all bunch of people who believing they were doing the right thing did rapid tests a few days ago all went to a party together well now we have a bunch of them are tested or positive cases because many of them just tested positive the next day so rapid testing has its place but it's critically important that uh people stop their social activities as much as possible do not use rapid testing as a reason to say well i can then i'm okay i'm negative i can go continue my social activities uh and and therefore we're asking people to change their behavior around how they around getting tests uh and then how they use those tests we need to prioritize people who need to have a test because they're symptomatic or other reasons need to have access to either pcr or rapid test kit and people who don't need those tests tests should not be looking to get rapid tests moving forward just if i could on that marla i think this is a really important question because the nova scotians have taken great pride in in their their testing and and it's it's it's it's a community service really but with this with this variant um if a person is exposed to covet this morning and they test tonight they're going to test negative if they test tomorrow they're going to test negative the day after they're going to test negative because the virus has to be in a person's body kind of growing i guess they use a technical term for at least 72 hours so so we're seeing people test every day thinking they're fine when really they need to be watching the calendar thinking about their contacts thinking about their own exposure and testing at the appropriate time so nova scotians have done what we asked uh but not now now now the ask is that we do focused testing uh because um the testing is a peace of mind but if you if you're not testing at the appropriate time it's it's a false sense of security and um there's no room for a false sense of securities in in this environment right here so so we have to be smart with our testing um we'll we'll lead in testing but it'll be in in focus testing and we just need to kind of share that educational piece with nova scotians because we do hear a lot i tested negative two times in a row and then i've tested positive well that's because you tested at the appropriate time in that last test so um so thank you for asking that important question about testing thank you we'll go to keith do set next with the canadian press go ahead keep

keith are you there

okay we'll come back to keith we'll go to generation cbc

i think we might be having trouble with our mute button here my apologies there we go all right uh dr strange i'm going to start where you ended this with a bit of a maya culpa about last week what should or could you have done last week that would have made things any better this week no i'm just one i just wanted to point out to people that uh you know that people who are looking at things in hindsight that maybe we should have acted differently a bit a bit harder we're hearing that that criticism but uh uh there's i just wanted to let people know that we're aware of that uh we're always trying to make decisions on the best information and try to find the right balance and just and and in retrospect in hindsight that maybe we didn't get the balance quite right last week but again a lot has changed between last tuesday and today as well so um i just want people to hear that uh that you know we're always think you know we're always i always continue to question i asked my teammates a question do we have things right and did we get that decision right so uh and and just looking backwards sometimes you go maybe we could have maybe we maybe we would done exactly the same thing but just people to know that we're uh that we're not just making decisions and and just believing we're absolutely got it completely right and and and um but these are very difficult uh times with rapidly changing information john do you have a follow-up question i do and and i apologize it's going to sound like i'm picking on you dr strang but last week it seems to me you said that uh supply wasn't an issue in terms of vaccines uh nor was staffing how did that change uh in just a week no that was we were talking about where we were uh at the current time we were we were always been working and trying to increase our supply and in into january uh and increase our vaccination uh capacity um but uh you know we've been focusing our vaccine efforts through the november december in some major other areas yeah uh kids uh uh you know immunocompromised and the long-term care facilities uh with with additional doses the vaccine and doing as much as we could 16 above with the booster doses and we are going to be shifting some of the from those other areas into more emphasis on booster doses but moving forward we clearly know that we need to get it more vaccine and as we we will build capacity to deliver as much vaccine as we can get okay we'll go back to keith do you set with the canadian press keith are you there uh yeah dr strang i was wondering in terms of numbers per hundred thousand can we put this in context for nova scotians in terms of the severity of the outbreak here are we in fact

the highest in canada at this point in terms of our outbreak um i haven't looked at that directly i'm i've i've seen some stuff and you know that people have told me i haven't seen the data directly that we are among uh some of the highest rates in uh uh in nova scotia and certainly the halifax area for a hundred thousand um so but you know it is what it is so that that that just highlights the seriousness of the situation we have and why we have to uh focus on uh on controlling this as quickly as we can and keeping the level of spread within quite frankly the capacity of our health care system to deal with uh even a very small percentage of people getting more severely ill uh that we have to keep that within the capacity of our health care system and both for covid but also if our health care system gets overwhelmed and there's all sorts of other non-coded health care needs that can't be met effectively as well keith do a follow-up question uh yes i do uh in terms of uh holiday season travel within the province uh i don't think i heard you say anything about that if you did i must have missed it but i'm just wondering what your advice is to people who may uh want to drive from one community to another at this point um what can we talk about i'm hoping nova scotians can understand that we're saying slow down uh limit your social contacts that that clearly means be careful and be thoughtful about what kind of travel you're doing um you know that that's that to me would be inherent and part of this just slow down stay close to home stay in small groups now we will get to see your border family and your friends and you know across the province you know at some point in 2022 but not right now next we'll go to sarah plowman with ctv go ahead sarah dr strang given where we are now i was wondering if you could help nova scotians brace themselves for maybe what's to come like what would be the best case scenario here and perhaps what you guys are looking at potentially one of the worst case scenarios in terms of numbers and hospitalizations well we're realistic even if we stayed at around and we're likely to see our you know our 400 maybe 450 500 cases a day will be around for at least uh in the next week um and we you know we're seeing you know one to two new hospitalizations a day over the last few days uh that is uh kind of the best case scenario because we are i think one of the reasons we are not seeing exponential growth in cases as you know last week people started to slow down uh we put restrictions on last tuesday that came into work effect friday so where we it usually takes about you know with the time somebody's exposed then it's about four to five days before they get positive and so we're always four to five days behind at least to see the impact of our measures so i think we are starting to see the benefit and you know plateauing where more of a plateauing effect but still that's at a very high you know five four hundred fifty five hundred cases a day will put pressure on our health care system so we have to go further and and uh the and and the the what we expecting to see and this is all dependent on nova scotians really taking to heart what we said last week and we're emphasizing strengthening today slow down stay close to home small groups uh only only you know it's you know really really necessary activities and if we all do that we will start to see a slowing down of the transmission of even omicron because even though it's highly infectious uh it can't spread if if you have if you're if we're following the public health uh measures it'll it will be some spread but will be much lower spread and our case numbers should start to come down and therefore our so our our impact and severe illness should start to come down uh but we need to get we're going to need to stick with this for a few weeks to really bring things back down into a much safer level sarah do you have a follow-up question yeah if people don't do that what's the worst case here or not worse but what what could we see i just want people to understand what we could see here well if we continue to have ongoing high case numbers and and building hospitalization rates we reach a point where our health where our health care system uh becomes very very challenged from two perspectives higher numbers of people requiring medical care in hospitals and worsening of an already existing uh uh challenges around getting the number of health care workers we need uh simply because uh of of we have many many healthcare workers who are isolating can't come to work because they are either a case or a contact so both of those together are not a pretty scenario in terms of the ability of us to continue to deliver uh fundamentally important health care so it's in all of our best interests to do what we're asking you to do to follow the rules and your own personal measures because all of us none of us know when we will need the health healthcare system to be there for us or for our families okay we'll go next to greg mercer with the globe and mail go ahead greg all right thank you uh question for dr strang wondering if the province is uh is planning to change its advice to health care workers around around isolation in other words is there a do you expect a move towards what they call a test to stay approach to avoid some of the staffing shortages that you've been describing so i know my colleagues in the health authorities the infection prevention control folks who are responsible for these are looking at that uh how we modify some of that but at the end of the day we always have to be cognizant that we uh that that if we go too far in this area we're then actually putting patients at risk of being exposed from the caregivers so it's a fine balance but i know they're looking at how the ways they can modify things while keeping the necessary level of of safety and minimum preventing transmission from healthcare provider to uh to patient greg do you have a follow-up question i do how would you describe how pressing some of the shortages are in the healthcare system right now because of isolation among staff i mean i i i know about it at a very high level i mean uh nsh and iwk can talk more in much more detail but we saw just yesterday that the uh that the nsh is having to uh stop some uh some more uh less less necessary surgeries day surgeries

and other uh elective surgeries because of some of the staffing issues just because they would call them an elective surgery doesn't mean that it's a very not a very important surgery for somebody so these start to have impacts already next we'll go to patrick butler with radio canada go ahead patrick hi uh the premiere of uh my province nicole labrador uh released put out a release about a recent gathering of premieres in atlanta provinces to talk about the situation um i'm wondering whether you know you're talking about following the science on on the boosters question did that science come up um and the differing interpretations of boosters be that who is eligible and the interval between second and third doses has that come up in your conversations given that the differences between the provinces yeah there's look there's always discussions but um for us it's it's we stick to massey so nasty's recommendation is is that six months that's the optimal the optimal time uh to get to get the booster um there's some areas where they're at three months some areas where it's just a free-for-all if you had a if you want your booster go and get it well that could be your you're 18 years old and you got your second dose the day before if you want your booster go and get it so obviously you can see how these types of um these types of uh situations can can lead to what i refer to as the hunger games because i read it read that somewhere that that's actually what it feels like in some areas so we're we're trying to be methodical we're we're respecting nasi if nasty changes will change but right now nasty is saying six months so that's that's the key thing that we're using um i i know that um newfoundland has said uh 22 weeks of so five and a half months and and i certainly respect uh that decision that's that's their decision and other jurisdictions are are doing other things but but um but for us we're sticking to nasi um and and even at sticking to nasty i i thought i was um look we have a supply issue now in talking to the federal government the federal government um has indicated that there's enough boosters for all canadians um so we just need to make sure we get them when we need them and and where we need them so um for us it's not a it's not a big debate we we we we certainly respect those that just move a little bit away from nasi um but that's just not where we're at as a province we're sticking to nasi and no all due respect to other areas for sure did you have a follow-up question yeah i do um and and you say that the vaccine delivery the for boosters is a supply issue given the um surge in cases that we're seeing in nova scotia could this soon become a capacity issue as well in terms of the healthcare system's capacity to give vaccines i don't think so but you know dr strang and and maybe the department can speak to that so look the reality is there's there's three there's three issues that need to be resolved to get the boosters in people's arms number one you have to have them that's the supply uh number two you have to have the capacity of people to actually inject the boosters um and we're we're talking to we will reach out to the canadian armed forces we'll reach out to red cross retired healthcare professionals students all of those resources we're we're having those discussions with and of course the third thing is where do you do it so do you need community halls do you need rinks do you need mass mass clinics and look we're we're we're focused on this we feel the urgency so um i i feel confident in saying that if we get the supply we get the confidence that we have the supply having the people to administer it and having the the place for people to go and do do it those aren't going to be an impediment so so we're working with the with the federal government to get that supply here when we need it and and um as i said we need it over the next couple weeks next we'll go to john mcphie with the chronicle herald go ahead john thank you uh this is a question for dr strang um as you just know that nova scotia has among the highest number of cases per population in the country we we seem to get to that state fairly quickly and i'm wondering why i guess uh particularly given our high level of vaccination and has the omicron variant been been such a factor here that we're getting this number of cases per day i mean can we blame it on that variant absolutely are you know our latest batch of

variant test results that came back so that 83 percent of the late of that more overcrowd so omicron has become rapidly become the dominant uh piece uh or dominant variant i think is an unfortunate set of circumstances where we have this highly infectious variant uh come into the province uh uh a in a location where there was uh where there was a high degree of of social activity amongst large numbers of people um a couple weekends ago around you know around the the x-raying ceremony that was a very unfortunate event that uh that would happen in a different location with the same circumstances you know the same outcome so it's not about blaming sane of x or anybody it's just like the the coinciding of those that large number of people in the social social events with this highly infectious variant which then as they travel back to other parts home to other parts of the province took that you know so that's that's how we then we now have this significant spread within within especially in the halifax area um but you know that that is the that is the nature of omicron uh so it's here uh but i do take uh some heart uh you know our our case numbers climbed rapidly but now will plateau so that you know we'll watch that carefully but maybe that is an early sign of of getting things under control are hospitalization numbers while they're increasing they're not increasing exponent exponentially uh which is a comment which uh a combination of you know many of our cases um have been in younger people uh but also our very high vaccination status that uh that the two doses of vaccine still provides uh some good protection against especially against severe disease against the omicron so i think we we can't uh um that we we can't move away from the

importance of vaccination as being part of our success story and now we need to add in the booster dose uh so it but you know all those factors come together that i it that we have some explain what happened but also some of the the things we have in place that are uh perhaps uh helping us out here but we you know moving forward we all have to focus on what we've talked about today everybody doing their part to slow down their activities and therefore slowing down the spread of covid over the next few weeks john do you have a fall question i do and it's to do with this slowing down advice uh we're in kind of a gray area here we're not in lockdown as such stores are open restaurants are open at least to 50 capacity and we can still visit family who have been within their social circle uh what i i know people are in their own situations in terms of family and travel and that kind of thing but in general what should we be doing over the whole holidays that we normally uh sorry what what should we not be doing over the holidays that we normally might do given that things are still open but we're being told to reduce our activities if i may um i don't think it's a gray area i think they i think their restrictions um should be pretty pretty clear and what you what you shouldn't do is put yourself in a situation where you find out you've got covid and then you're running through who did i see yesterday who did i see the day before who did i see before that and you have this massive list of friends and family that you then have to lay and agonize over with whether you've infected them with coping so what you should do is everything to avoid that that circumstance and limit your contacts um we've said uh groups of 10 in the er or 10 sorry 10 10 in that example uh that doesn't mean you have to go and go find 10 people but that's that's the that's the guidance as to what it is so so what you should do is limit your contacts and slow down that's the way we stop that's the way we we will slow the spread yeah to me it is really you know some common sense that always ask yourself is this necessary that i do it uh and who are the people i'm doing it with uh and even a simple thing like we've now put restrictions on shopping so really we're back to where if at all possible one person from the go shopping you don't need all the whole family to go shopping it's a lot of this is slowing down is really common sense about really thinking about what it is i need to do and who i need to do it with and then stopping all those non-essential things you use the word lockdown we're very cognizant of the lockdown has its own set of substantive implications so this is all about balance so you know and the significant impacts that we've had on people's mental and physical health from social isolation and stopping other activities uh over the last two years so we're cognizant of that and that is why we're we're in limited ways we're keeping social in in interactions between families and people long-term care facilities abilities for people to have some physical activity uh opportunities uh for their mental physical health and and and connecting with others uh so again it's about balance but make your choices wisely around that and follow all the rules around distancing careful masking all those things when you are out and about okay we'll go to lindsey armstrong with the coast next go ahead lindsay thank you dr stein following on that i understand that borders aren't a focus given that covid is in nova scotia you said to slow down and use common sense are you concerned at all that without making uh sort of a stay-at-home request or advisory that people will continue to travel and potentially spread covid so i think all along through the last two years with the vast majority of nova scotians have understood and made the right choices uh i don't think we have to put a travel restriction on to have the vast majority of nova scotians understand that they need to limit their movements

lindsay do you have a follow-up question yes thank you very much i understand that there remains a panorama delay with the high number of cases do we have a sense of how many cases are currently active in the province um i'll be honest and we don't you know we have quite a backlog in terms of cases that are uh you know backlogged first of all and trying to get to them with their their 24-hour notification and and then then for many cases now we will that's the only contact they'll have with public health and we're going to entering minimal data when we when we were able to do that into panorama so and so that really what the the source of truth now for case numbers is our is our daily case numbers coming from the lab uh and our and the more detailed information that we were getting with the you know more detailed data by public health that is no longer feasible and and once we get through this whether we ever get to that or not uh we'll have to look at that but right now we're you know that it's the lab information which is giving us the bare bones as well as we are we're looking at carefully what are our trends in severe disease hospitalization with a focus on how much of our overall capacity are we at and what are the trends of new hospitalizations coming in and the factors around those new hospitalizations so really this is an opportunity to shift away from daily case counts and overall uh indicators of disease and focus much more on one of the indicators of severity which is part of our transition to a more endemic approach yeah and just to i just want to i just want to double down on that one and stress it so because we do get questions about how many active cases there's a lot of covid in nova scotia i think they're just there's a lot of covid in nova scotia so the important things that the the important statistics from from my mind are how many how many new cases in the run of the day and how many hospitalizations um how many active cases it would only be an indicator of if there's much covid around and there's a lot of covid around so people should should act accordingly as if there's a lot of covid around because because there is a lot of people are getting better um but um we just need to we just need to focus

on new cases and hospitalizations i think those are the those are the key things okay we'll go to pat healy with the laker next go ahead pat hi this question is for dr strang last night on uh in an interview dr tam said it was time to get rid of the single layered cloth mask and maybe even the three-ply surgical type mask with only an n95 type mask being a better fit for people's faces will the province be making any changes to what mass nova scotians should be wearing so we are we were uh aware of some changing recommendations coming from the federal government we weren't aware that they were going publicly that's i have people on my team on a on a national call right now and that's one of the topics on the agenda so we'll understand what the federal government is saying uh my understanding is that that that advice is really directed towards both healthcare workers and people who are visiting into healthcare facilities but we'll take the time to understand completely what the the new any new direction from the federal government and and what that then may mean for nova scotia but this is new evolving information do you have a follow-up question yes i do uh premier houston and maybe dr strang can weigh in how soon will educators and parents guardians of students know if they will be returning to in-person learning after the extended break on january 6 or if they will be pivoting to online learning what will the epidemiology need to indicate to get kids back in school on january 6th thank you thank you pat um of course people remember that we we pushed return to school back by a couple days um that's that's already happens and um of course we're we're we're always mindful i see what's happening with some universities that are going to online so so we'd ask our our educators and people working um in education too to just think about what what's possible if we have to go there but um the the answer to your question of how soon is as soon as as soon as we can and as soon as that decision is made so we we need to see how we we put restrictions in on on friday we we've we've decided to kind of strengthen those restrictions at this stage it's it's it's unusual to to uh strengthen restrictions so so so quickly but we're in unusual times and we'll continue to monitor and if we if we need to make that calls and we'll make it as soon as we can so i just ask people to to bear with us and we we are optimistic that nova scotians will respond as they always have we'll get these case members coming down because we're limiting contacts and we're and we're slowing down and then we'll continue to watch where we go from there but thank you for asking that question pat i know it's on the minds of a lot of families okay next we'll go to tim busquet with the halifax examiner go ahead tim

hi good afternoon um uh i i guess this is to the premiere um i understand that there's been a lot of calls out for retired health care workers nurses and so forth to come forward to help out in in the labor crunch because other people are self-isolating um there's been concerns expressed to me that uh some of these people are either being asked to work for free or or if they're coming to work on on a payment basis that their their uh retirement benefits might be affected uh they're worried about those sort of things um can you address that issue of uh what what's being done i mean there's is money going to be provided to tire these people back and and will their future benefit situation change as a result um thank you for raising that tim i hadn't i hadn't heard that uh specifically about what i would speak to is i mean 500 cases um um each of those people had a certain number of contacts um so even if they had 10 well that you can do the math and they did 10 today and 10 yesterday and 10 you can see how there's a lot of people across the province isolating right now and and healthcare is not immune so um i wasn't aware of that but what i would say is to to anyone who can step up and and return to the workforce that's qualified obviously or take an extra shift we we appreciate that and i and i i don't i hope i've never given the impression that healthcare is somewhere i would look to scrimp and save money uh that that's not the case we're gonna we're gonna we'll invest what's necessary uh to get us through this tim do you unfollow the question i i do uh earlier today there was a quite positive uh announcement about the budget situation uh being uh much better off hundreds of millions of dollars better off than had been forecast uh and um you had just mentioned that you had talked with the opposition leaders uh about sick pay issues is there a possibility that some of this unexpected uh financial health will be directed into supporting workers who can't get to work

yeah of course um so um and you know we talked about this the supports for for businesses we'll look at the supports for uh for for nova scotians and employees who can't get to work or can't work otherwise yeah for sure i mean we're we're actively looking at that there's some precedent in the past for some of those programs so you know we don't have to start from from scratch so i i think to you to your ultimate question um is we're going to be there to support nova scotians um through this nobody nobody wanted this wave nobody expected this wave it's um proving to be debilitating with the with the um potential to get worse and and i know um nova scotians uh i think understand my focus on fixing the health care system um we won't let it crumble um right here we're not going to let that happen we'll invest in nova scotians we'll invest in in covet response and we'll invest in health care so um is there there's more than a possibility it's a probability that we'll come up with these programs okay next we'll go to chelsea gould with turo news go ahead chelsea hello thank you uh sort of to follow up on tim's question uh premier beyond the current sector impact support program do you anticipate any more business supports coming during this week um you're talking about in addition to the ones

that we we just announced is that what you mean yes because that targets certain industries yeah i mean look we're we're we're looking at uh lessons learned from last time we're hearing from different organizations and um we're we'll we'll do what we can to get people through this for sure chelsea do you have a ball question uh yeah this is for dr strang you've talked about hoarding of rapid tests um i've heard issues in ontario people selling rap tests that they gotten for free have you found any issues here with that i have i have not heard reports of that and uh if there are people thinking that i would ask them to think about uh you know the common good all of us giving something out for the common good uh and helping helping us use the supply of rapid tests we have available to all of us for the most effective use

okay next we'll go to lois and dort with the guys bro journal go ahead loisanne

yes hello thank you um i've noticed that there are no new exposure updates for the english guys area on the um website not since december 16th uh is there a reason for that um so you know two things that they're they're uh they're maybe we're slowing things down so uh there's less exposure so less notices required uh but we also have some of that backlog we're dealing with in public health so we're maybe a little bit uh delayed in getting to identifying some of those exposure notices oh sand you have a follow-up question given that this area is one that has one of the highest case counts per 100 000 population shouldn't there be a priority on updating that area

so we have code all over the province so uh and our priority is as i said in public health we are working to make sure everybody gets who's a positive case through the lab uh gets uh first contact uh by public health and in many cases it'll be the only contact now within 24 hours we're not there we've had some backlog especially over the weekend but that is our objective and we're rapidly working to do that uh and so we can't prioritize for geographically until we actually have that first uh contact anyway but i think our priority is to make sure no matter where somebody is if they're if they're a test positive that they get as quickly as we can get a contact with public galvan are given information uh around how to manage their their own health and as well as identifying their own contacts and then in certain circumstances especially when we're dealing with long-term care facilities homeless shelters they people who are much more risk and congregate living settings that's those are the ones that we're there prioritizing for the more detailed follow-up as urgent today as we can now by public health

okay we'll go to drake lathers next with the poor hawksbury reporter go ahead drake over the weekend sanefx issued a press release saying that the people reporting to them positive cases have plateaued but have we seen the outbreak and anti-ganesha cases tied to sane effects plateau yet so i think we're seeing uh yeah a lot of the cases there that were a result from uh you know the x-ring ceremony of many of them are now uh resolved uh and you know what we you know their infection is over they're no longer infectious to others so that that uh that has plateaued and a large you know that large number of those folks are unable to uh you know travel home and things have slowed down uh during exam period even when students are back on campus so not that there's not ongoing transmission and cases uh in that part of the province like there is elsewhere but certainly the peak of that uh the outbreak associated with state of x's were past that peak drake do you have a follow-up question and and with the recent oak break declared that saint martha's here in anaganesh are you confident that it can be contained like it was with the parkland outbreak we certainly have uh very knowledgeable and expert infection control practitioners working in our health system so within the health authority so they will be uh they already are actively working at uh that and the uh the other hospital outbreak as well to uh put up measures in in in place uh very quickly and uh to contain uh those outbreaks okay next we'll go to preston mulligan with cbc go ahead preston

hi a couple of short questions um and i'm happy to scroll back if you've already answered this and you can just let me know but for those households um that are used to testing almost on a daily basis with take-home rapid tests uh what should be recommended this is for dr strang what's your recommended protocol there should they reduce that somehow or how would you advise a family say four or five you test almost daily because of their uh constant potential exposure because of their job or whatever would you recommend well we're focusing people uh you know to uh really not use tests for those ongoing daily testing purposes uh if you already have test kits we're not gonna ask them back because you may be in a situation where you meet one of those criteria more on symptom-based testing or if you're identified close contact uh but also then you know if they have uh family and friends who are meet you're gonna meet our new criteria for testing and you have test kits share your test kits with those let's make sure that the test kits we have available are will be used for the prioritized and most important uh needs and there will be more detailed information in the next couple of days on that but we just need people to understand now that that regular daily asymptomatic testing is just not

something that uh that we have the ability to support or should be doing here now in the midst of this uh coveted search preston do you have a follow-up question yep quick one uh is there any request or is there any negotiation happening whatsoever with the federal government for any kind of help with uh what's happening here so i mean as the premier's outline where we have requests to be made from his office and from the department of health and wellness for uh to speed up delivery of vaccines we've had ongoing requests we continue to push the federal government uh to uh maximize uh their allocation of test kits to uh uh to nova scotia yeah i meant military i guess sorry i should have been more specific i don't you know we are putting a request out now people on my team uh to making a request to canadian armed forces for uh how they could might be able to support our vaccination efforts uh in in the new year like we've done previously uh but we're not going beyond uh beyond that at this point in time with the armed forces we'll go next to sarah deary with radio canada go ahead sarah yes can you hear me yeah all right um so i don't know if i missed it but you have the data for the number of omicron cases in the province we don't have i don't have a total number what i do have is the what i received yesterday the latest batch of uh because you have to understand that we don't send every specimen to for confirmation whether it's omicron or not but the latest batch of samples that were submitted to the national lab in winnipeg uh when they came back 83 of them were omicron so it's pretty clear that the rest were delta so it's pretty clear that omicron has rapidly become uh the dominant strain here in nova scotia not a surprise same thing is happening in other provinces

sarah do you have a follow-up question um nope i think i'm fine thank you okay we'll go to jonathan mcginnis with ctv next go ahead jonathan hi good afternoon thank you for uh taking my question um

people who are being tested are being told 24 to 72 hours is that is a typical wait time we're hearing of a number of instances where that where results are coming back far after the 72 hours is that um expected given the number of tests that we're doing or what what could you tell people who are still waiting for those tests yeah i saw data yesterday that uh that the vast majority i think it was around 70 percent of people were getting the result uh within 24 to 48 hours there was about another four percent that between 42 and 70 and 72 hours a very very small percentage were beyond that 72 hour mark so uh we'd ask those people to uh you know to be patient uh there is a line that they can call to try to uh get help getting their test result but that even given the large volume of testing the fact that we're able to stay to the majority of people within that 48 hours and and then the next group within the 72 hours uh is to me is a testament to the incredible hard and skilled work by our lab colleagues jonathan you have a follow-up question uh i do and and i was preoccupied there just for a moment so this may have just been asked but given the success of rapid testing um in for asymptomatic carriers of cobalt why are we now restricting uh rapid tests to those experiencing experiencing symptoms of the virus it's simply that we have uh you know we we have a finite resources both for pcr testing and our rapid tests we are working to expand as much as we can our supply of rapid tests but no matter what we do it is a finite resource so we have to the pressures of cobit require us to adjust and we have to allocate resources to highest priority needs and we're at a point now where we just can't uh afford the luxury of having people just test because they'd like to know their status on an ongoing basis and that is all the time we have today apologies to anyone we didn't get to over to you premiere for closing remarks well thank you thank you marlon thank you dr strang and thank you to some very thoughtful questions really appreciate that the message is is simple slow down spend time with a small group of close family and friends um it's tough it's tough on everyone um i um i'm no different i had to call my mother yesterday and tell her we couldn't we couldn't come for christmas dinner that's that's a that's a tough call no matter who you are so but the reality is if you don't need to go there or you don't need to do that or if it's not necessary then it's it's it's you're safer to stay home and this is the time to stay home so checking on your friends your family members your neighbors who live alone or those who are sick and or isolating that may need may need help and show them the true the true meaning of the holidays by supporting them and offering offering um offering them help um this is not the holiday that you expected it's not the holiday anyone expected um but um but still i wish you you and your family a safe holiday and i hope that 2022 brings you joy and good health and um sees us get through this pandemic once and for all but thanks everyone and i really appreciate your support thank you

you

good afternoon hope you are all having a lovely holiday season my name is marla mcginnis and i will be your moderator for today's news conference before i begin i'd like to introduce the honorable becky druin she's the minister of education and early childhood development and dr robert string chief medical officer of health for nova scotia go head minister

thanks marlene good afternoon everyone i want to start by expressing my gratitude for everyone who has supported our students and learning this year to the administrators teachers bus drivers custodians and other staff students and families for the incredible work that you've done the last couple of years have not been easy as a mother with school-aged children i know this pandemic has challenged us all in ways that many had never imagined i'm impressed by the resilience i see in students by the leadership shown by educators and the kindness exhibited by nova scotians the strong commitment of nova scotians to follow public health guidelines and look out for each other have allowed us to keep our students in school and experts agree the best place for students is in the classroom the in-school experience is vital to a young person's development and well-being schools are so much more than a place to learn schools are where students build lifelong connections friendships they play they access food and mental health resources throughout the pandemic we've acted on the advice of public health and placed a priority on the safety of schools to protect in-person learning for students i've discussed the return to school with nstu and peace ends and have heard their needs and suggestions for continuing in-person learning i've shared these thoughts with public health and many of these suggestions have been incorporated in the revised back to school plans we have seen the situation evolve and we're learning to live with covid for now this includes following new guidelines that offer layers of protection to slow covid spread to protect our most vulnerable based on the advice of public health students will resume within person classes on monday january 10th we'll be using the layered approach that has been so successful in our schools learning centers in nova scotia public schools which we know are a vital resource for many students and families will open on tuesday january 4th with the exception of chignecto central regional center for education which will open their learning centers on wednesday january 5th this extended break will allow for staff who will report to work january 4th through 7th to prepare for the return of students including planning for best practices on slowing the spread of covid we will be re-implementing some of the past practices that have been proven to be successful limiting movement reducing numbers in places like cafeterias removing excess furniture to allow for more spacing in classrooms we continue to ask parents and staff to stay home if feeling even a little unwell and to be diligent about wearing masks properly we also continue to ensure that ventilation systems are maintained and operating as they're supposed to we have maintenance available on a 24-hour call-in basis we've increased cleaning in our schools in accordance with advice from public health the extended break will also allow for families to monitor for symptoms before returning to school and to book vaccine appointments covid 19 pandemic has been stressful and i understand we are all tired parents teachers even students may have concerns about returning to school public health has assured us the schools remain safe they remain a safe environment students and for staff in closing i'd like to thank families teachers administrators staff and students for doing their part to keep us safe during the pandemic we will continue to get through this and we'll continue to lead by example to our young people by demonstrating kindness and resilience thank you

thank you minister and a good afternoon everybody i hope everyone had a safe holiday and was able to spend time with some family or friends today is about our plan for schools but i first want to mention a couple of things on cases and testing our cases remain high but relatively steady i hope we're near the peak of this omicron wave but we're not yet seeing any real decline our hospitalizations uh have moderately increased but so far the health system is managing despite many health care workers off sick or isolating however we are seeing a trend in increasing hospitalizations across the country and we need to keep a close eye on that over the coming weeks there is often a delay of two to three weeks between cases and hospitalizations that's why restrictions continue to be important while we monitor the impacts of this variant the variant and the way it's spreading is causing us to change the way we manage and respond to covid 19. we are not going to stop the spread of this variant like we did in other ways our goal now is to slow it down to protect our most vulnerable given the volume of cases that means focusing public health resources and pcr testing on those at highest risk of disease and hospitalization direct support from public health on case follow-up is now focused on settings where there is a risk of an outbreak among high high-risk individuals so in long-term care facilities in other seniors residences correctional facilities group homes and shelters and in other priority populations pcr testing has also been targeted to those who have covid-like symptoms and are at increased risk for severe disease so people age 50 and above are those with specific medical conditions pregnant women those who live or work in congregate live settings and health care workers and first responders all others who have covid-like symptoms or are close contacts will need to

use rapid test kits to test at home and self-manage if they test positive on the rapid tests and that self-management includes contacting anyone you have been in close contact with i also want to be clear that there is not a shortage of rapid tests if you need a test you will be able to access one you can access rapid test kits through all of our primary assessment centers if you meet the criteria for testing as a possible case for contact and we're also working diligently to increase access points especially in rural communities but what we cannot continue to do is have wide scale asymptomatic testing we need to use our supply of rapid test kits differently in this wave so please don't hoard test kits there is no need we have a good supply of rapid tests and we're ordering more but the supply is not limitless so we all need to use that supply responsibly and unselfishly

we are going to extend our approach to case management and contact tracing into schools and these changes will allow us to live with the omicron variant as best we can for most of us two doses of vaccine still provides good protection against severe disease booster doses are being rolled out and many children aged 5 to 11 will start to become eligible for their second dose our approach to returning to schools is about balance one of our key priorities has always been to keep children in school whenever possible the concerns about controlling the spread of what is generally a relatively mild disease in children need to be weighed against the clear harms and risks associated with children not being in school and learning at home school is so important in so many ways for some children it's their safe place where they get the most support physically and emotionally and many children are not able to learn effectively from online from home i know this shift will be difficult but it is the right path forward there will be layers of public health measures in schools to protect students teachers and staff these have proven to be effective uh throughout the last two years and so things like reducing movement activities within a school will help minimize the spread of the omicron variant protect everyone and keep students in school the key component is masking we also need to make sure people are wearing the right masks to ensure they have the best protection that means a three-layered cotton mask for children and students the three layers and a proper fit are even more important now with the omicron wave there are some situations like healthcare settings where other types of masks are recommended and required like a medical mask or an n95 and we're currently working now with our college in occupational health and safety on the use of these types of masks by workers in non-healthcare settings we'll have more to say about that in the coming days but for students in the general public a three layered mask is now a minimum and just a reminder that students teachers and staff were given three layered masks cut a cloth mask at the start of the school year and more will be provided

we need to come back to vaccination the most important thing we can all do is to continue to get vaccinated whether it's a little close to 40 percent of the five to eleven year olds who are not yet started their primary series or or people who become eligible for their booster dose of vaccine uh as their age cohort uh becomes eligible we also need to remember that it's key that for to keep our schools and other places safe is that if people are sick and have cold or flu-like symptoms that could be covered they need to stay home and follow the public health measures and advice for testing in isolation back to you marla

thank you dr strang we'll now take questions from reporters we do have a record number of reporters on the line so we'll do our best to get to as many as possible but i do apologize if we're not able to get to everyone um we'll start with ali thompson with cbc go ahead allie hi thank you there's been questions about testing for teachers uh you know headed back into the school year if children are going to be in school should um teachers uh be undergoing regular testing or will would that be would rapid testing be made available to them should they ask for it for school staff well that that is a topic of ongoing discussion we have a you know we have we have a finite supply of rapid test kits and right now we uh you know as we've outlined uh today and then just before christmas where we need to focus both our pcr and our rapid test kits on those who are uh symptomatic but certainly as we we are looking to get more test kits and so uh one of the things we are looking at is a depending on supply what role could uh regular testing potentially play uh for teachers in the school environment but that that is supply-dependent ali do you have a follow-up question uh yes i do thanks um i think you know a lot of parents there's a lot of parents coming down on either side of the fence there's many who want their children in school there's many others who think we should take a more cautious approach maybe just for those parents you can explain i guess how you balance all of that um and you know i guess if they're if they're sentiments come come into your factor into your decision at all

maybe i'll start administer drew and join in um absolutely we're very very well aware of of the different perspectives on this and are are are are cognizant that no matter where we land uh you know that there are there are implications for families uh on either side of whether you're in school or out of school none of this is easy and that covet has not been

easy but our our our fundamental point is we've always said we need to balance uh restrictions with the impacts of restrictions and that our overall goal is to protect those who are most vulnerable to severe disease and to minimize overall negative impacts so certainly with covid presenting now where it's become clearer and clearer that for children and youth it is by and large a relatively mild disease they're on the other side of the equation there are well learned over the last two years and in you know previous you know literature around the negative impacts on on children and youth by not being in school learning uh those are substantive and cannot and need to play a major factor so given where we're at we certainly feel my advice to the minister and to government has been balancing those both those out it's very clear to me that the having kids in school is the best decision to minimize overall harms to children and youth

dr stein you've done a beautiful job answering that and i don't really think that i i have anything to add in terms of um of the rationale and the considerations what i do want to add though is um just an acknowledgement um you know to you and a thanks to you and your team for providing the guidance that has kept the faith thus far has kept our students and our our staff safe in schools and we are very appreciative that and um you know and and are continuing to follow that guidance and that gives us confidence in the safety of our our school environments we'll go to alexa mclean with global next go ahead alexa marla dr strain i'm wondering if pcr tests will be considered a priority in school connected case scenarios moving forward so um so right now we're saying the vast majority of of kids in school would meet our criteria for rapid testing and not pcr tests with wide spread of uh of covid uh we're we're very comfortable that without you know extenuating circumstances that put somebody at higher risk for severe disease that a positive rapid test it can be reliable as an indicator of of infection um so we'll continue to use that approach and as i said as we you know modify um that approach based on available supply one of the things we're looking at along with teachers is we've we've twice now sent out test kits home uh to uh to families and we're again looking at supply dependence uh doing uh further distribution of those test kits after home so if a child does become symptomatic they have uh you know they have been supplied with with some rapid test kits to do that immediate test alexa do you have a follow-up question thank you marla yes there have been ongoing concerns raised by parents and teachers throughout the pandemic about ventilation issues in schools there are outstanding retrofit projects underway they're not due many of them to be complete until well into 2022. uh perhaps mr johann you can chime in why haven't there been interim ventilation measures put into place like filters um things like that to provide adequate ventilation in classrooms whether needed and dr strain is ventilation a concern for you in school

so i i don't mind starting and then dr stern can speak to this so upgrades have been have been made to ventilation systems where that was determined to be necessary through the course of the pandemic and and some funds were used to provide those upgrades um inspection regimes have been put in place and all of our ventilation systems are inspected regularly and the results of those can be seen online on the region's websites we've also ensured that there's access to 24-hour on-call service should any ventilation systems require that we've been working closely with public health and following their guidance around what ventilation requirements do exist in relation to cobit and we've implemented those and so dr strang do you want to speak any further to that yeah i think you know we have to remember this is a multi-layered approach ventilation only been one of those right there's lots of and as the ministers outlined lots of work to go on to optimize the current ventilation systems putting in new ventilation systems doesn't happen uh overnight uh but again we've done what can be done to optimize ventilation uh and i think we've seen now omicron is is more infectious but we've seen in the past two years that that schools have not been a major source of transmission of the virus within the school setting so to me that tells me that that the multi-layered approach uh including uh optimizing ventilation has been relatively successful now omicron means there will be more spread within schools but the measures we have in place have demonstrated their ability to uh to reduce the transmission and and reduce risk within a school environment next we'll go to natasha pace with ctv news go ahead natasha

thank you um dr strang or or minister jerem what do you say to parents who are concerned that there will be you know 30 kids crammed in a classroom but you know ranks and other facilities are either at half capacity or um events are closed altogether how do you justify that well we've been through this before as i said the outline one of our key core priorities has always been having skids in school wherever possible and so it's not the first time we've had kids in school where we've restricted other activities we will open up those other activities as we're able to uh as we you know get through the omicron wave but it is a priority to have kids uh in school learning and for to support a range of other of their social emotional uh and and and health needs um and uh and so i'm very comfortable saying that kids can be in school but we don't yet have uh add on other layers of risks into their lives by opening up other activities at this point in time natasha do you have a follow-up question i do thank you um given that you're now only um only giving us pcr test

results but the majority of nova scotians will be testing themselves using rapid test kits are you concerned the data that the province is giving nova scotians doesn't represent the full picture and does that data hold any value at all so we're at a point now where we don't need to detect and account for every single case of covet we are focusing in two way areas we're certainly doing lots of pcr testing and that is more than adequate to give us the uh surveillance picture to say where are we at with uh with the the the the current epidemic curve in this wave are we going up are we at its peak are we going down that's the important information we need to know uh as well as some of the other you know dynamics on on age and gender breakdown about you know based on who's getting pcr testing but much more importantly now we we we we have to focus our surveillance much more on on severity so what is the number of cases that are going into hospital and then and i see you what are the characteristics around uh those cases that's a much more important focus than than trying to monitor and and and and have information on every single copic case okay next we'll go to danielle edwards with the canadian press go ahead danielle hi my question is for dr strang um you mentioned that uh the province has been able to deal with the hospitalizations of covet patients but you also mentioned that there seems to be some some employees that are off because of uh being either exposed to covet or having to isolate do you have any sense of how many employees have been placed off work since this uh most recent wave of the pandemic began i don't have a specific i don't have a specific number but what i do know is that the requirements for the number of people off because their contacts or cases uh is creating substandard pressures in our hospitals and long-term care facilities and in many workplaces beyond healthcare it is a substantive issue that we need to continue to look at uh carefully but it is creating pressures there's no doubt about that danielle do you have a follow-up question um no that's everything thank you okay great we'll go to stephen cook with the chronicle herald next go ahead stephen

uh dr strang i hope i didn't miss this earlier in the session but i'm wondering what what uh measures are being undertaken to advance the vaccination of those under 12 especially when they're all going back into school if they're going to be vaccinations taking place in schools or or special clinics or what what we can expect to see in terms of vaccination of children in the new year we're continuing to look at our ours or our you know five to eleven-year-olds uh numbers there were you know we're i think the last we're around 55 percent of that group had their first dose and other they're starting to become eligible for their second dose um we're they're certainly lots of uh pediatric uh vaccine appointments through our pharmacy so i wouldn't certainly a critically important step for any parent uh for their before their five to eleven-year-olds come back to school is to make sure they've at least had their first dose and then having an appointment for their second dose we have lots of capacity in the system uh to do that we're also you know uh acutely aware of the need to build as much capacity as we can and get vaccines applied so we can uh provide boosters as well uh we're now at 50 and above and we always as soon as possible we will we'll move down into younger age cohorts as well stephen do you follow a question uh no that's great thank you very much okay we'll go to polish year with radio canada next go ahead paul

yes uh this question is just for uh dr strang just some of you can elaborate to the harms to the harm to children of not being in a physical school environment for their education well we certainly know that uh some of my education colleagues that it's uh that it's it's not the uh learning online and learning at home is not the optimum learning environment for the vast majority of of children uh and certainly being at home isolated has significant impacts on physical and mental health we are well aware of of of the data on that uh that's emerging um uh you know for throughout the last two years uh you know it's being around others as a socializing especially for younger age groups is important for uh social emotional learning and there are unfortunately too many uh children in our communities where the school is maybe their only source of of good support uh and and and um meeting some of their very basic needs around food and other things um the schools play uh more than just more than just a learning environment for for children and and so i think it's very important we're aware of all those roles and the needs that schools meet and the importance of having children in school wherever possible thank you for follow-up question nope that's fine thanks perfect we'll go to caroline alfonso with the globe and mail next go ahead caroline

oh i'm good thank you my question was asked perfect let's go to shirley fullerton with ctv national go ahead shirley

no okay we'll go to tim busquet with the health box examiner go ahead tim hi good afternoon dr strang you said that there's been a moderate increase in hospitalizations but you didn't put a figure on that i'm curious uh have any children been hospitalized we have not to date throughout the uh the the pandemic had uh children hospitalized uh directly as a result of of covet tim do you have a follow-up question i do for the minister um i'm i'm told that large numbers of children in grade one and grade two are failing to meet their reading benchmarks because of the disruption from uh past

uh you know not being in school uh i'm wondering if you can comment on that and address will there be any relaxation of those benchmarks or how are you approaching that right so the the teachers and educators have done an amazing job at adapting their learning approaches and teaching approaches to address the time away from school that students have experienced and we've seen um we've seen um we haven't seen kind of the significant uh issues that you're describing um we've seen students actually do quite well throughout the course of this um based on those targeted approaches to learning

okay we'll go now to um at ed halberson with qccr radio go ahead

that are you there

okay we'll move to pacquiao with the laker go ahead pat hi this question is for dr strang i have heard from some readers that they know of several people who have tested positive over the holidays and did not report that to public health what is your message to those people

dr stranger i'm mute yeah sorry i put myself on me for a second so uh yeah people who test positive on rapid tests we're not requiring them to report to public health what we're asking is people now if they meet the criteria for symptoms and they're there but they're they're eligible for a rapid test is to do that and if they're positive they can assume that that positive test is reliable even if it's a rapid test because of the wide spread of covid if you have symptoms in your testing and your rapid test is positive it's reliable and therefore you have to start uh tape follow all the steps and we've got lots of information online about what people can follow to manage self-management for themselves now that they're being identified as a case it's essentially isolating for a minimum of 10 days and then doing your your contact tracing and there's information about who contacts are and how you reach out to them and what information you provide them and what steps they need to take in terms of their isolation and a use of a rapid test themselves patient befall question that's all thank you okay we'll go to drake lathers with the port hawk spray reporter go ahead drake is the outbreak in anagan ish considered resolved or are we still having positive cases related to that initial outbreak well i think what has happened you know that initial outbreak has been spread uh broader uh within that antiquities community and then from there is spread through the through uh through many parts of the province so i think i'm not looking at the antigonus outbreak in isolation i'm looking at the fourth wave of omicron which uh started uh when our first detection with events in antigonish but now we're in the midst of the omicron wave across the province frank do you involve question yes i do and with the onus now placed on the individual are you sort of concerned with now students coming back that there may they may not fully comply with the rules my university will continue to work with universities universities have set up each of their own protocols in terms of bringing students back uh to start the school year uh so they're doing it in various ways uh universities are different than our public school system some of them are you know are relying on online um some of them are allowing students back into uh residences but still virtual learning and there they have we're providing robust information to their students as they come back next we'll go to lois andor with the guys road journal go ahead lozan yes hello thank you this is for minister druin what should students expect in terms of school support if they are at home with symptoms or a positive rapid test in the past some students have been told to get class notes from their peers

right so i guess i'll start with echoing the important message that if if you if students or or families are feeling at all unwell they should be staying home in terms of what supports are available for absences and classrooms and schools have a variety of different supports that are available and they're specific to those classrooms and specific to age groups so so that would be really a question for an individual at an individual classroom level um i certainly know my children they they embrace the sharing of notes that's something they they kind of go to on their own but they also have the ability to go to their teacher for additional information so if families have questions about what's available they just need to reach out to their teacher to find out what can be done to support students you can see at home louisiana you have a follow-up question yes i do um the second question i have is also for minister durin what options are there for families who don't want to send their children to school due to people in the home having compromising health conditions right so our focus really is for the reasons that dr strang has so beautifully explained to have students in school um and learning in school that's the best place for students to be with respect to keeping vulnerable people um safe i think those are questions for public health and for individual for individual doctors to know what what should be done in a home level but but in terms of what we're offering for education in school learning is really the best learning for our students and and that's what we're that's what we're providing next we'll go to alex cook with global news go ahead alex

no okay we'll go to sarah plowman with ctv go ahead sarah hi dr strength i just want to seek a point of clarification um the website where it says what to do with people tested positive for cova 19 does tell people to notify public health of their positive results through an email are you now seeing that people don't need to do that is this a suggestion people could do it but it's not necessary if you could just clarify that yeah i mean people were asking people to do that but i'm you know that's uh we're you know we know that that is not going to be complete and we're not going to be using that in any substantive way in terms of our surveillance our fa our surveillance will continue to be primarily based on our pcr testing as well as i said earlier we're shifting new much much greater focus on uh on hospitalization data sarah do you have a follow-up question yeah and new year's eve is coming up here um what advice recommendations do you have for people like how do you think this is going to impact new year's celebrations and what advice do you have to keep people safe well i think it would be the same advice we gave leading up to christmas uh keep your celebration small a limited number all over all the restrictions are still in place uh hours of operation for restaurants bars they're you know they're closed at midnight we're asking people to uh keep their household groups or their social groups of no more than ten uh and be very careful about the number of social activities uh that you uh attend uh throughout the holiday keep it small keep it safe uh and then that's no different for new year's than it was over christmas and boxing day okay we'll go to dan alstrand with city news go ahead dan

okay let's go to jerry west with cbc go ahead jerry

okay we will go to erin mcginnis with cbc

okay um let's try

chris stoodley halifax today

okay uh mary emma parento radio canada yes hi i was just wondering if we if you can elaborate a little bit more on the um on what's being asked to the teacher and principals to do during that first week of january before the kids go back to school um for those few weeks fridays what would they have to do for example sure so we'll be re-implementing some of the past practices that were in place um that were successful and so that would include um moving around some furniture potentially to allow more spacing in classrooms um and making adjustments physically for that there may be some scheduling changes that need to be done to support that limiting of movement so this time will be available for them to make those changes as well to refresh themselves on on on what those changes are and the measures that are in place so they're well prepared for when students return on january 10th do you have a follow-up question marie emma no that's it thank you so much okay um let's try bill mccush with coastal radio go ahead bill

no okay what about emily at the grapevine go ahead emily

ken kingston news989xfm

okay adam cook tell isle

yeah i'm right here marla can you hear me yep go ahead okay uh i want to pose this to minister drewen but dr strang if you have commentary on this i'd be happy to hear it as well minister a couple of weeks ago when you announced that there would be a province-wide early shutdown of schools on december the 17th if i am interpreting your comments at the time correctly it seemed that this was precipitated not so much by a rise in infections from students but by the fact that actual staff weren't able to be able to carry out classes in the schools the way they would normally be able to do so has that criteria shifted in terms of what's required to call a shutdown of schools either at the christmas circuit breaker that we're at now or at any other time is it more about whether teachers or staff are available as opposed to students being infected yeah so the call was made um at that point um you're absolutely right it was made for operational reasons because of the concern that we wouldn't have the ability um we wouldn't have the appropriate staffing and at that time we were um things were rapidly changing in terms of of uh of the development of the new variant of covid and the implications for in the classroom um so as we return now um in january to schools we will still be looking closely at staffing and we'll be implementing the various tools that we have in place to support um staffing and address attendances as they occur adam do you have a follow-up question uh yes i do uh just quickly uh and again to minister drew and uh was there ever consideration given of having a shutdown zone by zone as opposed to a province-wide

shutdown uh that would begin on december the 17th and is that likely to be the case as we go forward if there's a particular rise in infections in a specific health zone uh would schools be looked at for shut down there um so i want to make the distinction between the decision that we made um in december which was an operational decision um and and it was province-wide versus um any sort of school closures that arise as a result of outbreaks are covered those types of closures are really driven by um by public health um determinations and so i would i would let them um let dr strang speak to that specifically yeah i think right now what we're seeing is we have uh there's coverage you know across the province so we you know we're going to take a provincial approach to this um maybe in the weeks to come as we get towards the end of the omicron wave we may we may you know look at more of a regional approach but you know yet that that would be determined but at this point in time we have cove the reality is it's it's uh there's it's it's throughout the whole province so we need to take a provincial approach okay that's all the time we have today thank you very much to everyone for joining and that concludes today's news conference

you

good afternoon my name is marilyn mcginnis and i'll be your moderator for today's news conference before we begin i'd like to introduce the honor will tim houston premier of the province of nova scotia and dr robert strang chief medical officer of health for nova scotia go ahead premier uh thank you mark good afternoon everyone i want to start with the with the current coveted situation in nova scotia as of today 25 patients are in hospital admitted due to covet and three of them are in the icu so 25 and 3 and as expected our cases remain high today we're reporting 522 cases over the last two weeks we've reported to almost 7 600 cases 7 594 cases over the last two weeks so but thankfully like other jurisdictions we're not experiencing the level of hospitalization and severe illness with omnicron that we've seen with previous variants the public health team is watching the hospitalizations very closely as those 25 patients in the hospital and and three in the icu are key indicators in previous waves most of us probably only heard of someone getting covered but right now in nova scotia pretty much every one of us knows someone who has had it or maybe they've had it themselves it's different this time because the the variant is extremely contagious it's not just here it's everywhere that this is happening look at what's happening around the world over the last two days france britain italy spain portugal greece and many others have all registered record numbers of new cases other provinces are also hitting records uh the reality is omicron is everywhere and the return to zero case days is a ways away this naturally raises anxiety because we have been conditioned to fear coping and we must continue to have a healthy dose of fear when it comes to this virus however while omnicron is obviously extremely contagious the evidence to date is that it is generally far less severe uh so for those 25 families covid is is certainly still severe but 25 cases out of almost 7 600 total cases is consistent with data that we're seeing around the world in that severe cases are the exception and certainly not the rule please keep this in mind as we talk about testing boosters and other issues and we'll get to those issues but before before going to those issues i do want to i do want to tip my hats to the many nova scotians who did not get time off this holiday season including dr strang and the entire team at public health including the teams in the labs uh the folks that are testing sites those that are doing vaccinations and everyone across the healthcare system and in between many of them did not get any time off over these holidays i want to recognize them and i want to thank them when you think of the the number of cases and add in their closed contacts tens of thousands of nova scotians have been impacted by the virus over just the last few weeks this has put pressure on so many organizations and you only need to look at the situation with the airlines to see the wrinkle effect of isolation and illness our healthcare professionals in the healthcare system are no different this is a massive challenge in a system that is already severely understaffed our people are stretched in they're giving it their all they're going above and beyond so now we as nova scotians must must match their determination and do our part so that they can do their job this means some changes no one likes change but the world has changed since the beginning of the pandemic the variants have changed the vaccinations have been a game changer and now we must also accept the reality in front of us and that means change first it means that each of us has to take more personal responsibility with stretched resources we must ask nova scotians to take more personal responsibilities just that simple you will see this in the way we're managing covet cases to get at a more of a self-management approach for the less severe cases you will see this in the back to school plan you will see it in the rapid testing plan uh you you just see that we're asking each of you to be more accountable and i have faith in each and every one uh every one of us every nova scotian to step up for their family and step up for their community specifically if you're sick and you test positive on a rapid test you have call of it take personal responsibility for letting your contacts know or let your school principal know let your co-workers know and of course isolate so we ask you to take more personal responsibility in a number of ways and we'll talk more about that but it also means we we have to shift the focus uh to boosting and that means a bit of a shift away from what i would call confirmation testing the team is working hard to once again stand up additional booster clinics and add capacity to the system we know being vaccinated protects people especially against severe illness and we know the booster provides increased protection i know everyone is eager to get their booster shot but on boosters we're sticking with the nasty recommendation that the booster is most effective six months after your second dose we're sticking with massey on that i told you before christmas that we needed a supply of boosters and kind of laid out where we were i want to thank the federal government for coming through with the supplies we need we reached out to the federal government we made we made an ask there's been a number of discussions they've been extremely accommodating they're coming through with shipments arriving during the month of january we expect to have the supply we need this is incredible and i can't express how appreciative we are to minister duklow minister oblah and and the prime minister uh directly for their support uh we've had a lot of support uh through the system including our local uh mps so i thank them for that uh but let's talk about where we are as of today knowing that knowing the supply situation around 219 000 nova scotians have already had their booster or have their appointment many of these will be our most vulnerable including our long-term care residents so we recognize that that's a significant number 219 is not nothing to uh to scoff at but it leaves a lot of people that will become eligible for a booster in january and that that

number is around thousand a little bit more than five hundred thousand so with the supply now available we will open up um a couple hundred thousand new appointments on monday uh we feel the urgency in the team is working hard to add even more appointments but to add more appointments we have to overcome to two remaining challenges first we need more people we need people to help actually get those vaccines and arms this is our biggest hurdle especially now that we have an extreme shortage and pressure on of healthcare workers not the healthcare system uh the second hurdle is is the actual physical venues um we're less worried about the physical venues but i will tell you i'm worried about getting the human resources to to ramp up the booster program uh i can tell you that from the second we heard that the supply was coming the team dropped everything and put focused everything on rebooting the system to get as many doses as possible in arms as soon as possible so here's where we are i mentioned that due to efforts of the team over the holidays we can add a couple hundred thousand more appointments as such on monday we will open up booster dose bookings to anyone over 30 years old who meets the nasty recommendation to do more than those 200 000 ish additional appointments we um and meet the full need during january with less people having to wait into february we need some help we need more people so if you're a retired nurse or a doctor or and are able to fill shifts vaccinating nova scotians please put your hand up or if you have experience immunizing whether you're currently working a student retired whatever the case may be please please come forward and help us there's a minimum time commitment and some training involved but it's very streamlines um you can go to there's a website [www.nshealth.com](http://www.nshealth.com)

kobitjobs we'll make that available but there's a website you can put your name forward um i do want to acknowledge that i've heard from many former healthcare professionals who did this last spring and didn't hear back and we're discouraged uh please know that we have heard you we've we've redirected resources to appropriately respond to those putting their names forward uh we do need your skills and the more people we get the quicker we can do this but while all of this is happening we are continuing with the delivery model of pharmacies and we're adding clinics where possible uh the first the first new mass clinic opens next week it'll be at the halifax forum it will be up and running for appointments starting on wednesday and the team will be working to roll at other clinics and mobile clinics across the province as the program ramps up we'll be using community clinics in the eastern and western zones uh they have been doing they've been doing testing what what our plan is there is to split their time between testing and vaccinating things are happening we are doing everything we can to get you your booster as soon as possible but please have patience uh keep checking back and book your appointment to get that extra layer of protection this is uh these boosters are another step in putting the pandemic behind us um a final note on testing uh there's been a number of reasons for the changes the testing situation and vaccines are one being more focused in our testing approach allows us to add some booster capacity for example as i mentioned using clinics for testing in the morning but boosters in the afternoon these are the types of changes that are happening before i pass it over to dr strang i want to um i do want to acknowledge the incredible emotion that's in the air right now i can tell you i feel it i hear it but please please know that the team at public health and and your government has only one thing on its mind that's your safety there are those that are trying to cast out on um dr strang's approach to managing this wave uh you know we hear the naysayers some of them maybe questioned him every step along the way this journey but i will say that with the amount of emotion in the area now it's not fair and frankly frankly to criticize and question uh dr schwein of public health the team that has led us quite successfully through the pandemic it's just wrong to do that no one should stand for people questioning dr strang's integrity or the advice he is giving the reality is this variant is different and the world is different therefore the response is different dr strang and his team have my full full support and i know he has the support of nova scotians and because nova scotians know that he has our best interests at heart so we'll we'll get through this there's a lot happening um change will changes will be made as more information dictates that changes will be made but i want you to know uh that uh there's a lot happening to keep you safe so over to you doctor strength well thank you very much premier and good afternoon to all nova scotians uh i am optimistic that the relatively consistent case numbers in the last number of days uh are pointing to a leveling off of covet activity and hopefully soon starting a downward trend the omicron variant has been characterized as generally producing milder illness but it is yet unclear how much is the virus itself or ongoing vaccine protection or or most cases being in younger adults um but we do know that since the variant has taken hold our hospitalization numbers have are climbing modestly we're now at 25 as the premier said and three of those 25 cases are on icu so those are signals we need to pay a close and careful attention to that we need to make sure that our levels of severe illness are are held within the the capacity for treating those individuals within our uh the finite resources in our hospital system and as the premier said and as i've said before that omicron is forcing us to do things differently it's a different variant and requires a different response we no longer need to identify and have public health manage every single case of the variant because for most people that will result in relatively mild illness so we need to focus our efforts and our resources on our most vulnerable groups and settings so that we minimize severe disease and protect our

health care system we do need to pay attention to our hospitalizational numbers and those who are getting the most severely ill uh far more than daily case counts we certainly have enough testing going on to uh monitor the the where we are on the epidemic uh wave whether we're going up stable or going down but we do not need to continue to focus on counting every case and having uh accurate uh daily case numbers we need to look at trends and need to then look at indicators of severe disease and so that's part of why we're moving to more self-management and different testing options this is why we're not going to be con contact tracing every single case of no kova 19 by public health uh even in schools uh just because public health isn't doing the contact raising uh doesn't mean that we're not that we're stepping away from that we're asking nova scotians to take on much more of the role themselves of identifying who their close contacts are and notifying them omicron is all around us and there's the the the best we can do is to slow down its spread uh we have to recognize that we that you could be exposed anywhere and as the premier said we're not getting down to uh you know zero cases anytime soon uh it's about managing and slowing down the spread but not not eliminating it and i'm not saying this to worry you but we do need to be realistic about what we can do and need to do to manage this way and what it means for all of us going forward into 2022. i fully recognize that this is a big shift from how what we've asked you to focus on and pay attention to over the last two years but we're now even more we're asking for the help of all nova scotians all of you practice good public health measures you followed restrictions and now we need you to help with case management and testing too if you're sick with cold or flu-like symptoms assume you have covet stay home and get a test whether you fall into the rapid or pcr testing stream and if you're positive tell your contacts and isolate uh that information is on uh is on our uh covid websites both government and the nova scotia health authority all the details about self-management we'll likely never go back to managing cases the way we did before the omicron variant in fact i hope we don't need to because that means we're moving closer to really living with covet 19 and living normally with a certain level of the virus circulating in our population but we're not there yet we're in a difficult transition period due to omicron but we will get there i know the shift is hard and not everyone will support it for some it's too far and for others it's not far enough i just ask that you keep trusting the team that has led you through this so far if the steps we are taking don't work or we need to change course we certainly will we also know that vaccination remains critical to reducing severe illness and death from the virus and for protecting ourselves and others i encourage everyone to get their first and second dose if you haven't already especially children age 5 to 11 and for those of you who are eligible to receive your booster dose as the premier said starting next week nova scotians 30 and older will be able to book their booster dose as long as it's been a hundreds at least 168 days since their second dose there aren't many appointments available today but more modern appointments will be added to the booking system for clinics across the province next week i know that some people will be looking for pfizer but i have to talk to nova scotians directly and there is no need for the ongoing brand preference for pfizer if you are 30 or older i've said many times since we started our vaccination that mrna is the better vaccine but it doesn't matter whether it's pfizer or moderna they are both effective and very safe when it comes to booster doses in fact some studies are showing that modernize is actually slightly more effective as a booster dose we're also expecting limited shipments of pfizer due to global shortages of this vaccine as a result we will be prioritizing the use of pfizer vaccine for people under 30 because while it's still rare we know that moderna vaccine has a somewhat higher risk of myocarditis and perigeurotitis and pericarditis in this age group so in fact we're strongly recommending only pfizer vaccine for those under 30. therefore those who are 30 and above we we we need you to start using a much more modern vaccine so if you're 30 or over please do not wait for a pfizer booster if you can find a modern appointment book it and be patient if you don't see an appointment in a clinic near you check back often we are as the premier said we're aggressively working to open up more and more opportunities uh in the days ahead

speaking of boosters and appointments the premier outlined the steps we're taking to increase capacity to immunize more people more quickly across the province our pharmacy partners will continue to be critical for getting vaccine to arms but we're also bringing back community vaccine clinics and exploring other options we want and need to get nova scotians their booster doses as quickly as possible and to make this happen we need help all our efforts to expand opportunities for vaccination hinge on having enough people to deliver the vaccine healthcare workers with this skill have stepped up many times throughout our vaccine rollout but we know that the omicron wave has created challenges and pressures within our health care system and while we can redeploy some staff and look at different ways to run clinics we know we need more immunizers no matter what we also need people with different skills to support the running of community clinics nova scotia health authority is working to enlist the services of existing and retired professionals to administer vaccine so if you have the skill set to administer a vaccine or if you want to help in a clinic in a non-medical role please sign up we need your help to get nova scotians the protection they deserve as quickly as we can and more information on how you can do this is at [www.nshealth.ca](http://www.nshealth.ca) forward slash covet jobs there'll be more to say about additional clinics coming online next week before i wrap up i want to clarify in a couple of areas the first is on

reporting rapid test results earlier earlier this week i indicated that you do not have to report a positive rapid test result that in fact was incorrect on my part we are encouraging people to notify public health so they can provide in you can get information about what the next steps you need to do to manage yourself in your contacts so simply you can email your name date of birth health card number and contact information uh to public health capital p o c t n s health dot c a and that is on our websites i also want to talk about masking based on new national guidance we have updated our recommendations on masking we've already updated our guidance for health care settings with measures specific to those who provide direct patient care in the presence of suspected or confirmed covet 19 cases my colleagues in occupational health and safety are also looking at what changes may be necessary in a variety of non-healthcare workplaces but for the general public we are now recommending a properly fitted three-layer non-medical mask or cloth mass or a properly fitted medical mask we're not recommending one over the other but regardless of which mask you choose it needs to be three ply and the fit and wearing uh it properly are as important as the type of mask you choose wearing a mask properly means it needs to cover your nose mouth and chin all three there shouldn't be gaps between your face and your mask so check the top sides and bottom edges for air leaks and adjust the ties early for your loops or nose piece to get a snug fit and unless you have a valid medical reason for not wearing a mask wear a mask where it's required no excuses or loopholes it's simply not too much to ask

and we're about to enter 2022 it's hard to believe that it's been more than two years since the first cases of code with 19 surfaced in china no one would have predicted we'd still be battling this virus with restrictions and strict public health measures no one dreamed that after all this time we'd be facing our highest case numbers yet but i'm also not sure uh people would have said that nova scotia would fare as well as we have either yet here we are still going tired fed up but still fighting the virus supporting one another and doing what needs to be done i do want to take a moment to recognize the many people in public health our labs and testing centers and vaccine clinics who once again have put their work to protect nova scotians ahead of themselves and their families i know this is coming at significant personal costs and you have my deep thanks respect and appreciation in an ending i truly believe that and hope that 2022 is the year we find our new normal the year that covet 19 starts to become part of our history and not our future so i wish everyone watching and your families a happy healthy and prosperous new year back to you marla thank you dr strang we'll now take questions from reporters in the amount of time that we have we'll take one question and one follow-up we'll begin with keith ducett with the canadian press go ahead keith good afternoon i'm just wondering this is a bit of a major shift for nova scotia in terms of the way we've rolled out vaccine in the past and and the new emphasis on uh quickly getting boosters into the arms of as many people as possible as fast as possible i wonder dr strang what exactly is driving that is it the rapidity of the spread of the virus or is it the emerging evidence that the more you are vaccinated the better chance you will have to keep your people at a hospital or is it a combination of all of those things so first of all it's not a major shift we're going back to we use community clinics a lot last spring so we're we're going back to that model knowing that we there is a need to immunize large numbers of people in a short period of time which is exactly why we used mass clinics last spring but the justification now is simply that now we have we have uh with the cooperation of the federal government they a much greater supply of vaccine much earlier than anticipated we need to get that vaccine into people's arms as quickly as possible because a booster dose does uh give people the best possible protection against uh virus so two doses it gives you good protection again especially against severe disease but it it's not great against preventing any infection and therefore the ability of people to transmit the virus so by getting as many people as possible boosted as as quickly as possible we are getting additional protection against severe disease but more importantly we're really reducing the chance for the virus to be spread case you have a follow-up question yes i do thanks uh and i'm just wondering since you're ramping it up and you've put out a call for extra workers roughly how many are we going to need uh just so people can maybe sense the urgency if you're going to do this you're going to need people to put in people's arms so i'm just wondering can you give us a ballpark figure at least about how much you're short and how many people need to step up i i don't i'd have to go back you know i don't think we have a clear number on that i think the bottom line is the more people we can get the more the fat the more the more vaccines we can deliver in in the shortest period of time so we need anybody who's got the ability and then the time whether they have experience giving vaccines or many of the non-medical roles that are also necessary to run a uh to run a community clinic we need people to come forward put up their hands uh through the ways we've identified and that we need as many people as possible the more the better it allows us to go the more there are the faster we'll be able to roll things out okay we'll go next to sarah plowman with ctv go ahead sarah dr strang i'm wondering if you could break down the hospitalization numbers for us i'm just curious since there are some outbreaks at hospitals currently how many of that 25 are people who caught covid in hospital how many of that 25 are people who were admitted to hospital because their symptoms were so severe they needed medical attention so the number we have been reporting and the number today 25

is based on people who were admitted to hospital because of the severity of their covid infection there are also other people who were maybe because we test people when they come into hospital that they may have been identified as being positive but their reason for hospitalization wasn't covered that number changes all the time and also we have some people who are also because of now being exposed in hospital uh and again those are those are numbers that change we look at those numbers but for for me from public health the most important number and the one that we report publicly is out of all of our cases how many uh people are ending up in hospital because of severe covid infection and so far it's very low um uh we're probably less than point five percent of our cases and and of the known cases and if we assume that there's a lot many more cases that aren't known our percentage of hospitalization is is even below that that 0.5 percent so we're tracking that carefully and and so far we're seeing you know but it is you know ticking upwards uh but we're seeing it a moderate a moderate rise so which gives us some comfort but it's also not enough to relax at this point in time we have to be aware that that we're we still have a number of weeks to go and we and and often hospitalizations can lag behind case numbers by a week or two sarah do a follow-up question yeah i'm hearing from people um on the street in my circle that people are assuming that they are going to get covid even if they're following protocols and being careful can you help us anticipate what's to come should the majority of nova scotians expect that at some point over the next few weeks we might all end up getting this certainly we're going to see a lot there is lots of covid out there and if you're out and about in in the public there is a certain chance of you being exposed but it doesn't mean we should just throw up our hands and go well i'm gonna get covered so whatever so what to me it reinforces the why all why all of us need to be extra careful the choices we make about what type of activities we do uh how many people we socialize with wearing masks you know properly and and and strictly uh fog keeping social distance all those kind of things are even more important now because all of us have a role to play in not stopping the spread but slowing down the spread this wave will move through our population but we need to slow down the spread so any any small proportion that or end up in hospital we can keep that at a level that is manageable over time and not have a huge spike in hospitalizations because we let things just kind of go wild in terms of spread

next we'll go to amber friday with global go ahead amber

hi there dr strang nova scotia health has tweeted that rapid tests are only available for people experiencing symptoms or people who have been exposed to the virus are we running out of tests we have we have a we have a large number of tests and we've ordered you know a large number more but we have to recognize it's a finite resource and so we're at a point where right now we've had we've had to focus both our pcr and our rapid testing capacity uh for those who need it the most which is people who have symptoms or if they're identified as a close contact then they need that testing to be able to be a come out of isolation and return to work or other activities those have to be right now uh the focus uh of our testing so we have a lot you know people can go uh to uh you know our many uh pacs primary assessment centers across the province for a pcr test if they're in one of the groups we are also now starting to distribute rapid test kits through those primary assessment centers so people who are eligible for a rapid test but not a pcr can make an appointment and go get a rapid test kit and we are still uh in in a couple of locations in hrm handing out rapid test kits and we are rapidly working in other and more in rural areas other points of access to rapid test kits as well on top of the primary assessment centers but we have to have people use those the use our testing methods rely responsibly so as i said in the last briefing we're still hearing stories of people you know we we've created a dependence on rapid test kits and too many people are relying on testing uh and not changing their behaviors they need to change their behaviors now as i've just outlined to minimize their risk of covid and the risk of then spreading it to others and not depend on a rapid test kits and we certainly cannot afford people uh hoarding or or or you know stockpiling large numbers of test kits now is the time for us to be responsible for each other and use the resources we have where they're most effective uh and efficiently

amber do you have a follow-up question yeah i would just like uh the verification on of the 25 hospitalized how many of those do you have the omicron virus and uh how many of them have been vaccinated well i don't have that data in front of me we're working to get some of those details uh from the lab uh you can appreciate all the pressures we've had uh which with decreased staffing over the holidays we haven't been able to keep on top of all of those detailed aspects but we'll be we'll be looking to get more of that detailed breakdown in our hospital cases next week next we'll move to taryn grant with cbc go ahead taryn dr strang given the change in the approach to testing in nova scotia what is the metric or what are the metrics that you're looking at now and that the public can look at to know when we've reached the peak of this wave so i think we're we're looking at starting to move away from even even reporting and counting daily cases and we're looking at trends what is our one of the things we look at as well as our rolling seven day average of cases and

starting to look at what is the trend over time we're certainly doing still doing seven eight thousand per tests a day which is more than adequate to be able to tell where we're where we are at on the epidemic curve are we going up are we stable are we going down and but it's more important that we look at that with a longer period of time and not at a daily basis uh and so we we we will have a good method to look at the where we are on the epidemic curve and as i've said previously you know paying much more attention to the indicators of severe disease which is people who are hospitalized or whether it's a medical bed or an icu bed and really understanding those and what patterns of the hospital admissions we're seeing that's far more important than the daily case count now in the omicron wave tarantula question yeah again for dr strang with this large group of people who are going to be eligible for booster shots on monday do you have any concern about there being a mad scramble for all of these appointments given that in the past we've seen the system crash when much smaller age cohorts were invited to sign up for appointments yeah i mean we certainly in the early days we did experience some of that i think we we've learned from that and my understanding from the you know our i.t colleagues is that they've robustly strengthened the system to uh to resist that but also we need people to understand that every system has capacity limits and to be patient you will get we're opening up a large number uh early next week and we'll open up even more so if you aren't able to get in right away uh you know uh don't keep trying over and over and over again come give it a bit of time and come back uh patience we aren't we won't be able to immunize everybody that uh that's looking for a booster on monday or tuesday but we're building capacity to get people the opportunity to get immunized uh through through the month of january and perhaps in a little bit into february so people will still have much greater opportunity to get immunized in there in a really short period of time but we do need people to be patient as well okay next we'll go to stuart petal with the chronicle herald go ahead thank you um wondering about the the hell of the halifax hospitalization numbers um will there be a point where you would be looking at moving cases out of the hospitals to other rural hospitals do you know can you explain what that point may be so you know there's a lot of ongoing work i'm not directly involved in it it's led by the nova scotia health authority in terms of what their hospital capacity is and as we slow down other other types of health care there is more capacity for covid patients that's part of the key reason why we're doing slowing down things uh so there's always an ongoing look and adjustment of of of the type of patients and where where they're whether where they are best to be treated that is that is looked at on an ongoing basis by my colleagues in the at the nova scotia health authority stuart do you have a follow-up question yeah i'm going to swing a little bit to transit um understand how extensive drivers have been asking for more mass enforcement and capacity limits uh on buses and transit uh can you speak a bit to that so i mean is there capacity limits that that's within the authority of uh of metro transit uh we've always taken the position that for many people transit is an essential service for them that's the only reason they get around so we have to be very careful that we don't create uh exacerbate existing inequities uh by putting limits on transit but ultimately transit has that capacity uh as i've said where uh occupational health and safety colleagues are looking at uh any revised masking guidance for non-healthcare work workplaces and that would include transit

next we'll go to sarah sabonsky with all nova scotia go ahead sarah good afternoon uh premier are we wondering um if well like other provinces have to be um offering to health care workers that if they test positive they can go to work look it's an ongoing discussion review i mean our health care system is uh is stressed our people working health care are under significant pressure even without coping so once we start losing people um because they have to isolate or because they're sick themselves it's uh it's it's it's an incredible amount of pressure on on the system overall so it's this is something that we'll continue to review there are some um kind of uh i call them working isolation uh protocols that have been in place uh for for quite some time during this pandemic at least anyway if you're a close contact you know there might be some things you can still do um and still keep your colleagues and your patients safe so we'll continue to look at that but right now i mean um i it's just it's it's amazing to me um how how how kind of deep uh our health care workers have dug they're digging deep and they're they're making sure things continue to work and i have every confidence that they'll they'll continue to do that sarah do you have a follow-up question um yes are are we recommending to people to stay home for uh new year's eve so our guidance is in place uh we're not saying people have to stay home but if you choose to socialize do it carefully uh you know no more than 10 people whether it's your home or you're going to somebody else's home where you're going to a restaurant groups of 10 make sure that that group of 10 should be consistent with the same people you've been getting together with throughout the holidays careful masking all those other rules so yeah we're not we're not saying you can't enjoy new year's but like like we've said like christmas boxing day the last weekend enjoy the new year's and new year's eve new year's day uh do it slowly and carefully next we'll go to felix arsenal with radio canada go ahead felix thanks um uh are the temporary closures that were announced and some of the hospital services just just to come from those are uh due to covid outbreaks in certain hospitals so uh what i'm aware of is uh and nsh has a lot more details is yeah we've had people with two reasons that were are well three

reasons there are always slow downs of services over over uh you know the holiday period simply because of staffing uh reductions uh there has been further slowdowns uh or maybe extension of those slow downs to uh allow more capacity to deal with with covid uh and then there have been additional pressures put on uh because of a uh the large number of healthcare workers who uh having whether they're there they themselves are sick with covid or they may have been identified as a close contact and therefore have to be in a period of isolation felix do you have a follow-up question uh yeah we've seen in quebec uh yesterday that they announced that the the that period for isolation for uh some uh workers in hospitals was going to get shrunk down is that something that you're thinking of doing maybe in the west russia as well yeah we're uh like other provinces where we're aware of uh some recommendations that cdc atlanta and the u.s has has you know reducing their the the time period for both quarantine and isolation uh that only came out a couple of days ago so i'm on a call later this afternoon with my national colleagues about that and we're certainly i've asked my team in public health to look at this on an urgent basis uh as we enter into uh next week uh we need to look away are there any ways that don't add significant risk but also uh help us deal with uh with the workforce pressures whether it's in health care or the workforce pressures that are being felt across across the system next we'll go to tim busquet with the halifax examiner go ahead tim hi good afternoon uh dr strang in early december you said that the province had the ability to get first doses of vaccine to 80 percent of children age 5 to 11 before christmas um i don't think we're even at half that mark now is there a particular problem and does that suggest that there should be vaccination in schools or other such mass clinics for children no we're at about 55 i believe roughly in there above the five to 11 year olds who are eligible have gotten their first dose uh we certainly had capacity to do more than that um and i would we're looking at that as we increase capacity and for boosters it will also have increased capacity for uh for children five to eleven um so we'll continue to look at those numbers and and are there places where we may need to do more specific targeted outreach to children and families um but you know our focus now is to emulate large numbers of people in the short time as possible and they're certainly going to be lots more lots of ability for you know five to 11 year olds to get vaccinated if they haven't had their first dose and then towards the end of january we'll start to get everybody all those kids needing a booster so with schools going back in that one of the most important things that parents can do to keep their children as safe as possible is to get them their first dose if they haven't already gotten it critically important to get them immunized like everybody else can you follow a question i i do um on the rapid test reporting uh many of people have contacted me about the security of emailing uh rapid test results they say that violates all all sorts of privacy issues and and best standards and they say that the better way to do it would be to have a secure web form on on the provincial site so that they're not emailing uh who knows where their their health information in age can you address that issue well you know we've stood something up rapidly as we've pivoted our testing strategy i'll take that back and our you know look at our digital team but we put something in place quickly uh i think it's important that people still use that and we'll we'll look at the some of the security issues that you've identified next we'll go to lindsey armstrong with the coast go ahead lindsay thank you very much uh dr stern you said you're looking to move away from daily case reporting uh recognizing that weekly case totals are more representative of covalent activity obviously this would be a major shift i'm wondering when that might happen and why you're looking to stop the daily reports so we've been talking about this for a while and uh we'd like to do it in coordination with other uh other uh provinces as well so we're we're having some i'm gonna you know as i said we talked we're talking about this i'll be raising on my national call today uh as well as discussing it with other atlantic provinces as well it's you know it's something we need to um um not do a uh a rapid or hard stop but make a transition and we're looking we've been looking at ways of how we might do that for the last number of weeks but we'd like to do it in a coordinated fashion with other provinces and territories lindsay do you have a follow-up question yes thank you very much um for the premiere you said obviously that staffing is an issue with booster rollout and you've made a call for retired medical staff do you expect that this will be enough to cover the needs and have you looked at hiring from outside the province bringing in red cross or military support as we have in the past if it isn't enough to cover the booster clinics yeah i think the answer is we'll do whatever's necessary we want to get the boosters in the arms as as quick as possible as fast as possible and we identified kind of three steps to that happening one we have to have this supply so that was initially a challenge but the federal government has really stepped up and we're really thankful for that so now we look at the other the next challenge is do we have the human resources to make it happen do we have the the physical spaces so those are kind of the three steps the first step we have the supply now the second step is the human resources so it's incredible the amount of appointments that have been opened up in in january just from the efforts of the team over the holidays very quickly they got to work and they've added a couple hundred thousand appointments to the to the system in the month of january that will go up how fast that goes up depends on on the human resource um human resources that have available availability so we put that call out um i i i i suspect a lot of people will offer to help we'll see where we're at and then we'll need to if we need to go further we'll continue to go further but we also the discussions with the armed forces are are happening as well uh to the extent

that they're able to send personnel to help us then that'll get that'll get more boosters and more nova scotian arms even faster so it's it's we feel the urgency and we'll do we'll do whatever we can to get those people that are eligible their booster as quick as possible next we'll go to lois and dort with the guys bro journal go ahead lois anne yes so thank you my question is for the premiere and relates to the back to school plan the latest school ventilation report issued for the srce was done in august before classes were in session and before temperatures made open windows physically unpleasant and the one page report issued in august covering 20 schools gave no meaningful information to parents will the province consider random co2 testing which is an indicator of ventilation performance when classes are in session and make those findings available to the public uh but certainly something i'm hearing a lot of from from teachers and and families for sure it's it's it's a real issue there's no question about that so um i i haven't i haven't had a chance to chat with the team about random testing but um but i'll certainly you know i'm certainly personally open to that idea we'll we'll do what we can and to the extent that there's shorter term fixes we'll be happy to implement them some of them are longer term fixes we we understand that but uh what my message to um to teachers to students to families is we do hear you we will do everything we can to keep you safe your safety is is our number one uh priority we want you to feel safe at your place at work we want you to feel safe at your place of study so we'll do what we can and certainly your your suggestion on on random testing is one that will take back to the team oh sand you have a follow-up question yes i do thank you um what metric would currently cause a move to online school as daily case counts and exposures no longer appear to be the measure so i think we're working in schools uh that really is going to become more down to an operational issue for uh you know operational logistics within a school when it becomes no longer feasible if there's large numbers of either of uh teachers or students who are having to be away from school because they have had symptoms that have tested positive

okay our next question goes to chelsea gould with the toronto news chelsea's having trouble with her audio so bear with me as i read her question to you dr strange can you describe if there is routine in fluorophobic testing for staff in hospitals i understand there used to be regular testing but that stopped last summer yeah i would i don't think that that question would have to go to the nova scotia health authority they were they're responsible from an occupational health and safety perspective for all the protocols they have in place for staff i i cannot give an up-to-date answer on that okay and the follow-up question is you have updated your guidance on masking do you anticipate ever mandating these recommended masks into places where masking is required

no i mean we that very very difficult to enforce that i mean there are more stronger mandates around uh from a workplace health perspective under occupation health and safety uh legislation but for the general public uh you know that which really would have to stay as a strongly recommended um uh or a strong recommendation and like everything else we know that the vast majority of nova scotians will follow public health recommendations but it's not something that we would really see as be feasible to be enforcing

okay next we'll move to drake lathers with the fort hawksbury reporter go ahead drake i know you made corrections on the requirement to report positive rapid testing and also noting that the slowing down of contact tracing inside the schools but i'm just wondering who's going to advise teachers staff and students of close contacts and potential exposures once school does resume so that that that's an ongoing discussion but uh as we work out the details of of the kind of uh uh school reopening plan but again contact tracing uh moving away from contact chasing it really means that you're not requiring all that notification that what we're going to focus on is that both for students and staff the key thing is if they have flu cold or flu-like symptoms then they need to stay home not come not not be in school and then and then test as appropriate whether they're eligible for pcr testing or rapid testing uh and acknowledging that there's there's lots of there's lots of places around whether it's schools or out in the community we all have to live right now that there's that there is a chance that we can be exposed to covid no matter where we're going and then conduct ourselves with the right personal preventive measures no matter where we are uh and the key to that is focusing on keeping people who are clearly symptomatic and keeping them isolated at home and testing right do you have a follow-up question uh yes i do and this one might be for the the premier but um i guess what supports will be there for teachers or students who may need to provide or receive classwork for multiple days from isolating with a positive case yeah we'll continue to have those discussions with uh with teachers we we've been through in this province online learning it it worked well for a lot of students some kids don't have the internet um so there's you know the devices challenges there so but we'll continue to talk to uh educators about what's what's possible and being ready to open up alternatives for those for those that need it and i do want to go back to um just just to comment on on the contact uh tracing we've talked about how stretch the resources that public health are we've talked about how stretch the resources that the department of health

and working in health care are they're stretched um so for those that say like when the question is who's going to inform them the the input i don't want the implication to be that they can only ever be informed by public health because that's just not the case they could hear from one of their colleagues they could hear from you know somebody in the community we're just asking people to step up and be responsible and take personal responsibility if you have covet let those around you know and if we find out that's not working and everyone's trying to keep it some massive secret that they have covered and nobody's hearing anything we'll look at a change in course but but for me i believe um i i still believe in the goodness of people and that people care about their community and they care about their colleagues and they care about their friends and neighbors that when they have kobe they'll let them know if they were in contact with them so um to answer your question very specifically of who's going to let them know i personally believe it's any one of a number of people and that probably actually a number of people will let them know but if we need to change course we will but the reality is our resources are stretched and the public health team is trying to put those resources where they can really do the most work to keep people safe right now a lot of that's booster clinics um that that's where a big effort is going so um so we'll we'll continue to monitor if we need to change we'll change but right now this is this is the direction from public health and i trust it um and if we need to if we need to if something happens uh which which is unforeseen that needs to switch to online or other learning we'll do that too we will do everything that's necessary to keep people safe right now uh public health has given us the direction as what they think that is based on the information in front of them and i trust them and i believe them and i think nova scotians do too unfortunately that's all the time we have for questions today sincere apologies to the reporters we weren't able to get to premiere do you have closing remarks yeah thanks just just quickly kind of on that on that uh theme that we were just on obviously nobody wants to get sick with cove at 19 and nobody wants to isolate and and worry about not being able to work or care for their loved ones nobody wants to infect their family and friends uh these aren't just things that nobody wants but what what everyone does want is a booster and i want nova scotians to know that we're working very hard to get those booster appointments opened up and i'm um very impressed and proud of the work that's happened over just the last couple weeks to open up almost 200 000 appointments um for for january that's a good thing we'll continue to work uh towards opening up more appointments and i have every confidence that they will uh we'll do that as quickly as possible but ultimately everything that public health is saying and doing is driving towards more self-management of covet more personal responsibility and dr strang kind of alluded to and and i i've i've heard as well i've heard from many groups of many different groups of people um who have different feelings on what's happening here one group is angry because they think things are too loose another group is angry because um because things are are too tight with restrictions and rules but um but and then we have some that are you know kind of standing there trying to drum up fear and questioning advice but but i also ask nova scotians too to cut through all of that and know one thing uh if i can leave you with one thing it's that public health is is leading a common sense approach to this variant that is appropriate at this time based on what they know and if there has to be a change things will change but everything that is being done today is being done to keep people safe with an eye to some semblance of of of normal some sense of normal that includes activities and gatherings and hugs and handshakes and all those things but um but please follow the public health guidance i trust them and you should too if you're sick do it do a rapid test if you're positive for covet stay home isolate notify your contacts do all these things in the name in the name of your community and please get vaccinated so we're heading into new year's i firmly believe i always believe that tomorrow will always be better than today um and i believe very strongly that we're all in for a very good new year's and i wish nothing but the very best to you and your family thank you so much

you

you're good good afternoon my name is marla mcginnis and i will be your moderator for today's news conference before we begin i'd like to introduce the honorable tim houston premier of the province of nova scotia and dr robert strang chief medical officer of health for nova scotia go ahead premier thank you uh thank you marla thank you everyone for joining us good afternoon today we're going to talk um about developments around boosters we talk about hospitalizations and we'll talk a little bit a little bit about where we're going from here so let's start with the hospitalizations there are 36 nova scotians in hospital with their admission related to covid uh five of those 36 were hospitalized before the omicron outbreak so of those who are in hospital due to covid four are in the icu and the range of age and those in hospital is from 19 to 98 years old the average age is 72. there's nobody younger than 19 in hospital at this time so of those in the hospital 77.8 percent are vaccinated to some degree so we've had over 9000 cases confirmed by pcr test in the last two weeks for reference on hospitalizations on may 30th we had uh may 30th 2021 we had 582 active cases in the province 585 sorry with 53 of those in hospital and 18 in the icu so the case numbers are high um certainly very high as compared to what we're used to but the variant is different and the world is also different so looking at the data to date two things so far remain consistent number one this variant um appears less severe but the volume is certainly breathtaking and the second thing is the vaccines work to reduce severe illness at this volume things can change very quickly that's one thing we've learned during this pandemic is there's no need drawing lines in the sand because the sand shifts very very quickly so dr strang and i will be back on wednesday at that time we'll have two more days of information two more days of research and discussions and um well there are no new restrictions or changes for today i would i would tell nova scotians we are watching and we will not hesitate to do whatever it is we think is necessary to keep nova scotian safe uh so in the meantime let's talk about the booster program an incredible amount of work is being done uh on to get boosters in arms today we opened up appointments for vaccines to everyone over 30 who was over that six-month nasty eligibility criteria for booster doses so thank you to everyone who booked you certainly came out in droves thank you for that we had uh we had 92 000 new january appointments opened uh in the system overnight um i believe they're pretty much all gone or maybe even all gone by now as i speak um that means some people are very happy they got their appointments others are frustrated but what i what i would say to to them is more appointments are coming last week we said that hundreds of thousands of january appointments would be open they will 92 000 were open today so far the others are coming the federal government has committed the supply to us so we have enough for everyone over the coming weeks um the key to opening even more appointments than that number is it remains human resources i want to thank everyone who has raised their hand and stepped up to help out delivering the boosters and the vaccines we've had over last count i had was over a thousand individuals came forward to help i can't thank them enough nothing says bluenoser spirit more than stepping up as you have and i thank you tremendously for that so right now the team is working tirelessly to contact every one of those people who has put their name forward and as more people come on board more appointments will open up it's that simple so if you didn't get an appointment today more will be opening regularly so please keep checking back we will continue to update you and give you as much notice as we can if we see large chunks of availabilities opening up or new clinics uh we'll let we'll let you know for sure we want you to get your booster um uh the appointments will continue to open up daily um so with that i i continue to put the call out once again if you're someone with experience in immunizations um a healthcare professional a nurse a doctor a dentist uh retired practicing whatever if you have the ability to help um please go to um nshealth.ca uh backslash covid jobs uh and reach out and we'll be in touch with you for sure someone will contact you so i'll now turn things over to dr strang to talk more about exactly where we are and and some some perspective on that and maybe where we're heading so dr strang well thank you premier good afternoon everyone and happy new year to everybody watching uh given the very high case numbers that were reported over the last few days uh the premier and i thought it was important to have a briefing today just to help alleviate any concern or anxiety that we know often comes with such high case numbers i'm personally i'm not at all surprised by the case numbers uh despite uh the hope that i that i had that we could that we would have hit our peak we certainly had more gatherings over the holidays and those combined with a highly infectious variant was likely to lead to high case numbers and that's exactly when we look at the the the timing of the onset of symptoms and testing it's all consistent with people uh getting together we you know even in small gatherings uh over the over the you know christmas day and boxing day um that that's consistent so we have to deal deal with that now um i'm not going to predict where this will start to level off uh we know that omicron is here and it is roaring through the province at a very fast rate but no different than what's happening in in every other part of the country as well so we need to assume that it is everywhere and except that it's much easier to catch and spread than any other variant we face and as i've said many times before the main thing we need to watch and it really is shifting our focus is really on the hospitalization numbers which the premier uh has gone through we still um have our uh while we watch the the hospitalization numbers very closely uh but the rate at which they are climbing compared to the amount of coke

would we have uh is is is is very much at a lower rate uh and it's a positive sign that our icu numbers even though our overall hospitalizations is is increasing moderately that our icu numbers are remaining very low and stable so the health care system is managing the hospitalizations for now but there are substantive operational impacts that are occurring throughout the health care system from our ehs to hospitals to long-term care and these are really from the the hundreds of staff that are off because they are positive or isolating because they've been identified as contacts um and that's something i know everyone is worried about not having enough staff and the right staff for the right training to care for those who are sick and vulnerable

this is not just in health care there are operational impacts that are occurring in most other sectors as well right now people are required to isolate for 10 days if they have code in close contacts depending on their situation have to isolate for multiple days and have negative tests there is evolving new evidence and isolation times that that the public health is assessing uh right now today yesterday today and then we'll have some uh final recommendations tomorrow that we'll be able to say more about our briefing on wednesday we are in the most difficult stage of the pandemic yet we are two years in uh as everybody knows you had some form of restrictions and public health measures in place since march of 2020 here in nova scotia life was close to normal uh you know in the fall and then along came omicron um there are many there may be questions and some skepticism about how we're responding to responding to the omicron wave i understand that this is very challenging and difficult um and it's quite likely that almost all of us have either had covet know someone who's had it or been impacted as a close contact um many of you may be thinking and i've heard this sentiment out there that no one is very sick no one is dying why can't we just let this go and move on with her in our lives we could that's certainly an option but that's not one that i would recommend at all at this time not yet for most of us the risk is low but for some of us the risk remains very high and we need to think about people who can't get the vaccine people who are already sick from other diseases or conditions are immune compromised and and older nova scotians we sit still very clear that the single biggest risk factor for severe disease is is increasing age we also need to think about the health care workers who care who will be caring for all these people what if too many of them get sick what happens then so the things we have in place now will protect those who are most vulnerable in our health care system but as you've heard me say before it's about balance right now we can't justify a stricter lock down but nor can we justify throwing the doors wide open we can accept a fair degree of spread of the virus to allow us to continue to do some of the things that protect our mental and emotional well-being and minimize financial impacts such as seeing small groups of close family or friends going to the gym attending school however we also have to work together to slow the spread of the omicron variants to protect vulnerable people in the health care system so we all need to step up and strictly follow the personal protection measures that are in place i am hearing concerning stories about people's you know uh feeling complacent because well nobody in their life has been severely sick so what's all the big deal it's about as always doing what's necessary to protect those who are most in need of of our of our health and their and our protection for them so stay home if you're sick with cold or flu-like symptoms wear your mask and wear it properly uh and then just a reminder now we're recommending as a minimum that a three-layered cloth mask properly fitted and worn uh is the mit is is the type of mast you should be uh looking to use in the general public keeping physical distance were required and limiting your close social contacts also remain very important and i would be remiss if i didn't mention the most important thing that we can do to protect ourselves and others and that's vaccination the premier spoke about our booster dose rollout and i do want to also thank the team for what's been accomplished so far and i'm also proud that so many nova scotians have stepped forward to help help with this vaccine program and build capacity both those who can immunize and those who can help in other ways and we'll need more people to come out for the in the days ahead to get the vaccine that we have into people's arms as quickly as possible and again i'm also proud that nova scotians are yet again prepared to do what it takes to fight covet 19. the evidence is clear that vaccination reduces severe illness and death from the virus and is critical to protecting ourselves and others don't let anybody tell you otherwise if we were dealing with omicron without our very high two dose coverage rates of vaccine we would be in a much more different and difficult situation so our vaccination work over the last year is showing its its dividends now but we need to continue to layer on the booster we can't just vaccinate our way under the omicron wave we have all the other measures that i've mentioned but as i said our vaccination rate is is one of the key reasons why now despite high rates of omicron we have very low rates of severe disease so the vaccine is working and it is protecting us and getting a booster dose will maximize your protection your odds of getting infected or if you do getting severely ill decrease greatly when you have a booster dose so those who are 30 and above please the many of you have got an appointment and the rest there will be a lot more appointments for you and please take advantage of that every person who gets a booster is another person who is optimally protected after two weeks from vaccination and much less likely to get sick and transmit the disease so again if you're 30 and older and it's been 168 days since your second dose of vaccine go online

and look for an appointment uh if you can't find anything today keep checking back because we're always adding uh appointments continuously as more immunizers and clinics get operationalized and come online and there's enough vaccine for everybody who's eligible to have their vaccination uh this month of january and please if you haven't yet had any doses of vaccine or your child hasn't it's never too late and we'll soon be reaching the point where children five to eleven will start to become eligible for their second dose and that's equally important as well

excuse me with the amount of omicron circulating in nova scotia the chances of getting sick if you're not vaccinated are very high and there's no guarantee that you'll experience mild symptoms and it's simply not worth the risk when everyone can access a safe effective and proven vaccine and i've been asked a number of times whether people who have tested positive for covet can get vaccinated the answer is yes anyone who has had covet can and should receive their vaccine whether it's the first second or booster dose as soon as they've recovered no longer have symptoms symptoms that have completed their isolation period

there does seem to be a lot of anxiety about testing and a belief that we don't have enough tests we do have enough tests for everyone who needs one uh we're just using them differently uh through this omicron wave people are showing up at testing sites to get rapid tests and getting upset when they can't get one it seems people believe that they can access one rapid test kit per week that's not true you can no longer get a test just so you can be sure you don't have covet we asked you that you understand you need to go online or call eight one one to complete a self-assessment and if you meet the criteria which are really based on being identified as a contact of covid or having symptoms yourself then you can book an appointment to either pick up a rapid test kit or get a pcr test whichever you're eligible for the system is responding to this pandemic including testing at our maximum capacity we're balancing caring for patients and managing the highest risk cases with access to testing and vaccine um and so in any community there's always a balancing going on uh by the health authority and the iwk so when we need increased access to testing or vaccine or there's surge in care demands uh nsha is always adjusting their resources to respond to their greatest of their ability so please know that we are closely monitoring the different demands and when we and when we see adjustments and more resources are needed in a certain area or in a certain area of focus like access to testing in cape breton right now for example the health system will respond and respond quickly i want to end today we're reminding people that we are nova scotia strong january will be a tough month and i expect that the premier and i will have some more hard decisions to make omicron is pushing us to the limit in creating a difficult balancing act between controlling the virus and limiting the significant impacts of restrictions none of this is easy and we need every nova scotian including us the premier and myself to be at their best let these challenges bring out our finest qualities for all to see we will get through this pandemics do end like uh so we will get through the pandemic but let's get through it by working together caring for one another and treating one another with kindness and respect the challenges we are collectively facing are manageable and they are temporary but the legacy we leave with our response will be permanent back to you marla

thank you dr strang thank you premier we'll now take questions from media in the amount of time that we have we'll do one question and one follow-up and begin with sarah flahmann with ctv go ahead sarah all right dr strange you said that right now we can't justify a stricter lockdown or justify keeping the doors wide open can you give us a sense of what would justify a stricter lockdown there are a lot of viewers who are asking us well why aren't we doing more to restrict this given other provinces are and we're not immune to this so i think we continue to look at a number of factors what is our what is our disease but most importantly we look at our hospitalization what are we seeing in terms of our the impacts on our hospitals and that's the key metric to say how do we navigate uh our way through this by uh keeping the rate of disease and the especially the rate of severe disease within the the capacity of of the health care system so much of this is about not stopping the spread but it's slowing down the spread so all the cases don't happen in a very short period of time um and we're we're still there we are well within capacity of the healthcare system uh what's creating a lot of the pressures now is the is the there's the many hundreds if not thousands of people in healthcare beyond who are isolating for various reasons so as i said we are looking at that actively and we'll have more to say how we adjust in that area on wednesday fair do you have a follow-up question yes i do thank you regarding rapid tests i know we're using them differently but could you give us a sense of when we might receive more shipments of rapid tests and and how many we might get and when that happens how they might be used is there a possibility that we will see asymptomatic testing again on a wider scale in the future we're just waiting for those tests to arrive yeah we're still uh working with the federal government to uh you know understand exactly the timing and the amount of shipment that we'll get in the in over the you know the next few weeks um some of that depends a lot what is the demand for testing for people who are symptomatic in our contacts so uh i what i would envision for at least the next number of weeks until our case numbers

start to go down substantively that we're going to continue to focus our testing as we are now with uh really the emphasis on whether it's pcr or rapid testing on people who are symptoms and then helping contacts as well we're also looking at how do we again as we get more clarity on supply how do we support our schools with access to testing directly through schools like we've done previously but this time looking at the uh the ability to do that for all grades p to 12 as well as for teachers so again as we get more clarity from uh on on on delivery of supply we'll be able to firm up those details but i don't see the focus of our s testing changing in the short term next we'll go to alexa mclean with global go ahead alexa

okay i think she might have just fallen off the call let's move on to gareth hampshire with cbc go ahead gareth thank you um hi dr strang you you alluded to the rapid testing changes there and you mentioned cape breton and people in sydney are saying that the nearest places they can get appointments for the rapid tests are either antigonish or niels harbour which is obviously quite a drive um what steps are being taken to make them readily more available and how soon can do you think that can happen yeah we there are actually i believe three uh right now existing uh sites in the sydney area for access to rapid tests and we're ramping up uh supply and uh hours uh for appointments quickly to address those concerns as you know there's been a surge of cases in in that part of the province so as i mentioned in my remarks we continue to monitor these things and and be as responsive as we can but um we also need people to help us out that we uh you know we understand that you need to meet certain criteria uh before you uh you're eligible for a test and we also need people to make appointments we still have uh people showing up uh with no appointment thinking they can get a test kit and thinking they can come every week just to get a supply of test kits that's not feasible to do that right now so that the system will respond as best we can but we need nova scotians to respond as well and be uh be responsible with how they are uh the supports that they're seeking from the health care system whether it's testing vaccination or or seeking care gareth you have a follow-up question yes thank you maybe premier you could address that as well there seems to be quite a bit of anxiety about access to the rapid test kits what's your advice to people who are trying to get hold of them in and out of outside of halifax yeah the same as dr strang's i mean we're we we recognize that um we've had a testing um a testing philosophy here which is served us very well and it was based on on surveillance we wanted to do a lot of testing asymptomatic symptomatic whatever we wanted a lot of testing in the province so we could understand um the existence of covid in the province it was surveillance-based testing it had two-fold though because it was surveillance-based it was good information for for public health and for the government but it also it gave people a sense of security i'll i'll say that but uh but we're at a different stage now in the pandemic um we we have less of a need for this surveillance part because the reality is there's a lot of covert around there's just a lot of code around we don't need a lot of asymptomatic rapid testing to tell to tell nova scotians there's a lot of covert around and so so we also need people to uh to modify their behaviors and and expect that if they're in a large group of people they're probably somebody in that room who has covert so you know that's there's a lot of things happening here it's a lot it's a lot um for all of us but you know there's definitely a need for testing there's no question about that and and we want people to be able to get that test when they're eligible so as dr strang said we are we're working to get more supply we're working to stand up clinics we're also working to to balance that with the boosting exercise so there's a lot of work being done um i know people are are frustrated because because it's a different it's a different stage in the pandemic it requires a different a different response um and that's that's a shift and shifts are you know shifts are different you know they're they're challenges for people so so my message to people is we we hear you we understand the importance of boosting we understand the importance of testing and there's a lot of people working very hard to make sure people can access what they need when they need it hey next we'll go to sarah smelly with the canadian press go ahead sarah hi there um dr strang i'm wondering like what are you taking away from the province's low hospitalization rates is it a a reason to be optimistic well uh i'm encouraged by the fact that we're you know we have our hospitalizations are while they're increasing they're increasing moderately and a very low percentage of you know probably well below a half a percent of people who are infected are actually ending up in hospital and also encouraged better that the vast majority of people are not requiring even though they're in hospital are not requiring icu care but we also have to continue to be careful that could change very quickly if we all if we just let things go so you know january's going to be tough uh i think you know we've got good things in place to focus on on on keeping that level of uh hospitalization uh within the capacity of the health care system but to do that requires all of us to really uh continue to do the really hard work uh for the next few weeks uh so let's buckle down for january keep us in the reasonably good spot that we're at in terms of our hospitals uh and we'll get we'll get through this as you know things start uh anticipate the pressure likely starting to ease off in uh in you know february and then into spring as spring comes but we can't get ahead of ourselves and right now we still have a lot of hard work ahead of uh in the days and weeks ahead along with you know every as we've altered the premium i've talked about back starts with vaccination but then following all the other things that we're asking people to do in

terms of testing following personal measures that that's that's what we all each of us need to focus on to keep those hospitalization numbers uh in in the uh in the kind of the manageable state that they're at sarah do you have a follow-up question uh no thank you i'm okay thank you perfect we'll move on to jen taplin with the chronicle herald go ahead jen there um parents are really concerned um do you expect many parents will not send their kids to school next week and how can you assure them it's safe so i mean i understand uh we did the school decision was probably the one of the hardest decisions that uh that i've made and brought forward recommendations throughout the whole pandemic but uh you know but at the end of the day where we've landed is that uh there's a significant risk for kids not being in school and if we look at the overall well-being of of of children that the best place for them to be is in-person learning uh i recognize that each family has their own unique circumstances so uh but i and i do know that the education system has uh well-established processes in place that if they're individual students that for whatever reason can't be in school um that there are ways for them to get the support from the education system um and we are we are we'll be talking more on wednesday about this we're putting in and you know as we've had previously uh multiple layers of protection around uh you know keeping kids in classroom cohorts minimizing movements around the school uh limiting external visitors uh but it starts with uh if if children or or teachers or if they're sick they need to stay home and not be in school um for you know uh using uh uh masking carefully and and appropriately uh within the schools and and uh and uh other things were you know looking at ways that they can improve ventilation all those factors are different layers that um that what that pro apply uh a reasonable level of safety the reality is we are going to get covered in schools uh but those layers of safety will will help decrease any the transmission that that happens within that uh setting but also acknowledging that the the critical importance of children for uh for being in person learning wherever possible john do you have a follow-up question i was just curious um how many people have stepped forward to in the past week to help with the vaccination clinics and uh how many more are needed uh i don't have a specific number on that i mean the more the better i was outside the last briefing we we continue to get more and more people stepping forward whether it's immunizers or other functions in in clinics um and we'll take everybody that uh that we can uh so if you're interested you know you can go online to the uh nova scotia health uh covered website where there's a place both for people to uh uh to volunteer for both either whether it's immunizers or many of the other jobs that are necessary for our mass clinics based on that on that we've had over over a thousand we can get you the exact number but it was over a thousand last last time i checked and i know people were still still uh expressing an interest to me so at the moment um people are contacting those people and and and just making sure that we get the right we got the right skill sets so but over a thousand we can get a better number for that though if you want if you needed one okay we're going to move back to alex alexa mclean with global go ahead alexa

alexa are you there

okay we'll go to tim busquet with the health box examiner go ahead tim hi good afternoon um dr strang you keep saying that instead of daily case counts we should be focusing on hospitalizations but generally speaking we're not getting that data over the two long holiday weekends we didn't get hospitalization numbers at all um we're not told what the vaccination status of those in the hospital is we're not told how long they're in hospital the res the release today said that 31 people have been hospitalized since omicron so are we to understand that no one's left the hospital we have no idea about the age of the people in hospital on and on and on uh it was helpful that that the premier said some of this information today but can we expect to get some of this this information on a daily basis moving forward yeah i'm not going to commit to daily because it doesn't but we are looking at how we provide more robust uh hospitalization data uh as as we move forward um i mean i i think you know we were we were developing our hospital surveillance systems uh i hope you can appreciate that we you know in the midst of of uh the omicron we have people who had been working for two years and and i was trying to get some people a little bit of time over the holiday period so we only focused on what was critically essential now we're back and we you can expect to see more robust hospitalization uh data moving forward tim do you have a follow-up question i i do on that uh that's good to hear and thank you uh on that i just want to ask it more pointedly 31 people have entered the hospital because because of kovitz since omicron uh again have none of them left or is there are there short stays and they're being replaced what's the situation there so we'll get more i mean their average length of stay is uh is a some of them are in the emergency room and then they don't aren't admitted others are in there for a few days so uh there is some turnover um but our overall numbers are staying well within our capacity so again we'll have more robust breakdowns of that as we move forward next we'll move to adrian blonde with radio canada go ahead adrian good afternoon uh premier houston um how confident are you that the schools will be able to reopen considering that we can see that more and more people are close contact and have to isolate temporarily and what kind of measures can we expect to be announced before the schools reopen in january yeah i mean as confident as

you can be with anything in the middle of a pandemic where things change very very quickly but um you know dr strang spoke to the fact that we believe the best place for for our students is in schools so we will take every step we can to make sure that um that they're safe in the schools that includes masking you know we're looking i i was asked last time about the ventilation systems we're looking at that we want parents to to know that their parent their children will be safe in school and that the teachers and we want the teachers to know that they'll be safe in school so we'll take the steps but if if things change um and we have any concerns whatsoever then we'll change we'll we'll move with it so we've got um school in-person learning is um scheduled to start a week from today um and we got a press conference on wednesday we'll continue to look at the data we'll continue to have discussions but if we feel confident that school can be opened in person safely then we will open it in person if we have other data or other concerns then we will make an adjustment and we'll speak more to that on wednesday as it gets closer adrian do you have a follow-up question yes a question that i think could be for you both we can see that ontario has implemented again a stronger restrictions how is nova scotia different from um ontario in that regard well i mean i'll speak to it then maybe dr strang might want to but um every jurisdiction is a little different in terms of the actual demographics of the population in terms of the vaccination vaccination rates of the population i i think you know when you look at the the variance and look at what was happening in nova scotia before the omicron wave other areas had more delta which was a different a different variant so there's lots of lots of factors but um you're right there's also a lot of similarities so we're we're you know we're having these discussions we're looking at the data and i think as a province nova scotia has shown that it will move and it will move very quickly in the interest of public safety and that um that stands just as much today as it ever did before but i don't know dr strang if you want to add that to that yeah as the premier said every throughout the whole pandemic every province has been somewhat different with our own epidemiology and other circumstances um you know we have uh fairly strong measures that are in place uh at least until january 10th and i fully expect that they will be extended we'll need to extend those beyond january uh sorry january the 12th um but again every measure has its own set of impacts and this is all about balancing what is necessary to control kovid uh versus minimizing the the impacts of the substantive impacts that can happen from restrictions and i think we're in a good place right now again it's not about stopping the spread of cobit so much as is about slowing down its spread so the impacts which will occur and we'll but we'll then we'll get out of this but we got to spread out those impacts over a period of time that are within the capacity of our health care system and so far i think we're doing a good job of that but we continue to watch things very carefully and course correct if if necessary but at this point of time i have not felt the need to bring forward recommendations to strengthen uh restrictions but i think fair fair warning for nova scotians that it that uh extension of the existing restrictions is is quite like quite likely to be coming next we'll go to nicole sullivan at the cape ruten post go ahead nicole thank you um uh dr strang this is uh for you i'm just you you know you touched a little bit on um cape breton it's extremely difficult in cape breton to even get appointments to pick up rapid testing anywhere on the island um some i've spoken to health care workers both hospital both long-term care facility who've had symptoms since thursday and friday still unable to get an appointment to be able to get their tests so um you know i know you you urge that it's important to not just show up but these people they can't get their tests they're symptomatic so i'm wondering why is the system set up so that you can only book within for three days in advance and why can't somebody like a continuing care assistant or a hospital worker pick up tests from their employers so we we are focusing uh on on our workplace uh testing uh strategy we are continuing to provide rapid tests through uh what we call high-risk uh workplaces such as uh healthcare settings and you know long-term care facilities and other kind of congregate living settings so that is still uh available um there's been as in just in the last few days as increase in cases in uh in the cape breton area so as i said the health system is rapidly adjusting uh redeploying supply and opening up uh appointments and other opportunities to address that increasing demand uh as quickly as possible nicole do you have a follow-up question um yeah i do thank you um so i'm i'm wondering when it comes to the rapid tests versus the the pcr tests um i know through our our health system where we're recognizing the rapid tests as being accurate tests yes you have covid if somebody has a rapid test but they develop long covered symptoms how much is that test going to be accepted um outside of public health and nsh for say long-term or short-term disability claims through insurance companies so we're setting up a process so certainly we're now with the with the level of spread of kobe that we're very comfortable you know a rapid test means you have covet uh and we are setting up a process that uh you know for you know it's there for people can report that into the into the health care system and we are we're aware of the need some people may need more formal documentation so we're establishing a process that over time if people need some kind of an official documentation uh showing that they had a rapid test uh that we will have a way to provide them with that documentation next we'll go to pat healy with the laker go ahead pat this question for premier houston how will the province ensure staffing levels at schools are maintained given the fast spread of omicron and if a large amount of teachers have to go off work into isolation yeah we're uh thank you pat for the question we're we're very concerned about this um in healthcare in education but across our economy i

mean i've spoke to a number of business owners who are finding it difficult to keep keep their operations going because of the you know the vast number of nova scotians that are on isolating because they were close contact or are sick so it's a big issue um in education uh it will be as well so we'll watch we'll watch closely there's been there's been some standard um protocols for when when the the school needs to be closed uh one of those will be operational issues if we just can't don't have the the people to operate it then we won't be able to keep the school open so we're concerned there's no question about that i don't want to minimize the concern but we're watching very closely with what's happening across the community pat do you have a follow-up question yes i do dr strang if you get covet 19 how long do you have to wait before you can get your booster dose so what we're saying is that we certainly even if you have an infection it's still uh important to follow up with whether it's you're completing your first o second dose or your booster dose you should wait until first of all you're no longer considered uh infectious uh and also that you're completely that you're feeling uh feeling better once you meet those two criteria you can go ahead and and and and get what you know finish your series including a booster with coco vaccine

next we'll go to lindsey armstrong with the coast go ahead lindsay thank you very much a question for the premier and dr stern looking at ventilation in schools are you looking at actually establishing active ventilation systems in the schools that currently rely on passive ventilation before the kids return and will teachers still be asked to open up windows as ventilation this january uh thank you thank you for the question lindsay there's lots of discussion about ventilation in the schools and you know this is something that's an active inactive file and um my understanding is that you know 70 to 80 of the schools have um you know pretty high quality hvac system and there are other schools that that that need you know that have an older ventilation system so what we're what we're looking at is what we can do to um and but i want to say all this against the fact that there's public health has not identified any issues with the ventilate with ventilation in the schools um so but that said we hear what's happening in the community and we want to be responsive so we're looking at those those schools that you mentioned i think it's about 70 schools in number but that's an active file seeing what we can do um in terms of setting up systems in the classrooms there so it's happening uh in real time i think there's some procurement discussions that are happening right now as well so um but to answer your question about will that be before the start of school i don't think it will be um but it's something that we're very focused on i know dr strang if you want to add to that yeah i think you know improving ventilation or optimizing ventilation is important but again it's one of them multiple layers so i always come back do we have to have the multiple layered approach and it's all those different layers none of which by themselves are are perfect but it's the layers working together which provide good levels of protection lindsay do you have a follow-up question yes thank you very much for that a question for dr strang i'm wondering if you have any update on your discussions regarding ending daily case counts i'm wondering what the other provinces thought about that and if you have a timeline for when you expect to end this practice no i brought that issue forward that'll add my last uh you know national call on thursday there was lots of uh support from my other chief medical officer of health colleagues around uh moving away from the daily case counts and uh but also doing that in a in a consistent way in terms of timing and and what that looks like uh there was a commitment by uh the public health agency of canada who kind of chairs those national meetings to to have this as an ongoing agenda item uh as as we move forward you know we usually have two uh i'll have a call tomorrow and then another one thursday we have two calls a week so look forward to that conversation unfolding with my colleagues across the country next we'll go to adam cook with telly community television go ahead adam thank you very much marilla i'd like to begin with premier houston if i could although dr strang you may have some insight on this as well premiere during the last covet 19 media briefing this past thursday you stress the importance of volunteers coming forward and staffers coming forward for community vaccination clinics and you mentioned that the eastern and western zones were going to be starting to ramp up in those particular areas are you able to discuss at this time what exactly that will involve and what the timeline is for getting these community clinics up and running um thank you adam and i can tell you this is a this is a major there's a major push inside of public health and and the department of health uh of course with the health authority as well to to get as many of these clinics going as we can and and you know we've mentioned the supply is there so now with the human resources so i will get a better a more accurate number but the number that i have is a thousand nova scotians have stepped forward uh to help out and the more people that step forward and help out the quicker we can get the boosters in our arms whether you know whether that's support in a pharmacy or in a community clinic or whatever the case may be we'll make them available wherever we can so it's all about the push to get um to get people uh who are qualified to help out and that that pushes is is active and i would say i'm very optimistic about the response of nova scotians and the willingness to step up and help out at this time so so we'll we'll have more news as we can open more clinics we want to open more appointments uh we open 92 000 overnight i think they're pretty much all all booked now we'll continue to open appointments but it's um the people stepping up is what really

gets us over the over the top on that

just to add to that we have been able to get an updated number it's 1 646 nova scotians have come forward to help out and deliver vaccines so that was 1646. adam do you have a follow-up question i do thank you marilla dr strang wanted to bring up the concept that was mentioned by one of my fellow reporters earlier concerning getting testing done in cape retina and i'm curious about a system that was used to provide rapid tests uh just up until the middle of december that being the nova scotia library system rapid tests were available there can you give us some thoughts on why that system is no longer in place was it basically surging cases and a you know an increased demand for rapid test kits or was it just felt that other vehicles such as the nova scotia health authority and its various health centers would be better to distribute these than the library system oh it was it was uh both a combination of uh you know the surge in cases and prioritizing our testing in certain areas as well as uh you know we've had some decreased supply which were which were actively replenishing uh you know we still uh as we get more supply we may go back to looking at libraries as an access point uh as i said there's active discussions going on around how we especially in in our more uh rural communities how we make sure that there's uh reasonable uh re uh close uh combined close in terms of geography access to rapid testing uh you know i i've been able to get to people get rapid testing kit so we haven't ruled out that we may not use libraries as part of that as we move forward again a number of initiatives that we're looking at and it comes back to uh what's feasible given our focus of testing and also what's the supply that we have available next we'll go to lois and george with the guys bro journal go ahead lois again

yes hello good afternoon um i have only one question today no follow-up is there a hospitalization threshold that will trigger more restrictions such as a percentage of all active cases thank you no as i've said many times before we don't you know there's a number of data pieces and contextual pieces that we look at to make decisions there's not one specific number of thresholds that uh you know in terms of hospitalizations that if you hit that then you're then you have to uh you know increase restrictions it's it's looking at data points and the context around that data points and uh you know how what what's the the what's the total picture that we're looking at uh to make decisions okay we'll go next to drake lathers with port hawksbury reporter go ahead drake i know you mentioned you weren't surprised with the high case numbers over the holidays but was the almost 1900 cases announced on par higher or lower than what you and your team were expecting well i mean it was as i said i think i said i wasn't totally surprised it was you know that was a very high number uh but again i'm not on uh not out of the realm of possibility uh given you know what the types of the high and highly infectious nature of the omicron variant and uh and the decisions we've made to allow you know small group gatherings as over the christmas holidays for for obvious uh you know beneficial reasons for for people and families um and so now moving forward we uh you know we will we continue to manage things and again it's not it's not about the total volume of cases and the express spread of covid as much as slowing down that spread to the point where we can manage things uh within our hospital system and keeping a very close eye on the various uh you know data points around uh you know who's coming into hospital under what circumstances do you have a follow-up question yes i do and just sort of touching on those uh data points that you'd be looking at to make those restrictions or make those decisions are we ever going to get to a point where we'll have to implement increased restrictions on fully vaccinated and boosted individuals

so um you know that that's you know i'll never say never to things but uh certainly we know that uh you know people that are even with two doses of vaccine have good protection against severe disease and a booster gives them even uh very good protection against severe disease and brings their protection against getting uh infected back to the level that it was when we had the delta variant around um so certainly vaccination uh require is is gives people much more protection um and i think we always need to accommodate that when we look at the type of restrictions and what's necessary necessary for people who are vaccinated versus unvaccinated we have time for one more question we'll go to stephen wenzel with city news halifax go ahead stephen thank you an infection control epidemiologist in ontario is calling for schools in that province to remain closed until at least january 24th and in a letter to toronto public health he warned a premature return to in-person learning would cause quote all students attending schools and daycares in ontario to become exposed to covid19 within a few days of opening with estimates of up to 2 750 children in ontario being hospitalized throughout this wave children under 12 are not yet fully vaccinated in elementary school classrooms remain the largest on vaccinated gathering in the country doesn't the idea that the safest place for kids to be is in school contradicting the science no in fact that's you know that's one person's opinion there were uh 500 physicians in ontario who wrote a letter very recently a public letter uh asking the ontario government to uh to keep schools open so there are there are strong opinions on either side um but we when we look at the nova scotia context context right now we're

comfortable with the position we've taken about uh balancing uh the need to control covid versus minimizing harms from from restrictions and knowing the substantive i have to keep coming back to this the very substantive harms that that occur when when we have uh kids out of school for prolonged periods of time uh but as a premier said we'll continue to look at things and adjust as necessary but right now we're very comfortable with the position we're landing about about balancing multiple perspectives and having having kids in school with multiple layers of safety to protect them and teachers steven do a follow-up question sure will you be requiring proof of vaccination to become mandatory in schools for children five or older

no we have not at this point contemplating proof of vaccination uh for five to eleven year olds and uh we've always said that proof of vaccination would not apply uh regardless of each uh for essential essential essential or access to essential services like health care and i would consider education uh up there is as essential as health care for children and that's all the time we have today go ahead premier uh thank you mario thanks everyone for the questions these are certainly the questions on the minds of nova scotians we're hearing them as well for sure but the reality is that covid is all around us now um whether in nova scotia pei quebec uh new brunswick newfoundland on and on uh other countries um covid is everywhere with this variant most nova scotians know somebody who's had covid at this stage um and and probably have seen or heard that the person recovered fairly quickly that's that's that's uh happening a lot with this variant and seems to be the norm but some people do end up in hospital and that is where our focus is those making sure that the health care system that the hospital system is there to support those that need it that's our that's our entire focus right now um so we're watching that very closely so um i thank all those nova scotians uh during the holiday season i know it was tough um to limit the groups and to miss some of the traditions of the holiday season particularly around being around extended family is really tough and i really thank you for for stepping up and and doing doing what public health asked of you i can't thank you enough for that you're taking responsibility uh for your own actions to protect your community and to protect protect those around you so thank you uh for doing that um we'll continue to add booster appointments we'll continue to look at the science we'll continue to understand the impact of covid on nova scotia in our demographic in our population we're watching very closely and um public health and myself and our team will we will we will act very quickly as necessary we have one goal and that's the the safety of nova scotian so so thank you for your time today and we'll see you all on wednesday thank you

you

okay

good afternoon and thank you for joining us my name is tina tebow and i will be your moderator for today's news conference joining us today the honorable tim houston premier of the province of nova scotia and dr robert strang chief medical officer of health for nova scotia go ahead premier thank you tina good afternoon everyone thanks for joining us today we're going to talk about schools we're going to talk about boosters we're going to talk about so let's start with the hospitalization there are 45 nova scotians in hospital with their admissions related to covet five of the 45 were hospitalized before this omnicrom outbreak of those who are in the hospital due to covad eight are in the icu so 45 and eight the average length of stay of a coveted patient in hospital is 5.4 days the average age the age range i guess of those in hospital is from 26 years old to 98 years old with the average being 70 years old and of those in in hospital 68 um 69 percent are vaccinated to some degree no no children are in hospital in this problems at this time which leads me to to schools we will be delaying the return to in-person school by one week to january 17th online learning will start on january 10th schools will remain open for students who use the learning centers this this delay this one week delay was an extremely difficult decision the best place for our children is in school we've been here before and our own history in nova scotia with covet shows that our schools are safe that said we believe that with this one week government can take steps to increase public confidence even further and since we can do that we should do that and we will do that so with this one week while online learning is happening we will work to address four themes of concerns that we've heard the first is around ventilation there are 71 schools across the province that can do with increased improvements to the ventilation systems this issue has been sitting on desks for years we're going to pick it up and we're going to deal with it right now yesterday we authorized the purchase of ventilation units for classrooms in those 71 schools we've been told that many if not all of these systems can be in place late next week the second the second issue is around masks it's my hope that when children show up for in-person learning there are three-ply masks available to every one of them and possibly even sitting on their desks waiting for them so we use this time to to try to get that done the third the third theme of concerns is around testing and test kits tests are in high demand nationally they're hard to come by but we're working on it it's my hope that a new shipment of tests was ordered quite some time ago that it arrives and is distributed uh to schools and available again available waiting for for each and every student when they arrive at school so that's that's in that's a work in progress uh hopefully a week from now we'll have we'll have more clarity on that and the fourth uh theme of concern that we heard is um just around the communication procedures so we use this additional week to firm up and properly communicate procedures for things like who to notify when there's an illness there will be covet in schools everyone should take precautions knowing that there's lots of covet around the province but so these these steps that the government will take will make school will make the um a safe school system even safer so teachers and staff you will be safe at work parents your children will be safe at school and students you will be returning to a wonderful in-person learning environment surrounded by people that have your best interests at heart that those are all true the best place for our children is in school and government will do its work on these four items and our schools will be open and i ask that we work together to remove any remaining question marks that still exist because the the brutal reality in this province is that for some kids school is the place where they are safest and they're safest at school that's it's sad but it's true and the reality for many children in this province um is particularly as we move into the depths of winter is that school is the place where they are most warm again that's sad and it's hard to imagine for many of us but it's true and and the reality for many children is that is that school is where they get food it's heartbreaking and it's a terrible reflection on our society but we can't ignore it and not to mention the socialization that takes place in school all of these things uh weigh heavily on me as we as we push the start of the school year of the return to school back by one week it's it's a tough decision knowing knowing all these factors so i apologize um i also know that every time we change the school calendar we traumatize those families who don't have the means to access child care so we must also remember that schools are as safe as their communities any steps that can be taken to protect communities protect our schools when those who can work from home or can slow down do they're doing their part to slow the spread and slowing the spread helps keep communities safe and keeping communities safer allows kids to return to school all of us have to be proactive in how we prevent ourselves from getting sick but also how we prevent transmission to others so people working from home or are other community restrictions that are in place they're not inconsistent with schools being open in fact they're very consistent the more we do to keep communities safe the more we are doing to give our children the opportunity to be in school where they want to be and where they should be i'm very passionate about schools but next let's talk about boosters as of today over 42 percent of the public that's eligible at 30 years old and eligible for a booster has either already received their booster or has their appointment booked so that's not an insignificant number but it's not a hundred percent either i realize that yesterday uh 12 600 boosters went into arms this is a this is a new

record since july there's work to be done for sure in getting the boosters out there but it is being done and if you didn't get an appointment or didn't get an appointment as early as you would like keep checking back we're opening more appointments daily and there is enough vaccine for every nova scotian who wants one and we're working hard to get that to you we have large clinics now at the halifax forum and we're opening a clinic in wolfville next week on january 17th we will open large clinics in truro and darkmouth starting on the 10th some covid testing centers will offer vaccines by appointment and i talked about this last week and kind of a split split shifts so those were hope to have those in truro new glasgow cumberland aniganish sydney berwick yarmouth and the testing site in digby will come on board in a couple weeks so there's a lot of work being done on the boosters so please be patient i do want to speak directly to cape ratners i know there is a lot of anxiety in cape breton over testing we hear you there is an incredible amount of work being done to meet the need capacity has been added in sydney along with more wrap more rapid testing kits we had a testing center open in new water for today we one will open in glace bay tomorrow sydney mines number two plus mobile units be on the ground hopefully by friday so again there's a there's a lot of work to be that's being done there so thank you to the incredible work of the cape breton family resource center joanna i know you and your team have been wonderful partners working tirelessly to get these kids out and i thank you for that before i turn it over to dr strang let me just let me just say to to nova scotians i i share your frustration but i i do want to say this seeing the professionalism and the dedication of the people working so tirelessly to keep us all safe i have incredible confidence in the plans we're putting forward i trust public health the plans that we share with you are developed by high quality people that are using the best information available where things need to be updated and changed we will adapt you've seen that but i have every confidence in saying that the plans that we are following the plans we are sharing with you are the best possible plans nova scotians have been incredible throughout this pandemic you've set an example for the rest of the country let's keep doing it uh dr chang i'll turn it over to you

thanks very much premiere a good afternoon everyone uh the omagron variant uh continues to create challenges uh here in nova scotia across the country and in many other parts of the world uh there's no doubt we are right in the thick of the omokram rave at this time we've said all along that we have two main goals uh especially with this wave first and foremost it's to protect the most vulnerable people from severe disease and hospitalization uh and so far that seems to be uh what we're seeing and the second is to protect the health care system and ensure it can continue to operate uh effectively and that is where we're seeing some real challenges now omicron is having a significant impact on our health care workforce health care facilities long-term care home care emergency services and as a result access to the care and delivery of many services our hospitals are over capacity for nova scotians that means waiting too long for care or having long-awaited tests or procedures cancelled i'm not saying this to scare anyone but if you are experiencing an emergency you will get care but if your health concern is not urgent please at this time do not go to an emergency department visit your family doctor or walk-in clinic or or use the 8-1-1 telehealth line to help get direction the reality is there's very little flex in our health care system right now when we're asking everyone to help support the teams who are doing everything they can do to ensure people get the care that they need so extending restrictions that are currently in place to january 31st is a necessary and important step to continue to slow down virus transmission it also gives a couple of weeks after children are back in school to monitor how that's going along with the spread in communities to determine what our next steps might need to be but please remember that the restrictions only take us so far and only work if everyone follows them it's also critical that we each do our part closely follow personal protection measures to slow the spread of the ver of this variant and that includes getting vaccinated many people are questioning the vaccine but i need to be clear the protection we have from our very high level of vaccine coverage is what is uh keeping us as safe as possible as safe as we are right now i don't even want to think about what omicron would look like if we didn't have vaccination so like the virus is evolving and changing so too much our response to the pandemic we need to look at some some clear and honest facts we've been at this for almost two years and there is a lot of covid fatigue and frustration but we've also learned a lot about covid 19 we know much more about how to prevent it and also how to live with it we know that restrictions help to prevent spread and we also know that they have unintended consequences like placing stress on on our individual and collective mental health and our economy we know that personal protective measures also work to keep us safe and these are things that are within each of our control and relatively easy to do we know that we have high vaccination rates as i've talked about and we're starting to get booster doses into arms with a plan to give one to every nova scotian uh who wants one at an appointment in january or february and at the same time we're continuing to offer first and second doses to adults and and first and starting to be soon second dose is for children 5 to 11. so when we look at all these facts it's clear to me and hopefully clear to many others that our response to the omicron variant can't be the same response that we had in wave one two or three we are in a different place and we're asking people to do things and accept approaches that may feel uncomfortable because they are different from what

we've done in the past two years the omicron wave will pass through and we will move uh move forward to living with covid but we do need to do it cautiously and in a way that minimizes overall harms both from the virus itself and the actions we take to slow it down now you it's about balance a word i use uh frequently so i want to talk about uh part of that moving forward i want to talk about changes to isolation for positive cases and close contacts and our advice is changing our approach is changing in response to what we're learning about omicron in a nutshell for most people starting uh on friday this coming friday both the isolation period for positive cases and close contacts will be shortened evidence shows that the omicron variant has a shorter incubation period than with the original strain and the majority of transmission happens in the early part of the illness generally one to two days before a positive test or symptoms begin and then the first two to three days after to be safe we are landing on changing the isolation period for most people who get covered 19 from 10 days down to seven days and i say most because vaccination status matters and matters a lot people who are fully vaccinated that's at least two doses of vaccine and children under 12 and the reason we say children under 12 is that they have not yet had time to get two doses so those people will be required to isolate for seven days following the start of symptoms or a positive test and if they're asymptomatic or their symptoms are improving and they have no fever for the past 24 hours they can leave isolation after just now seven days previously it was 10 days but those who are not fully vaccinated or who meet our criteria for moderate to severe immune compromise will still be required to isolate for the full 10 days now i want to talk about some changes to the isolation period for close contacts and we know that having close contacts isolate is creating huge impacts on them on our workforce uh but so i feel at this stage that this is where we can make some changes to alleviate uh some of this pressure uh that is happening in sectors across the province it will present some increased risk from covid but but given that we're seeing mostly relatively mild illness i feel that's an acceptable risk that will help minimize uh the overall impacts this wave is having on on people families and and almost every sector of business and our economy this is another step towards living with covid and again vaccination status matters when we're talking about uh the isolation for close contacts if you're a close contact uh and are fully vaccinated or or again or under 12 and you have no symptoms you no longer need to fully uh isolate until you have a negative test you need to stay at home as much as possible but you can attend work or school if it cannot be done virtually all other contacts with people outside your household and outings need to be avoided uh wherever possible get someone to pick up groceries or prescriptions but we do know that there are a small you know some people who cannot and and if you absolutely have nobody to help you out then it is acceptable to do those that meet those essential other needs if you are going out whether it's to work school they always wear a mask properly fitted and keep your distance from others as much as you can these new rules apply to close household contacts if the covered case that they live with can fully isolate away from the rest of the household and then they also apply to close contacts uh of non-household cases for example two people who work together or people that were at a social uh kind of gathering together so except for going to work or school you would be if you meet these criteria you need to stay home and isolate and you need to then have a negative test at at least 72 hours after the exposure it's a little different if you are a household contact of a case who cannot fully isolate for example you have young children or it's a crowded household and people just cannot fully the case cannot fully isolate in these cases the close contacts will have to isolate for the same amount of time as the positive case and test every three to four days including a test on the last day of isolation if all these tests are negative you can end isolation on the same day that the case does if you're an unvaccinated or partially vaccinated close contact or again you meet the criteria for moderate to severe immune compromise uh and have not if you're in those with that immune compromise uh definition and have not yet had your third dose uh and all those groups who don't have symptoms you still have to isolate for seven days after your exposure you can only leave isolation when you get a negative test on or after the seventh day in any circumstances regardless of vaccine status if a close contacts develop symptoms they then have become a possible case and have to fully isolate and follow testing requirements this is a lot of new information and we know it's complex and it's going to take some time for people to understand all the changes that we've made in the last few weeks so we're working as quickly as possible to update the information we have online so that's an accurate source uh of information on exactly what to do in specific certain circumstances and uh situations i know for many people this is a confusing time we need to acknowledge that things are changing often nothing seems straightforward and it's tough to keep track of all the new rules on top of the changing information there is a lot of anxiety and demands especially for testing the but the reality is that we do not have unlimited resources whether it's for tests for vaccine or for people uh to uh to to run those services or other health care services we are doing the best to manage access to testing vaccine delivery managing uh cases and contacts and caring for people who are sick

being i unfortunately have to say this yet again today being rude and disrespectful to health care workers trying to do their jobs is not the way to respond none of this falls on them and we've had to ask for police presence at our testing sites as as recently as today that is just unacceptable and frankly disappointing and and i really feel that it's it's uh

ridiculous that we're having to go to that extent to control people's behavior uh and how they're behaving towards people who are have gone above and beyond to provide care to them if you do need a test you will get one if you need a vaccine you will get one and if you need care urgent care you will get it but it's much more easier for everyone if we're all patient and kind to each other and follow the rules we do need to work with the resources we have and we need nova scotians to be part of that solution the very first thing you need to do to get a test is to go online do the self-assessment and find out if you actually are eligible for a test and then if so what kind of tests you need we have far too many people just showing up at testing sites demanding to have tests and many of them are not even eligible they're being turned away and they're being disrespectful so help us out help us by taking more uh taking more responsibility to understand the information that is available as best you can and we will do our best to help you make sure information is available and understandable and by continuing to be honest continuing to rely on evidence and science and continuing to make decisions that are balanced and with a view to minimizing overall harms our actions and these changes are about this balance the balance between living safely with covet and moving forward out of the pandemic the balance between keeping our health care system and essential services running and protecting vulnerable nova scotians but also allowing our communities and economy to keep thriving as best as possible we need to take all we've learned about covert over the past two years and how to protect ourselves and adapt it to meet the challenges of this latest phase and that's why we're making changes to how public health manages cases who gets tested and what kind of tests they get and then as i've talked about as a friday how long cases and close contacts need to isolate i'll say it again and i've said it previously this is the most difficult stage of the pandemic we're all ready to move on but covet isn't ready to let that happen just yet the one thing that we can all rely on that has stayed consistent through this pandemic is the amazing ability that nova scotians have to adapt to change to persevere and overcome i really believe this is the last stages of the pandemic so we let's not let things uh go at these la at this late stage let's stay together be kind and caring to one another be responsible and we will come out the other end of this marla

thanks dr strang again just a reminder to reporters on the line uh we have about 22 reporters on the line today we will try to get to as many questions as we can we will start with natasha pace from ctv go ahead natasha thank you very much um i'm just seeing here a release was just sent out saying that restrictions that took effect on december 22nd that were supposed to expire next week will now continue until the end of the month but no new restrictions are being added um given the fact there's been thousands of new cases announced in the last few weeks why no new restrictions

this is about balance that we know that uh every restriction has its own set of significant impacts uh we have a a disease that's very widespread um and and uh how much further do we go with before we're locking everybody down which i do not believe that the impacts of that are substantive so we have to move forward finding that balance um and we feel that where we're at right now is we still have a good balance and we're asking nova scotians to help us out with that by doing everything they can do to play their part and take on their responsibility by following the restrictions that are in place and adhering to the all the actions that they take based on the public health measures uh and we'll watch things uh and if we need to go further we will but we're very cognizant that further restrictions come with significant impacts on their own go ahead natasha if you have a follow-up i do um perhaps for the premier i i understand that the nova scotia paid sick leave program will launch on monday um can you tell us a bit about this program who qualifies how many days are nova scotians eligible to draw from this program yep thank you so that's that's look where the program is consistent with last time um in in all the criteria people may be familiar with it from last time so but look as doctor strength said we're trying to find the balance of how do we we know that the restrictions have an impact on people we want to support people through that process we want to do that um in conjunction with the the programs that the federal government have out there so we're going to get through we're going to get through kovitz you know dr strang didn't didn't mention but obviously we're delaying the start of school so we're we're adopting and making the changes that we feel are necessary to keep nova scotians safe and we'll do what we can to support them uh through that process and one of them is that paid that paid sick leave program which it's consistent with last time people be familiar with that next we'll go to gareth hampshire from cbc go ahead gareth thank you um premier the delay to school what impact do you think that move could have on the availability of frontline staff who might now need to stay at home for that extra with their children given their already big staffing challenges yeah so certainly that's the you know we're we're very conscious of that as well and this is one of the you know that's why i said these are tough decisions uh for sure for a lot of reasons the impact on children the impact on families and you you've highlighted one of them for sure um but we we have to weigh all this stuff up and we just we just look at the amount of covet we have it in our communities um look what look at what government can do to to uh we believe our schools are safe but to make them even safer to increase the public confidence so i do apologize to those uh those families and and some of which are are you know it's it's a it's from very

traumatic when the school challenge and when the school calendar changes they don't have the means or the access to child care it has a huge impact on families and some of them are frontline responders so it has an impact we accept that but we we have to do what we what we believe is right in the interests of the of the general public go ahead gareth if you have a follow-up thank you dr strang now that the testing is not really giving us a true picture of the virus out there do you think public health should move to wastewater testing to monitor the covert 19 given that we now know that omicron was detected in wastewater by dalhousie researchers in november actually that's uh when we've actually had conversations with the the researchers and what it turned out they were detecting the alpha variant they actually weren't detecting omicron so it's still a research tool that has yet to be validated in many ways so uh we continue to have conversations with the research researchers but there's a lot of questions and in in from a public health perspective we don't feel that it's yet at a point where we can accurately use it as a surveillance tool next we'll go to alexa mclean from global go ahead alexa thank you tina premier houston uh natasha my colleague brought up the paid sick leave program that launches january 10th i'm just wondering why this wasn't launched earlier because of the current wave we're in part of me the new program will be retroactive to december 20th which is several weeks after this wage star wave started and many nova scotians don't have any access to paid uh sick leave time so why wasn't this program uh relaunched sooner well i mean we were we're responding to a lot of things that are happening um so we're responding to things as quickly as we can and i appreciate um and i feel sympathy for you know the impact on on families of of the restrictions that we have to impose and the changes that have to happen there's broad broad a broad range of impact and and i i feel those very personally uh but we're you know we will implement these programs we'll constantly look at what we can do um better what we can do more of and how we can be there to support nova scotians keeping nova scotians safe and supporting them through this is there is there is the only objectives that that we have go ahead alexa with your follow-up

thank you i'm just wondering given the widespread impact of this wave on on workforce isolation requirements uh dr strang can you outline the specific reasons why seven isolation days is the new timeline uh in instead of five so and so let's let's be clear that is for people who were cases for seven days down from ten uh when you look at the evidence on that it's actually very clear that seven is a uh up you know seven days is really the end of uh of the vast majority of people for uh being infectious to others when you go below seven days there's still an increasing chance of uh of people being infectious so we felt for cases that seven days was actually a a safe a place to land what we've all been and that's in in a part of a bigger package but what we're also doing is saying the the many many more people who are close contacts if they're as outland in general if they're fully vaccinated or under 12 and they don't have any symptoms that the vast majority of the close contacts can now return to work in school while following distancing and masking protocols that will have a huge impact uh positively on uh on some of the the significant workforce pressures that are happening but that does introduce some risks so we along with that with that change we found it reasonable to land on a much safer seven days than five days for cases next we'll go to danielle edwards from the canadian press go ahead danielle

actually danielle's uh replaced by michael tutton from the canadian press today so i can take it if you like

hear me yes i can go ahead okay um dr strang um in terms of the 45 who are uh hospitalized uh and then i think with eight in icu are do they all are they all a result of omicron and if not can you break out you know how many are delta or others so we could just get a sense of whether omicron is behind the small increase so far in uh severe cases we yeah we don't have that data we're not all our specimens are not sent for validation to the national lab we only do uh you know a portion of specimens to kind of keep track about what percentage of our specimens are or omicron versus other strains so we don't have uh you know strain information on every hospitalized case go ahead mike with your follow-up

do you have any models in place to show when you sort of anticipate the peaking of of this wave roughly and if so when and any models to indicate what percentage vomicron cases end up in hospital or icu if you have any knowledge of that yet we have a model looking at hospitalizations that we're working this week to refine that model uh what we're seeing if you look at our lab confirmed cases plus estimates of the number of people who are testing positive with rapid tests that our percentage hospitalization is probably you know point two to point three percent uh so very low risk of people ending up in hospital uh but i have to i have to make the point that that the the risk of people unvaccinated people uh ending up in hospital is much greater than vaccinated recent data from ontario shows that if you're uh unvaccinated you're six more times more likely to be in hospital 21 more times likely to be in the icu i just have to make that point that it's important that people continue to get vaccinated um we we are looking at as i said we've got that modeling that we're finding on the hospitalizations uh really how we uh the how this wave plays out uh really depends a lot on uh on people following the restrictions we have in place taking the responsibility of following those personal protective

measures it's everybody doing what they can do to help slow down the spread

next we'll go to john mcphie from the chronicle herald go ahead john thank you uh this is for uh dr strang we're being called that uh the triple layer mask three-ply mass are the best protection against the omnicron variant but they're pretty hard to find i'm just wondering uh do we have any plans to address that and perhaps get some supplies in can the province do that kind of program so i'm not personally aware of any uh shortages around three-ply masks we certainly are procuring a supply of three layered cloth masks and to be having those available for uh for uh schools and um my discussion with our procurement people has not indicated at all that there's any shortage of of any of uh of whether it's the three-ply cloth mask or medical masks go ahead john with your follow-up thank you uh this is a question for the premier we're hearing that a lot of schools don't have proper ventilation systems and require quite a bit of work i'm just wondering how that can be rectified in just a week

i guess a lot is a relative term but there's certainly there's 71 schools out of almost 400 so i guess that's a significant amount but you know the plan is a plan similar to what newfoundland did uh we're going to procure units that will go into the classrooms and their their hepa filter units and and they'll be plugged in in the classroom so we know the supply chain disruptions people see that a lot of things they're trying to buy so but but all that being said we're being told from the supplier that they can be delivered within a week and once they're delivered here we can get them to the schools and get them into the classrooms and we're optimistic that we can have the majority of those spaces um have a have a have a filtration system a new ventilation hepa filter system in them by by the end of next week but you know it's the supply chain we're we're there's a lot of factors that have to have to go but we can only go by what we what the suppliers indicated and that's that they can be can be there by next week next we'll go to adrian blanc radio canada go ahead adrian and thank you premier how many rapid test kits are expected for nova scotia and that may be a question for dr strang as well will they be used in schools where students could be required to test regularly yeah so um i don't have the exact cumulative number of what i know the federal government made an announcement this morning you know we'll be we'll be wanting an allocation there i know our minister is talking to the federal minister on that um you know early in december maybe late november we we'd ordered a few million tests which we had expected to to have by the by the end of december they're not they're not here yet so um but the distribution plan certainly we want to have those test kits available in schools uh so teachers and students we're working we're working hard on that we're using the you know i mentioned cape breton in the family resource centers libraries other distribution channels we want we want people to to make sure that they they have access to tests as needed and i'll go back to what dr strang said you know there's a criteria when you when you need to be tested and you meet the criteria you will be tested in this province we we have had you know we've been good testers in nova scotia and we we've tested just as a matter of our ordinary uh schedule you know people getting tested every week or a few days that was what we they were being asked to do and they did it and we led the nation in that and it was good because it gave us good good data on covet activity in our communities now we're at a different phase you know the world's different this variant is different and now we're asking nova scotians to to be conscious of the fact that there are limited test kits you see that in all kinds of jurisdictions have of limitations on supply we're no different we have some in the works to get here we want to get them into schools we want to get them into into libraries but if you need to be tested you will be able to get a test we just ask people not just to show up at the distribution centers just wanting a test just because wanting to you know get a few just to have around the house you know we're past we're not at that stage right now we're just not it's a different it's a different world it's a different variant so we just ask people to be patient but i assure nova scotians uh we are working to get more test kits here and i assure nova scotians if you need a test you will be able to get it and if you need medical care you will be able to get it but just but just please work with us work with your friends your neighbors your communities to keep everybody safe but if you need a test you can get it we have lots lots ordered and coming and we'll get those distributed just as soon as they get here

go ahead adrian with your follow-up and when will you decide if remote learning like um learning from home will be maintained for another week or not uh well so we delayed the in-person learning except for the learning centers until the 17th um we're asking for online learning to take place as much as possible next week um and and but the goal is to get kids in schools for the for for all of the reasons that that i laid out we know how important it is that kids are in school for for many nova scotians school is the place where kids are safe it's the place where kids are warm it's even the place where they get their meals and that's a sad reflection of our society but it is we can't ignore it it is what it is we want kids in schools not to mention the social aspects and and everything that goes along with that and i know teachers want want to want to be there to support those students as well and want to do that in a safe environment so so we've delayed it a

week but the goal is to get our schools open to in-person learning to do it in a way that is safe for all those working in the school environments and for all of those that are there attending class we want them to know that they have a high degree of confidence that they're safe but we want them in school and the goal is to do that on the 17th next we'll go to paul bacon from all nova scotia.com go ahead paul dr strang you mentioned do you really believe we're in the last stages of the pandemic can you tell us why you believe that i think there's a lot of public health experts and epidemiologists that look at that it's likely that you know um you look at the pattern of past pandemics the timeline uh as well as you know how the omocron strain is behaving that uh many people are on the same page that you know the omicron will be the path out uh of of of the pandemic um and you know as we get to spring uh you know and part of that is he is continuing to have high vaccine coverage rates part of it is as we get you know the spring that uh people are outdoors more and we see any natural seasonal cycles with respiratory viruses um but just you know looking at all those factors and then the normal history of pandemics uh you know nobody has a completely a 100 percent accurate crystal ball but a lot of people are feeling that you know as we as we move through the next couple of months and then into spring that that is the way out of the pandemic go ahead paul with your follow-up and premier houston just before christmas uh prime minister justin trudeau was praising nova scotia's widespread testing strategy it seems that you've had to abandon that because you can't get enough tests from the federal government if i'm understanding you correctly

uh no i don't think that's a really a fair um characterization we're we're certainly adapting uh the the new variant the pandemic has shown i've shown people you have to be nimble you have to be able to adapt and change as as the facts in front of you uh dictate necessary we're looking at the situation we're in uh and we're not unique it's not unique here whatsoever you know there are supply chain issues with testing kits for sure but nothing has changed in the in the sense that when you when you need a test you'll be able to get it we've just we were just we we talked before about you know the widespread testing the asymptomatic testing it was really important um at a certain point in the pandemic to understand the amount of covet in our in our communities um we don't need that level of surveillance right now to know there's a lot of covet in the communities there is a lot of covet around that every nova scotian should accept that reality we don't need asymptomatic testing to prove it out so so we're adapting we're looking at what's in front of us and we're saying we we're the you know when you when you meet a certain criteria you have to get a test and we will make sure you get that test but in terms of widespread testing just let you know the world is is changing uh nova scotians are are nimble and and realistic and we just ask them to change to change with us um so but if you need a test you'll get it if you need medical care you'll get it we're watching very very closely uh and and the the the plan the changes the restrictions we're making they're all based on the best information we have the best data we have the best science we have there's a lot of high quality people uh analyzing this day in and day day out and so the plan nova scotian should have great confidence in the plan and the ability of the team developing the plan i know i certainly do so we're not abandoning testing but we're certainly adapting to what's in front of us next we'll go to nicole sullivan from the cape breton post go ahead nicole thank you um i want to talk a little bit about the volunteers um i know we've got i'm assuming more volunteers have signed up since monday but at that point it was over 1600. i'm wondering if you could give us an idea of how many of those are are signing up from the island from cape breton um and how many would be being used here

um we can get you that number and i apologize i don't have that breakdown i think um i think i got updated on the fly last time when i had in my mind that there was over a thousand and i think just during the briefing we learned that that was way up over 1600 so i do want to thank those uh nova scotians across the entire province who are who are stepping up to help out it is much needed and it is much appreciated so i thank them i thank them for that we can get uh a detailed breakdown on where that number is uh right now and we can get that by by region i'm sure so to the to the people who are signing up i will say this um i know there's a number of of people who who have signed up and and are still waiting to kind of get there and get and get the instructions and get the go ahead to get going so uh we there's people are working through they're calling people you know and just making sure uh that we can get them get them rolling so taking a bit longer um but uh but we've been pretty pretty uh encouraged but you know a little bit maybe a little bit overwhelmed by the the the number of people that have stepped forward but we do need your help and we will get to you and we will uh we will we do thank you for stepping up but we'll get you the detailed numbers by region for sure go ahead nicole with your follow-up um thank you um again about the volunteers i'm curious you know um on your test protects ta website there's only been a call for volunteers in dartmouth and two in the hrm i'm wondering if you could explain to me why that is why we aren't seeing some for outside of the area or in cape breton in particular i just got it i just got an update so i think i thanked him for that but but from from cape breton alone uh it's as i sit here right now there's over a thousand people that have kind of raised their their hand up and said they want to help out and they're able to help out so um i'm i'm not really sure the exact uh question but i i i think i might have heard that it appeared to you

that we weren't looking for volunteers in cape breton i'm not sure if that was if i misread the question or not but we we are asking nova scotians across the entire province if they're able to step up and help the police step up and help and they are responding in great numbers so i i thank them for that and and just to your to your first question it's it's over a thousand uh from cape breton alone just at this point next we'll go to chelsea ghoul from the truro news go ahead chelsea hi thank you dr stein you've mentioned mental health can you speak to where we are now in the pandemic and balancing things you know for mental health like gyms and social spaces against the restrictions can you compare that to the pathways of the virus and what's different this time around so i think we don't have uh you know um you know numbers to compare but i think it's a cumulative effect too that the ongoing uh impacts of uh the stresses of covid the stresses of the isolation and other and the financial implications all of that is is not just what's happening today but it's the cumulative impact of that and we there there's lots of data out there especially national data showing you know significant uh increases in access for for mental health services particularly around young people this is also you know uh surges in anxiety depression eating disorders uh there's also been very hard on seniors and the seniors isolation um all of that we have to be cognizant of and that just doesn't disappear um uh quickly even when the pandemic goes so that impact on mental health is is something that we are acutely uh sensitive to uh and it's driving some of the decisions around well ultimately we need to have children in school why uh you know i had a question earlier today about why aren't we going to a tight lockdown well the impact substantive impacts on the individual and collective mental health is one of the reasons why that is only uh a tool you at this point in the pandemic you use if absolutely necessary um it comes back to balancing uh covet and other impacts and certainly mental health is at the forefront as we look at those other impacts um i wasn't able to get into the previous question i'm just going to use the opportunity to answer it test to protect is not the government uh program test to protect is that done by dr baird and her volunteers so they only look for volunteers for a couple of sites in dartmouth and halifax the uh the government recruitment of volunteers is on the nova scotia health authority website and that is province wide go ahead chelsea with your follow-up question thank you very much and i think this question's for the premier why have the ventilation systems in school not been improved before now in the 71 schools and at what point was this current deal with the supplier acquire um i i'm not sure why you know obviously i mentioned in my comments that it seems to be something that's been kind of sitting around for a couple years i'm not sure why but that that ends we just um this week we've i think the the the approval went through yesterday or today or something so we're gonna we're gonna act on that now i can't speak to um why that why the delay was there um but it's certainly been for too long in my estimation so you know this this week we've said enough is enough let's let's get moving on those so that that's that's in place right now next we'll go to tim busquet from the halifax examiner go ahead tim hi good afternoon dr strang i i wonder if you can speak a little bit more directly to the situation in the hospitals with staff and shortages and and other kind of secondary cobit impacts i was told that yesterday the situation at the qe2 was uh especially pressed the ambulances were 20 deep in line waiting for lack of staff i went by this morning and they were already seven or eight lined up that was early in the day i was told that there were people who had heart attacks who were being treated in the hallways i understand there's long delays in transferring patients from elsewhere and that there's going to be a reduction in surgery surgeries announced tomorrow can you verify any of that and and what do you have to say about it i i think you'd have to those details you'd have to ask those questions directly to the nova scotia health authority uh uh to me that there are indications that uh you know for a long time our health system uh our q our acute care system has been under substantive stress that's uh and that's why we've made a priority of uh of uh you know as we've learned more in the in the pandemic we've when we're shifting our focus uh with this current wave to focus on really about la allowing uh uh spread but doing what's necessary to minimize severe illness uh to do what we can to protect the acute care system um because it is uh for for uh you know your pre-existing stresses and then just having uh the current wave even with a very low percentage of hospitalization the volume of cases is resulting in enough people that just adds to uh the the system that is already at capacity

go ahead tim with your follow-up question yeah so this uh just earlier in this briefing the the premiere said that the average stage the average stay of covid patients in the hospital is 5.4 days i i understand that from a public health perspective you're worried about the impact on on you know the system so you're you're concerned about how many people are there at any one time but there does seem to be some churn and out in the public i think uh the the worry is well what are my chances of being hospitalized so um can you tell us how many people have been hospitalized in total um since omicron came around we keep cat we keep uh track of the of the cube of at any given time who's in hospital and what that what's that telling us um um uh we'll just say we're looking at uh way as your your question the other day on monday we're still doing that deeper dive into hospitalizations and looking uh of the over the impact over time from the omicron wave we have time for one more question we'll take one question from uh we'll go to lindsay um armstrong from the coast go ahead lindsay uh many many things i'm wondering for premier and dr strang i've heard from a number

of nova scotians who are concerned that they're being asked to work in person right now even though they were able to work remotely in previous ways given your advice today i'm wondering what your advice would be to to

so i mean our advice to employers is we need everybody uh to be um uh to be contributing to the efforts to get through this wave so uh we're asking uh wherever possible that people uh work from home so i would expect that there's an onus on employers to step up and support uh that ask as uh wherever possible uh to be part of contributing to uh to the our collective efforts to get through this go ahead lindsay with your follow-up thank you i'm also i'm wondering what happened to our astrazeneca and johnson and johnson doses i'm wondering if those were used up if we have any leftover doses and there's a province considering sending leftover doses to places that have need for vaccine supply so we do not even have we do do not have estrogenic in the province at this time we have a small very small amount and it's i don't know the exact amount now because people have been accessing it so people who have been looking uh for the public or people from the public who were looking uh for uh johnson johnson vaccine as uh and as the only vaccine they use they can actually go through our canned immunized portal and book an appointment for that uh but there are limited limited numbers and it should i have to you know use the opportunity that is not a recommended choice for a vaccine we would strongly encourage people to take an mrna vaccine instead and that's all the time we have for questions today go ahead premier thank you thank you for um thank you for the important questions i will say from my perspective it's been an honor to see firsthand the professionalism of the teams within public health the nova scotia health authority department of education department of health you know across government and certainly across our communities in the last few weeks they they've processed an incredible number of pcr tests they've added an incredible number of boosters and appointments to the system they did all this while continuing to add shots uh to arms across the province and and none of these are just statistics or numbers uh that we look at on a page we always have to be remindful that these uh these they represent the blood sweat and the tears from our from our fellow nova scotians they're they're our friends they're our family there are neighbors they've been clocking in each day without a break to do what they can to protect the people of our province their action is leadership and their action is nothing short of heroic it really isn't i want to recognize these people today for their dedication um their heart and and for the significant time and energy that they have invested in keeping us safe we have asked a lot of our people in public health and healthcare education and and across the government i know we've asked a lot but i want you to also please know that you you are seen and you are appreciated and i have great confidence in your ability to keep us all safe and i know nova scotians do as well so i thank you thanks everyone

you

good afternoon and welcome to today's hovid19 update i'm heather fairbairn and i'll be your moderator today before we begin allow me to introduce the honorable tim houston premier of nova scotia and dr robert strang chief medical officer of health for nova scotia thank you heather good afternoon everyone today we're going to talk about hospitalizations testing schools and and the booster situation as well so let's start with the hospitalizations there are 60 nova scotians in hospital with admissions related to covet two of those 60 were hospitalized before the omnichrome outbreak of those who are in the hospital due to covid five are in the icu and the average age is 66. 66 of those in in hospital 25 percent of the people in in hospital have have no vaccination there is one young child under the age of five in hospital the average length of stay of a covered patient in nova scotia hospitals right now is 5.8 days so we never want anyone to enter the hospital as a result of covet every hospitalization is is scary and it is a concern for sure but that said it's still true that we have not seen the severity uh with this variant as we have with previous variants in fact i'm sure most people watching today know people who have covet or have had covet and in the vast majority of cases those those people are are now better or getting better a few of us would know someone who has gotten severely ill and certainly a few of us would know somebody who's had to be hospitalized but it's happening 60 families today 60 patients just today and i certainly don't want to minimize those who who do get severely ill by this by this variant it's inevitable with any virus particularly those with with underlying conditions or are otherwise vulnerable and certainly those that are unvaccinated so but that's that's the update on where we're at today in terms of testing just ask nova scotians please please bear with us on the changes to the testing changes hurt but it's time to change our testing our testing strategy as we discuss the evolving nature of this pandemic into what we hope soon becomes endemic we have to change our approach to testing today nova scotia has been the envy of the country in terms of the public's commitment to testing to be totally honest i've been a regular for months at either stopping at a a clinic for a pcr or a rapid test at home it's it's it's always been something that i've been doing just during the pandemic and it's always provided a great deal of comfort so i get it i get that the change the change is difficult but we have to start moving away from the way we've been testing and we have to make that move for a couple of reasons the first being we no longer need to use extensive testing to confirm the existence of the virus in our communities we know it's here so right now the best thing we can do is if you're sick stay home but even if we wanted to continue testing at the same earlier pace it's just not possible due to supply issues if you've turned on the news over the last few weeks you've no doubt heard discussions about supply chain concerns across a variety of products and the testing is no different so to date we've always been supplied with rapid tests by the federal government as this variant started to take hold back in early december when other jurisdictions were also starting to look at our our way of testing we saw that the the writing was on the wall uh the demand would be there for testing we ordered approximately two million more tests that would be in addition to the federal allocation so we continue to wait for those tests but we're hopeful to have updates soon on their arrival at the same time the federal government has been actively working to procure more tests um last week they announced the purchase of 140 million tests so nova scotia will get its share of those but the result arrival of those tests um is is up in the air and every province is in the same boats i can tell you that in in discussions with the the premiers and the prime minister that was the number one thing when will the test be there and there's a lot of questions around the supply chain issues so um that said we do expect to start seeing um small portions arriving from the federal government next week and then hopefully every week thereafter but right now we have we have no guarantees on arrival dates so as a result we've had to be more conscientious about how we use our rapid tests and i want to be very clear about where we are in this province with rapid tests right now we are distributing about 830 000 rapid tests per week across the province and these tests are going to testing centers they're being used for outbreak response they're being used nova scotia health workplaces other high risk areas and a community stream so we wish there were more tests but 830 000 tests a week is almost a test for every single person in this province and that is not an insignificant number particularly when you consider that there is no need for every person or even for most people to be testing once a week at this stage it's not the time for everyone to test every day or every week there was a time for that but that time has passed so we will continue our focus on community testing to ensure that everyone who needs one has access to a test if you need a test you'll get a test but that's where we are with testing today so in terms of schools um i want to discuss you know we've talked about testing in the schools school goes back on monday and i i made some commitments as to how we as a province would use would use the week in preparation for that return to school and i can tell you that updated ventilation system in those 71 schools that that we identified has arrived those systems are are on the ground they arrived on monday and they've been distributed to classrooms across the province so that's good progress there we we've we've made we've been able to make three plymouths available for every teacher and every student that's a good thing and and despite the challenges that i just laid out there will be access to rapid tests we've talked to our expert panel on testing there's a there's a panel that provides guidance on testing uh it's 10 10 leading experts that we turn to and discuss uh testing and and you would be familiar with the names of those experts they're

highly highly qualified people so we discussed with them the current supply issues and the potential shortage and their recommendation is to focus on making tests available in communities so that when the tests are most needed they are accessible so we will continue to do that but we will also make sure the tests are available in schools we'll be distributing approximately 25 000 tests uh across the province to the nearly 400 schools uh based on enrollment but we'll come up with that and get those tests out there and those tests will be available based on a need for testing so primarily for students and staff who come to school symptomatic or develop symptoms well at school so i just want to say i understand the anxiety and the degree of hesitation that people are experiencing teachers and parents in particular regarding back to school but i've said it before and i'll say it again our schools are safe and the best place for our children is in school this is the advice of public health this is also the advice of leading pediatric doctors in this province at the iwk and elsewhere too the best place the safest place the warmest place for many of our children is in school um so to to parents uh if your child is sick as you would have in the past when they were ill please keep them home um so but school will be returning back in person on monday and i thank um teachers and staff for the incredible effort that was made this week with the online learning and i know the effort that was making made in preparation for students to arrive on monday thank you thank you for that next let's talk about the boosters as of today 49.6 of the public that is 30 and older and meets the nasty recommendations already have or have booked their third dose yesterday alone 17 104 boosters went into arms that's a single day record in this province at the height of the program last spring and summer we were we were doing about 12 000 shots a day so that's an incredible effort um this is a testament to all those nova scotians who have stepped up to help us immunize i thank you i know there's still some who put their name forward and and still anxious to get get the work helping and we are we're working through we were pretty blown away by the response that we had and we thank you for that and we still need your help and we will be in touch um but today we have clinics up and running in in halifax at the forum in dartmouth wolffville truro new glasgow amherst anaganesh uh sydney and berwick we're we're opening at clinic tomorrow in yarmouth with moore opening in digby and truro on january 24th drop-in clinics are happening all over the province this week we're offering outreach clinics at center 200 the captain william spry center kingston fire hall shelburne fire hall metro housing santa fex wallace community center the ali center and others i think you get the point there's a lot of work being done to make sure that you can you can get your booster so thank you to everyone who has done their part and got vaccinated or who is helping administer the vaccines our province is safer because of each and every one of you and your efforts so thank you for that uh just in closing i'll just make a comment about the health care system you can see there's a lot happening um and i want to tip my hat to those on the front lines keeping things flowing keeping things working keeping things happening kovat kovet is impacting every aspect of our life and healthcare system's not immune we're seeing impacts on wait times on patient flow and surgical care some scheduled surgeries and procedures were postponed last week and more will be impacted over the next couple weeks as we work through this but we are working through this our health care workers and and health care professionals on the front lines continue to step up under incredibly trying times we're we're working to to move people and support you where we can but i want you to know we see you we hear you and we really can't thank you enough uh for what you're what you're doing so so hang in there please um dr strange

today i want to offer my deepest sympathies to the five families who lost loved ones uh due to cover with this past week and unfortunately there are too many other nova scotia families know what you are going through i sincerely hope that that these deaths are a remind unfortunate reminder to everyone that this virus still can have deadly consequences for some people i know that many are questioning the restrictions we have in place or they're even the seriousness of covet uh maybe maybe you you've had covet or know people who've had it and you think what's the big deal that uh in your experience people felt sick for a few days but then recovered and it seems to be just like the flu or a cold uh for most of us uh i'm very thankful this is true and to me a lot of this is attributed to the vaccines doing their job with over 90 percent of nova scotians having at least one dose of vaccine and a highly transmissible virus we are seeing many vaccinated people get coveted and that's not a surprise but being vaccinated is protecting most people from severe illness and death which is really what we're looking to prevent but unfortunately this is not true for everyone and i'm sure if you ask the people on hospital or the grieving families if they thought this could happen they may well say no but it is happening five people died this week and 60 people are in hospital today because of covet infection and those numbers gotta continue to creep up the numbers of hospitalizations and they are their people they are aunts uncles neighbors co-workers and friends they're not just a number there are factors age and underlying health conditions being the main ones that put people at increased risk for hospitalization we all have these people in our family in our work or social circles perhaps even without knowing it and those people are are relying on us they need us to help keep them safe and those most vulnerable are also relying on the rest of us to follow the public health measures that limit the spread of the covenant virus we've all been working for several weeks to slow down the spread of this variant and we do

have several weeks ahead of us while we've made some changes to the length of time people need to isolate based on how this virus is acting there are still thousands of people who are not able to work because they are isolating due to covid hundreds of health care workers are not able to work in a system that was under immense pressure even before the omicron wave nova scotia health has between five to seven hundred employees off work on any given day judicobit these shortages are happening across the entire health system from long-term care and home care to emergency health services with every wave of the virus we've asked our health care providers to do more they are tired frustrated and more than a little bit anxious many were called back to work during the holidays most people are working on teams that are short staffed and many are being redeployed to other areas of need that they may not have as much comfort in working in but they need to be there nova scotia health has once again asked people to cancel their vacations but it's still not a stop enough to relieve the stress on the system patient volumes are at a high staff are seeing higher visits to emergency and experiencing delays in admitting patients and outbreak cases among patients already admitted for non-covid reasons have also gone up and managing these outbreaks requires more staff time and effort to prevent further spread the health care system impacts of this wave are requiring that entire system to take significant steps to alleviate pressure and create more capacity so it's paramount that all nova scotians do what we can to protect critical health services and urgent cancer care for patients who need it the most this means reducing other services for the time being and i know those decisions aren't made lightly at all by uh by nova scotia health uh and they do come with their own significant impacts but please know that the situation is being monitored closely uh and and uh and um every effort's been made to preserve services as much as possible let me move on to testing there continues to be confusion even anger about testing we've made a lot of changes and for the last year we've recommended testing as a way to find as much as many cases as possible and stop the spread of the virus then along came omicron and now we're pulling back and changing our approach to testing um we we have to do this but it's no wonder that there is confusion given the amount of virus that is circulating in our province we can no longer identify or need to identify every single case of covid and we need to focus our testing resources along with other resources on helping to prevent severe outcomes but at the same time it seems everyone wants a test and feels they're entitled to having rapid tests at home to use as they see fit unfortunately supply continues to be a challenge not just for us but across canada and we need to use rapid tests more efficiently and equitably we currently go through more than eight hundred thousand uh rapid tests per week across all testing streams and this will increase even more when tests are distributed to schools and we are able to make tests more tests available to the community but right now we have just over 1 million tests in the province so our supply is very precarious we're expecting another 3.6 million tests from the federal government this month but we don't have them yet and shipping timelines continue to change so that's why we're prioritizing testing to focus in the following areas testing centers for people who have symptoms or have been identified as close contacts for outbreak testing for example in long-term care facilities at workplaces where employees support vulnerable populations that are at greater risk of severe outcome including long-term care correctional facilities and shelters school children and staff and and at community distribution centers in areas that have surge in cases or or have uh more uh longer distances to travel to testing centers and it's also why we put pause to some of our testing streams such as rapid testing in in a large number of workplaces that the workplaces that don't support directly vulnerable nova scotians rapid tests were once readily available for most nova scotians but now you need an appointment to get a rapid test that not everyone will be eligible to get one this is the reality of dealing with limited supply and while you may not be happy about this we all need we all need you to understand and accept that others may have to be a higher priority than ourselves please do not get angry at frontline staff or try to find a workaround put others ahead of yourself and be kind to those who have been caring for you for over the for over the past two years they deserve nothing less than this once we have more rapid tests in the province we'll work to make them available in more community locations to pick up without an appointment but right now to avoid frustration uh the easiest way to book the right test whether it's a pcr test or a rapid test is by going online and doing the self-assessment the kind of test you need depends on your age your whether you have symptoms or not and some other factors doing the self-assessment is a requirement uh before you go to actually get a pcr test or pick up rapid test kits the address is covid dash self dash assessment dot nova scotia dot ca and if you cannot do uh this online selfless assessment and only then you can call 811 please do not try to find a way to avoid doing the self-assessment you could arrive at a testing center for an appointment only to be turned away if you haven't done the self-assessment and do not just show up at a testing center or you certainly will be turned away you need to do the self-assessment and get an appointment and then go get your tests we ask for your patience and cooperation while we rebuild our testing supply and work to make rapid tests available in more community locations so in closing uh i want to say to people if you don't think omicron is a big deal you're absolutely wrong it's a risk to people who are vulnerable people we all have in our lives people we know and love and it's a risk to our health care system the system we all rely on to care for us and our loved ones when they need it most there's no doubt we are in a very serious situation the most serious we've been in during this entire

pandemic given all the pressures on our health care system this is different than other waves we've never before had hundreds of health care workers not able to work or so many cases that public health is no longer able to identify and closely manage each case in all their contacts so if you're not carefully following restrictions if you're not wearing your mask consistently and properly if you're not keeping your social circle small and consistent and limiting your social activity if you're not staying home when you're sick and following the rules for testing isolation if you're not contacting close contacts when you become positive if you're not vaccinated any of these if you're not doing them you are contributing to omicron spreading at a faster rate you are contributing to the immense pressure on our health care system and you're potentially putting someone you know and love at risk none of us know who we may interact with who could end up being severely ill from this virus and any of us could be the next to need the health care system for urgent or emergency non-coveted care if i sound concerned it's because i am deeply and i'm asking every nova scotian to please step up take this seriously do your part many of you have been but too many are not omicron really does require everyone every single one of us to do what they can to start this wave trending in the right directions the actions of every nova scotian matter right now so please make your actions count for our collective well-being thank you

we'll now take questions from media participating by phone we have a long list of reporters on the line so we'll do our best to get through the 17 or so folks that are joining us today in the time we have available we'll take one question one follow-up starting with ctv's natasha pace natasha thank you very much premier you mentioned that ventilation systems are on the ground in nova scotia but will they be installed in the 71 schools that need them by monday when in-person learning resumes yeah natasha thank you for the question yeah my understanding is is that they're they're actually physically in those schools now and will be in the classrooms by monday natasha do you have a follow-up i do thank you um dr strang with 60 people now in hospital including a child and hundreds of health care workers um currently off work is the health care system at or close to a breaking point at this this time you seem very concerned today so i think you could ask anybody working in our in our hospitals uh that that it is a very concerning time i wouldn't use the word breaking point uh you are going to hear more from nsh later today about more specific steps that they're taking to uh to reduce services in in many areas uh to uh to be able to manage the uh requirements of the number of patients in in hospital either uh as a result of covid or their they come in for hospital for another reason or they're or they're tested they still need additional care uh or people who are even being exposed in the hospital there's no doubt that our hospital our acute care system is under extreme pressure right now moving on we'll go to cbc's jean laroche go ahead jean

good afternoon gentlemen i just wondered dr strang and premier you've talked about the number of people in hospital with uh kova at 60 today um but i wondered why there isn't a breakdown uh more uh i guess more accurate because we're hearing that the situation is far worse than uh than is being let on that there should be a breakdown of people who are hospitalized with cocaine people who test positive at admittance and people who test positive while their husband in hospital in other words they get hospital acquired uh covenant so could you tell us why you're not detailing it to that extent and whether or not you're giving a true picture of what's going on inside the hospitals yeah i think i'll go first and maybe dr strange can add but i think what we're trying to do is we're trying to focus on on covet on the variant itself and the impact it's having on our communities um and on our systems including the health care system so from that perspective it's uh people are are wondering about the severity of the illness if i get sick if i get the virus you know am i going to end up in the hospital am i going to what are the impacts going to be on me so so our focus has always been on the severity of the virus in terms of does it does it how often does it get to the point where somebody has to be hospitalized i think that's the most important um um it's the thing i get asked most it's the it's the thing that seems to be most on the minds of nova scotian there are other people in the hospital for lots of other reasons and um sometimes people show up at the hospital for some other reason i don't know just use an example could be a hip injury and find out that they're asymptomatic for covet uh or we've had some outbreaks you know we've been very very uh we've been spoke very frankly about the objects we've had and some of the long-term care facilities and and in the and in the hospitals themselves so what we've focused on um in this province and i still think makes most sense is is focused on the impact of the virus on the people when they contract it will you get so severe that you have to go in the hospital that's where we focus there are more people in the hospital uh that with covet uh and have other other other reasons for being in the hospital but for these briefings in particular we we've focused on the severity of the illness to the point that it causes somebody to require hospitalization that's that's that's the only that's the thinking behind it i i and i still think that it's it's it's fair and reasonable thinking

yeah the premier explained it well from a public health perspective we're focusing on on indicators of severe disease all our efforts are around minimizing the the the numbers of people with severe disease and and and focusing resources to

uh protect people most vulnerable for severe disease the health authority also looks at with their you know with their utilization pressures they look at the other aspects as well uh but from our overall perspective that the focus on severity is is where we continue to you know pay the the closest attention go ahead with your follow-up jean dr strange in light of what we've heard in recent days about the number of health workers a number of long-term care workers who are off either because they've contracted the illness or they are close contacts can you talk a little bit about the discussions that are going on to try and change the protocol so that people who are either close contacts or are um better from the disease are able to get back to work and give some respect to their colleagues who are left behind so so we made some substantive changes uh recently when we uh uh when we made the the decision um and it wasn't it wasn't the primary purpose wasn't to get people back to the workplace but it's an important outcome that people who were if they're fully vaccinated uh or under age 12 and that's not relevant for the work workplace but if they're fully vaccinated and they're identified as a close contact they they have to isolate and do the testing but they can continue to go to work or school as they follow you know careful masking protocols that already has had a substantive impact uh um not just in health care but in a whole range of business sectors about allowing many more people to come back to work uh and not having to do uh you know have a complete isolation uh while while their contacts and doing their their their testing protocol i know that uh certainly in healthcare that my colleagues in infection prevention control and occupation of health and safety continue and they're the ones who are responsible for for in facilities continue to look at ways that they uh can safely and i have to emphasize safely you have to have the right protocols in place to bring people back from uh you know from being contacts uh into the workforce early uh worst case scenario they're in a waste of people who may be finishing their their infectious period uh while they're you know from it from being infected even bringing them back under very strict protocols so they continue to look at those uh and using those where where were necessary uh i think it's important to say we would only bring you know in people who are covered cases back under very strict protocols and and only if absolutely necessary when there's critical care needs next we'll go to global's alicia dross go ahead alicia thank you uh with the omicron variant being a lot more contagious than previous variants i'm just wondering what the best mask for the general public to wear is and if it's at 95's are those only effective if they've actually been properly fitted

so yeah n95s are a specific type of type of mask for a specific use in certain types of occupations uh i think because of the one of the key things is the importance of being fitted appropriately um for the the the the general guidance or sort of the guidance for the general public is now that is a minimum people should have a three-layered cloth mask or a medical mask and then the three layers is important no longer the one or two layered masks uh we know that those three little layers are especially with omicron are are are necessary but i i keep every time i'm asked i have to make the point that it uh while the type of mask is important wearing the mask where it's necessary and wearing it properly uh snugly fitting over the nose cheeks and around the chin um and and and and continuing to wear that where at all times uh where it's required are as important as the type of mask you're using go ahead with your follow-up alicia thank you this one's for the premiere with quebec looking to tax potentially non-vaccinated people for health care is this something that nova scotia might consider

it's not something that we're considering and i think i think what you're seeing from like the the federal minister with the vaccine mandates and quebec's position i think you're just seeing like the people who are trying to manage the system are incredibly frustrated um that this is an illness that um you know people have an option to get the vaccine and really severe limit the severity of the impact on them and and and by not doing that there's there's there's ramifications to society into our health care system so we're not talking about either of those two things here but we we we want people to get vaccinated the vaccines are safe the vaccines are effective and the vaccines are the best way to keep yourself safe your community safe and and quite frankly your province safe and take pressure off the health care system so i i understand um kind of the frustration that that people are feeling and and i and i share it but those aren't uh specific discussions we're having here in this province right now but we do encourage people to get vaccinated moving along we'll go to john mcphiee at the herald go ahead john thank you uh can you if we're in the most serious situation we've ever faced in the pandemic as dr strang just said the question remains why we're reopening schools next week why are you comfortable doing that given what we've heard today about the uh about the severity of the uh of the situation that we're facing right now look we we follow the advice of public health we follow the advice of the experts and and we we marry that up with the fact that we know that schools are the best place for our children you know we we we've talked at length about uh for for many children in this province school is where they're safest um it's it's it's it's a sad reflection of our society but it's an honest one uh for many children in this province as we as we head into uh winter with extremely cold temperatures it's it's the school is a place where many children are warmest um many children get their food at

school so we understand all those social impacts and then um you know it's the the the the the impact on their own mental health uh their physical development schools are the best place for kids so so our schools are safe uh we'll move forward i think we've shown that where where necessary to close the school we will we did that through the fall we did that last year if there's operational issues or issues with outbreaks we we will take steps to close schools and and um we accept we expect that that will have to happen and but but we have almost 400 schools in this province and and um we're we want kids back in schools because they're safe in schools there's other issues we're we're taking we're encouraging people to to work from home we're encouraging people to follow all the public health guidelines all of those steps are designed for each of us to do our part to keep our communities safer because when we keep our communities safer we keep our schools safer so if we can do anything that we can do in an individual level to decrease our our personal contacts dr strang and i are doing it today we're doing it because we want to limit our contacts so that we keep our communities safer so therefore we make our schools safer but school is the best place for kids that's the advice of the experts that's the advice of public health and our kids will be back in school on monday john do you have a follow-up i do thank you this is also for the premiere and still still sticking with schools questions have been raised about the effectiveness of the portable air filtration units that have been purchased for schools experts have said that the clean year delivery rate is called over of sorry of those units won't be enough to purify a particular classroom just wondering if the government is aware of those concerns and what kind of moderate what kind of monitoring will be done to ensure that they're that they're doing the job yeah so so first off let's let's remember that um the these systems are kind of above and beyond we're doing something there because we know there was a concern and we want public confidence to be as high as possible so so from a public house perspective these machines weren't a necessity for people going back to school but we've we've layered that on as we continue to layer on uh protections we've layered that on i know that there's a great number of experts saying these these these are perfect for this situation there may be others that say otherwise that's the nature of experts i guess uh but but for for me personally we know that these machines will give people a lot of confidence and we know that they'll do their job to increase the safety of people and and i am happy that we were able to work with suppliers and the team was able to make this happen so quickly so it's a good thing and we'll do continue to do everything we can to keep those working in the schools teachers custodians uh staff in the schools uh safe and and um and the students safe as well next we'll go to keith toussette at the canadian press go ahead keith hi dr strang i recall you uh previously expressing some time ago that you had some hope that we may have seen a plateau or approaching a plateau in terms of the number of numbers of infections but obviously something something's changed since then i'm wondering what it is is it the holiday season and we're finally starting to see the numbers or the spread kick in because of the holiday season or there's something else going on here well we've had it wide spread for uh a couple of weeks uh probably more than three weeks and we did see a peak a week ago related to christmas uh we saw a very short and kind of peak this last weekend uh you know a week after new year's so uh you know we expected those but we're back down again to uh but still at very you know how much higher uh daily case counts than than is sustainable over the long term so we still have to work a lot of work to do to slow the spread down and and and get us through this omicron wave it will start to come down uh at some point though those people who are vulnerable to being infection infected will have been infected that's the way you know uh uh epidemics work and we will start to see this coming down in the next few weeks but uh right now i think where it's safe you know right in the middle of the of the peak of the wave um and there's still a lot of hard work to do ahead and where as we've we've talked about uh it's creating substantive impacts both from a workforce perspective and also the capacity of patients within our hospitals right now so we have some challenging days ahead go ahead with your follow-up keith uh yes for a colleague in quebec as you know your colleague in quebec dr arudha suddenly resigned on monday he went from being a very popular figure to one of some derision in some quarters in that province so i'm wondering whether you think the daily grind over time of having one central messenger such as yourself wears on the public given that you you yourself has all have also been the target of some criticism and even protest

so i'm going to speculate around i think there are a number of factors uh uh uh behind the scenes around dr arud's decision to retire um whether the public is becoming tired of hearing from me uh or not i i don't know i get lots of while there are people that are critical i also get lots of people reaching out and saying uh giving me support and uh and and uh and say how valuable it is that uh to hear my voice at briefing so um i'm gonna continue to be the the chief medical officer of health and uh and uh work with my uh very uh expert and hard-working colleagues uh work with the premier and uh to uh my commitment is to to be here and to help get nova scotia through uh this pandemic as safely as possible moving along we'll go to adrian block with radio canada go ahead adrian

and thank you dr strang we heard today that canada has enough doses for those is that something that public health is

already planning for

uh no the only people that were planning for a fourth dose or those who nasty is recommending a fourth dose and that would be uh people who are moderately just severely immune compromised who are uh have been for the last couple of months being eligible for a uh third dose in their primary series and then you know in may and june be able to get their booster dose uh there is no evidence whatsoever uh that at this point in time that a fourth dose uh is is is going to be necessary other than the circumstances i've just uh described if that changes and if nasty makes recommendations uh we would look at doing that but uh i'd say we don't we always follow an evidence-based approach and i think as a country we also need to be very concerned about uh the ability of other countries to uh offer even first dose uh and ultimately we can we will only be safe here in nova scotia in canada when there is much higher vaccination rates around the world so we should also be paying very close attention to this from a global perspective adrian do you have a follow-up yes for premier houston you said you were against a mandatory vaccination but many jurisdictions are in favor with the rationale that unvaccinated people are representing a burden a direct burden on the health care system is it something that you see in nova scotia that there's a link that can be done between how many unvaccinated people there and the burden that represents on the healthcare system it's it's it's true if you look at our hospitalizations that 25 of them are people that are not vaccinated um in in a province where we have over 90 percent you know vaccination rate it's a disproportionate impact on our health care system that is that is a fact and that is uh certainly frustrating uh for sure we've taken a number of steps um you know if you know we've required vaccines to to work in certain professions some people have lost their job because they're not vaccinated we've required vaccines to do certain things we'll continue to to encourage people to get vaccinated they'll will continue to be a choice people make but the choice to be not vaccinated has ramifications and um those those ramifications already exist in this province we're we're not talking about mandatory vaccines across the board but i certainly uh share the frustration that that many of us feel with the impact that those are not vaccinated are having on our health care system and our communities moving along we'll go to all nova scotia paul bacon go ahead paul thank you uh premier uh dr strang talked about the 500 to 700 health care workers who are unable to work on any given day because they're self-isolating either because they've been exposed or potentially exposed when classes resume next week it seems likely that a lot of teachers are going to find themselves in the same boat and a lot of schools are going to have trouble finding enough staff does the province have a strategy or have steps they will take to mitigate that calling up more substitutes or other things yeah there's obviously lots of planning going on and certainly um in healthcare you'll hear more from the health authority about some of the some of the movement of people and the changes that are happening there to support those that are that are in staff and and um my understanding is that on any given day there are nine or ten thousand people working in our health care system and day in and day out and right now a lot of you know we're seeing a few hundred people every day that are off six so it's having it's having an impact it's a percentage of the people um that are off sick in in healthcare we're seeing that in every business and every organization around the province we expect that we will see that in education for sure but you know we're looking at different steps of as you mentioned substitutes uh freeing up people who are qualified to teach but are are working in the system in another capacity not in a classroom mobilizing them to be in a classroom so these are these are things that there's a lot of um a lot of thoughts and a lot of energy going into making sure that we can meet meet the challenges that we know await us but we want kids back in school it's the best place for them go ahead with your follow-up paul and dr strang you mentioned 3.6 million more rapid tests you're hoping to arrive in the next few weeks but that doesn't mean the province is going back to its widespread testing strategy is that correct that uh that is basically over for the foreseeable future that's correct i mean unless we get a much more robust supply but you know for going through our current testing streams are uh our 800 000 a week so you can see that 3.6 million doesn't actually go uh for that that far so we will be maintaining our our prioritized uh approach uh to testing uh for the for the foreseeable future and and quite likely as we uh you know and this will take us through the omicron wave and then we have to rethink our whole testing strategy entirely as we move much more into an endemic phase next we'll go to the halifax examiner tim busquet go ahead tim

hi uh thank you but dr shang i i appreciate that uh better data more data is being provided about around hospitalization but i'm going to ask you for more still um there's uh uh the premier said the average stay in hospital is 5.8 days can we get a sense are the people who are just coming in for a day or two are they younger better vaccinated and what's the situation for those specifically in icu and and deaths um are they um uh vaccinated or unvaccinated people so you're getting into areas to him around the the circumstances on individual people so we always have to be especially around deaths and the small numbers in icu we have to protect their their their their personal health information uh in general uh i mean i don't dive into the details on length of stay and all those kind of breakdowns so um i mean the health authority

uh looks at that and uses that for a lot of that it feeds into our you know ongoing planning uh for their the use of their resources and what capacity they may need to build um but that is really more for for planning purposes

tim do you have a follow-up i i do for the premiere um premiere in 2020 when the when the pandemic started that summer there was uh something called a pandemic premium for healthcare workers uh it was paid an extra two dollars an hour uh for up to four months work and this was early days in the pandemic there there was a difficulty especially around long-term uh care workers at that time but arguably the the pressures on health care workers right now are much greater than even then is there is there the ability or will you provide extra emergency funding for health care workers you're absolutely right the the pressure on our health care workers and um across the across the entire system is is um as high or higher than it's ever been so you're absolutely right on that point um these are types of discussions that we're we're constantly having how can we how can we you know the the first instance is how do we how do we support people um by you know moving people around reject re-juggling things to make sure that they they have um the support they need to do their job effectively and people that are in the hospital and people that are seeking out care in this province are getting incredible care from people who are under incredible pressure so but you know you raise a point on on on the compensation aspect these are discussions that will continue to happen and we'll we'll have those discussions internally but we definitely want to support our healthcare workers as best as we can possibly can moving on we'll go to the cape breton post and nicole sullivan go ahead nicole thank you very much um this is for you dr strang um i've spoken to a number of parents who are struggling to get their children vaccinated and that's because of their medical history they've been trying since their children were able to get the vaccinations that they exist that they're at you know some are flat out being refused to be given vaccinations at both pharmacy clinics as well as the iwkw vaccination clinic uh told that they need medical clearance before they can get it but no direction as to where to get the medical clearance how to get the medical clearance or even how to get a medical exemption for the proof of vaccination policy until they can if ever safely get the covid 19 vaccine i'm wondering what um what you would tell people in these situations what they should do and what also what procedures should be taken by health care professionals who have deemed somebody's medical history to make them at risk of the of adverse events from the vaccine what procedures they're supposed to take once they refuse to provide that vaccine

i'm only aware of a single story like that i mean there there are very few reasons uh very few at all while a child could not receive their vaccine uh and you know the iwkw has uh many uh specialists and experts uh and they're running a clinic uh directly uh certainly uh you know they're for for the rare circumstances where the child may need an exemption and can get the vaccine because of a previous history in terms of reaction to vaccines we actually have a process in place and this has been repeatedly communicated to primary care providers that they can have an urgent referral to a specialist including allergists for an assessment and when i know the experience with adults most of time when we've had people who thought that they couldn't get a vaccine because of allergy history when it's reviewed by experts there they're recommended that it is safe for them to continue to get a vaccine so uh i don't you know i i i i don't i can't speak to any specific circumstances um but uh you know we will do everything we can to ensure a child can safely get vaccinated and uh and there's lots of experts in this province we're very fortunate to have uh pediatric vaccine experts uh to uh to support individual uh clinical cases do you have a follow-up nicole i do thank you very much um and again these are these are families that really want to be vaccinated the children involved also want to be vaccinated um and i have sent some questions to the department of health and wellness and in a written response they indicated and it was excellent information that was provided and it's much appreciated but one of the things that was pointed out was that there are these pathways through nova scotia health and the iwkw health services for people who need additional supports to get vaccinated there is one family i spoke to they believe their child has a phobia of needle things piercing through the skin and they've been trying desperately to access any of these pathways to help their child get vaccinated because the restrictions that are in place are basically her mental illness now for this family others in cape breton and nova scotia that might be dealing with uh this type of situation can you tell us what supports are in place is there something like a nasal covid19 vaccination that has been approved in nova scotia in situations like this we put in uh in any in each health zone there are contacts through public health working with clinical colleagues to provide all sorts of supports from even going to the extent of going to somebody's home to vaccinate them in a safer environment or even bringing people into an inpatient hospital environment with the right supports so there are there are pathways in every zone to provide the necessary supports to deal with all you know a whole range of uh whether it's fear anxiety uh you know people uh children with complex or even adults with complex uh disabilities that require lots of additional supports we have been doing this successfully uh for months so i i'm not sure why people would have difficulty accessing those supports at this time

we have time for one final outlet uh we'll go to guys bro journal lois and dort sorry lois go ahead please that's all right thank you appreciate the time um premier houston you said that rapid tests in schools would be for those who came to school symptomatic or developed symptoms while at school if you have symptoms shouldn't you stay at home and might people come to school just to gain access to the test thank you lois i if you have symptoms yes stay home no question do not try to game the system and go to school to get a test that would be kind that would be a ridiculous thing for somebody to do i hope we wouldn't have anyone trying to do that if they have symptoms they should stay home no question about it you have a follow-up lois yes thank you uh the government often talks about the mental health impact of not being in school for students has anyone assessed the mental health impact of being in school during a pandemic thank you

certainly there were you know there's uh ongoing uh supports in school for in general for for children and youth with mental health issues and for for some for some kids uh yeah being in school can be a place that uh that creates uh a lot of anxiety and uh and other challenges um and and but but in general when you look at uh at the at the the impact around a broadly in a in in in all children uh and youth that there's much greater impacts collectively of being held out of school and this has been a challenging time uh and there's a lot of uh concerns around mental health in general uh in in children and youth uh particularly uh from the last two years and so we're we have to pay we're going to have to pay attention to that uh but quite frankly their their the ability to support children and youth through schools is an important part of that addressing those overall mental health issues uh you know it's easier to do that in a school environment and build supports into the school than trying to uh try to identify and build supports one-on-one for kids in a community-based environment and that's all the time we have for questions today premiere thank you dr strength thank you um to everyone watching and for your questions as well um i i understand the frustrations i'm hearing them from nova scotians i understand them i share them i'm also frustrated um this is uh this variant is presenting our biggest challenge with kobit to date and it's it be beginning to feel like and if you ask a lot of the experts it is certainly people would say that at some point it's going to touch most of us and i know people are some people are scared i know people are divided but it's been a long journey and on this long journey nova scotians have have faced so many fears and so many unknowns and continue to move forward tentatively at times yes but always trusting public health and using science and the best most up-to-date health research and that's what's led us uh this far and it's what will continue to lead the way so our trust has been well placed in public health and and i thank nova scotians for that and i know the team at public health does as well so i have every confidence in our in our plan the plans that are presented they're they're built they're built on the best information that's available that's not to say they're perfect we'll change as necessary um we've we've shown that we'll do that as well but we only have one objective and that's to keep every nova scotian safe and to keep every nova scotian healthy so thank you for doing your part thanks everyone

you

good afternoon and thank you for joining us my name is tina tebow and i will be your moderator for today's coveted briefing joining us today the honorable tim houston premier of the province of nova scotia and dr robert strang chief medical officer of health for nova scotia go ahead premier thank you tina good afternoon everyone first off uh off the top uh condolences to eight families who have lost loved ones since uh since our last covet briefing so condolences to the families today we're going to talk about hospitalizations schools and an update on boosters so first let's start with uh hospitalizations but just i want to i want to talk a little bit off the top too about uh the impacts of kovalev covet has has really two impacts on our lives the first impact and the one that we often talk about here at these briefings is the ability to work and enjoy life and and the second impact uh is is obviously the the service delivery the impact on the health authority so there are many factors that impact both of these vaccination status pre-existing conditions um the human resources in the healthcare system the preparedness before the pandemic are all just some of the factors so it's important to to stress this because where we can each do our part to reduce the burden on the system we we should do it so so here's where we are today there are 83 nova scotians in hospital today with admissions related to covet so to me this number is an indicator of the direct impact this variant is having on people's lives it's the first the first impact i've talked about the ability to work and enjoy life of this group 12 are in the icu the average age is 68 of those in hospital in this group 25 20.5 percent 20.5 percent uh have no vaccination there are no children in the hospital the average length of stay of a coveted patient in nova scotia hospital right now is 6.5 days so for these briefings we've tended to focus on on those 83 people those 83 nova scotians who are admitted because of covet in the context of discussing the severity of the virus these are the people whose covid was so severe they could no longer manage their symptoms at home but at the same time i agree that if you are in the hospital and you have covet more resources are needed more resources have to be diverted from regular services to provide care so it is appropriate that we look at this number and in terms of that number there's a total of 256 nova scotians in the hospital today with covid impacting the system this includes the 83 that i've mentioned but it also includes 66 patients in the hospital who were admitted for other issues but were discovered to have covid on arrival at the hospital so this could be a heart attack patient who on admission was found to have covet and there are further 107 patients who were already admitted for other reasons and have contracted the virus in hospital so an example this would be a patient who's in for a hip replacement but contracted covid while recovering from their surgery so with 256 total nova scotians in the hospital you can see where the pressure is mounting on our health care system so i want to say clearly to our health care workers i i know the burden you're caring you're overworked overwhelmed um and there's a lot of emotions and and i share them and i certainly don't blame you we're all feeling a bit overwhelmed right now and this is a lot for anyone and you're on you're on the front line so we hear you and we see you um the other we were also overwhelmed in a positive way and that's those who came forward to help with boosters so we're now at the point where we have more volunteers than shifts so we put the cry out for for volunteers and and people stepped up so thank you for that this is incredible uh in such such a short amount of time we've had so many volunteers and that have sprung into action i really appreciate that um i have expressed uh some frustration this week to the to the health authority over the fact that some of those who volunteered and offered to help uh didn't hear back this was this was a thing that we really didn't want to happen and it did happen so for that to those nova scotians that volunteered and didn't hear or haven't heard yet i i apologize um in a province where our health care workers haven't always been respected appropriately i don't want you to think for a second that we didn't appreciate you you putting your name forward and sticking your hand up and saying you would help so uh healthcare workers are exhausted i know you're exhausted um you've given everything you have and and you offered to give more so from the bottom of my heart i thank you let's talk about schools our schools opened on monday i know there were some hiccups but my understanding is they've been worked out we expected some hiccups on the return to school but um they've been worked out classes without um um updated ventilation systems now have the systems that we're ordered that's that's a good thing all students and staff have been provided with three plymouths that's that's a good thing so the despite the incredible well-documented global shortage and issues with rapid test supply rapid tests are also available in our schools on a need to need to be a need be basis and so that is also a good thing so i i thank everyone uh behind the efforts of making that happen it's much appreciated and and it's been uh it's been more smooth than not smooth i'm very pleased with that so thank you for that uh just as a point of reference normal attendance in our schools is around 88 to 90 percent these last couple days in attendance has ranged from 80 to 88 percent so simple math suggests that there are about eight percent of families who kept their children home for one reason or another and i certainly respect that the emotions of of the of the situation are not lost on any of us um they're certainly not lost on me and i feel them so i i want to stress though that our schools are safe and our schools are as safe as our communities so anything that you can do to help keep our community safe it helps keep our schools safe and this is why dr strang and i are limiting our personal contacts and appearing virtually for this the reality of schools being open is not contradicting the message that we need to reduce

activity and work from home in our communities where possible these are not mutually exclusive directions they're exactly consistent directions when we keep our communities safe we do our part and we do our part to limit movement we in turn protect our essential workers um right now those include healthcare workers and of course our educators and and people working in long-term care across the system so when we when we protect our essential workers we we protect our children and we protect the access of our children to the education system so we're not oblivious to the stark reality that many of our jobs require us to work outside the home we know that let me let me assure you that i fully appreciate this but um but but to those that can limit your movements where you can where you can so um we can all do that to help keep our schools open so another measure that we can take to keep our students and staff safe is vaccinations before i speak to vaccinations and boosters i'd like to touch quickly on contact tracing though apparently there is uh there's still confusion around contact tracing uh so to be very clear nobody is restricted from telling anyone that they have covid um if you have coverage you can tell whoever you want that you have covid that's absolutely that's absolutely of course the case people people can share what they want to share about themselves or about their families in any way they want um but but right now at this stage of the pandemic the reality of this wave and the reality with covid right now is we need to and this is why we talk about personal responsibility when we talk about personal responsibility we mean that given all of the covid around people should be aware of their own health status and they shouldn't rely on contact tracing or exposure notifications from the government or from anyone else to manage their own health this is the time to take responsibility for your own health care status as much as you can this is this time to support one another that's the bluenoser way and we know that our children want to be in school we know that school staff have done their part to keep school environments safe by getting vaccinated now we need parents of children over five to do the same thing get your children vaccinated give them additional that additional protection and help us protect our communities and our classrooms vaccine appointments are available across the province right now so so please sign up and in terms of boosters on on january 5th sitting right here we said dr strange and i said that the team had worked hard to open up thousands of january appointments they continue to blow us away i will tell you at this stage in the month their ambitious plan was to do about 139 000 shots that included time to get up and running and that included time to work out the kinks but i will say that um they have really and they wanted the hit stride towards the end of the month but they've really hit stride already in fact so far this month they've done in the range of 152 000 boosters so they're exceeding their own ambitious targets in fact they're knocking it out of the park since then i can't thank them enough just yesterday they did 15 368 boosters just yesterday so spots continue to open because people and and people are working hard and stepping up to make sure that they open um i do want to say there was a clip on the news last week and included interviews with two retired nurses that have sprung into action i was able to track both of them down and speak to them thank you janet for making that happen but one of them made a very powerful statement that really impacted me in that news clip she said that when that needle goes in she instantly knows that she helped that person and was such a powerful thing and if you stop and think about that there are thousands of people across this province stepping up every single day to support you and instantly help you protect yourself all we need you to do is sit in the chair and let them so please do that on on monday we opened up boosters to everyone 18 and over who've had their second dose at least six months ago that's the nasty recommendation as of yesterday 82 of our pfizer appointments are booked up so people are are stepping up and booking them and we should see more uh booking up in the coming days but today 50 of the population 18 and over has either had their booster or is booked for their appointment that's that is very significant so thank you for doing your part to keep us all safe dr strang

thank you premiere and good afternoon everybody and before i start i want to thank a special person uh professor jerry o'coin for today's tie that i'm uh privileged to be wearing that he sent me thank you jerry and it saddens me to have to start today by acknowledging that eight more nova scotians have died from covid in the last week and my deep sympathies go to their families and loved ones we've had 15 deaths since the omicron wave started on december 8th and those nova scotians have left behind many more friends families and loved ones for most people the omicron variant results in symptoms that are less severe than other covid variants but it is much more infectious that it is still taking lives and leaving many others very sick at home and in hospital our health care system continues to be under tremendous pressure our hospitals are full in fact they're beyond the hundred percent capacity i've talked with them over the last few days and it is an extremely delicate balance most non-coveted programs and service services have had to be reduced so that coveted care can be provided and also to maintain emergency and urgent care for other health issues staff in the health care system are under great strain and they deserve everyone's support and deep gratitude and thanks and we have a responsibility to help them and the best way to help is to reduce the circulation of virus in the province we all need to slow down our lives and be extra careful as the premier said our vaccination rate is very good 83 of our population has two doses and almost 93 percent have had a first dose or have one book within the next 30 days and about about 50 of

those eligible to have a boost or have had one or have an appointment booked but there are still over 70 000 nova scotians who are eligible to be vaccinated but are not vaccination is protecting all of us from severe illness and it's limiting the impact on our health care system and on nova scotians who are at risk for severe outcomes this is the plain and simple truth so it's never too late to start your vaccine series and do your part to not only protect yourself but to help your family friends and other nova scotians and also if you are vaccinated with two doses it's important to get your booster dose dose to strengthen your protection and also add to the protection of all nova scotians

we know that public school students are back in classrooms this week and post-secondary institutions are returning to in-person learning in the next couple of weeks in-person learning is critically important for all students our young people our future generations have endured a lot over the past two years and we need to support them now so they have long-term success i do understand that there is some anxiety about in-person learning we've considered the risks and benefits sought import input from experts and made the decision that the benefits of students and learners being in classrooms with their peers far outweighs any risks i want to take some time today to address the top questions that i've been asked and many other has my colleagues have been asked about schools the the question i'll first address safety in schools and i want to start by saying that we can't equate safety with being covet-free in school or anywhere in our province covet is everywhere so of course it will be in our schools we can however consider the multiple layers of safety in place at schools and that these are layers that are that are not in place at many other places in our community these include masking in increased support for ventilation increased access to testing cohorting and of course vaccination here's what we do know there is a lot of covet 19 in nova scotia that will be in our schools because it is in our communities omicron presents in children as mostly mild illness the vaccine doesn't prevent all covet infections but it does protect against severe disease and the single dose of vaccine provides some protection and keeping at least eight weeks between the first and second dose provides the strongest longer long-term protection public health measures in schools provide additional protection and limit the spread of the virus in those settings and again being in class with their friends and peers is best for young people's learning development and emotional well-being so the most important things to focus on to slow the spread of covet 19 in schools are vaccinating everyone who is eligible staying home if you have any new respiratory symptoms cold new cold or flu symptoms means you need to stay home and that's that's critically important and then following the testing guidelines as required whether it's for pcr or rapid testing and closely following all the other public health measures next week we will be providing rapid tests to all students and staff in the public school system and regional centers for education will work with private schools and the mi'kmaq education authority to distribute tests for them as well these tests can be used if a student or staff member has symptoms and because of the potential for ongoing exposures in school families and staff will have the option to use these tests up to twice a weekly even if they have no symptoms and i want to take this opportunity to remind everyone that if you've had a covert infection in the last 90 days we don't need you to test it's not advised at all it's very unlikely that you have coveted plus your test may still be positive from your prior infection or however if you do develop new cold or flu-like symptoms you probably have another virus uh that's within that 90-day period and you should still stay home until your symptoms have improved the second question i'm seeing often uh is about contact tracing we're seeing many parent groups attempt contact tracing on their own and while they appreciate that people want to help and feel the import the information is important there really is no additional benefit in school settings to have a to be to have that contact tracing relying on being notified by government or someone else official about being a close contact whether in schools or elsewhere it gives people a false sense of security covet is all around us right now and it's possible that we will be exposed anytime we're out and around people that's why we all need to focus on being cautious and using personal protective measures as well as closely monitoring our own health staying home when we develop new cold or flu symptoms that's how we protect uh protect each other uh and then again the risks of relying on being notified and then the false assumption that if you're not notified you're somehow not at risk just don't work anymore uh with the wide spread of omicron i recognize that this is a significant psychological shift and a shift and i understand why it is creating concern and anxiety for some parents and teachers but the reality is that the advice will be the same whether you've been identified as a class classroom close contact of a case or not it will always come back to follow public health measures to keep yourself and others safe stay home when you're sick and test as appropriate and get vaccinated with the full series and boosted doses when you're eligible parents are asked to follow whatever procedures are in place to report an absence in school those procedures have been in place well before covet and if they want to notify the teacher or other parents that their child has covered they can if teachers want to they can notify parents and guardians about their own covet status but schools and teachers are not expected to notify families if a parent tells them of a positive case in one of their children

the last question i'm getting a lot is why are children in school but we're asking people to work virtually in old conferences and meetings virtually the answer is simple we are asking everyone who can work virtually to do so to limit spread and minimize exposure so that children can be in classrooms and our health care system can continue to function we've said throughout the pandemic our health care system and having our learners in in-person learning are our top priorities so it's about making sacrifices and choices to protect the people and systems that we have said are our highest priorities before i close on schools i want to stress how important it is for all of us to support our children and youth as well as teachers by creating a sense of reassurance and calm in our language and actions about returning to school i'm very concerned about the unnecessary fear and anxiety that has been fostered by some groups our children and our teachers need and deserve better i know it seems like this pandemic will never end but it will and kova 19 will become a more normal part of our lives until then follow the restrictions and personal measures diligently get vaccinated by doing so you will reduce the opportunity for cover 19 to spread and will be reprotecting your vulnerable family friends and neighbors slow down your life to slow the spread in your community our health care system our exhausted and dedicated health care workers our schools our students and our teachers need this from you tina thank you dr strang just a reminder we'll take one question and one follow-up from reporters on the line and the allotted time that we have for today's briefing we'll start with mike gorman from cbc go ahead mike thank you dr strang regarding contact tracing the health authority website advises folks that if they test positive they should reach out to their close contacts and let them know why should that be different in a school setting particularly in elementary schools where most kids either are not vaccinated at all or only have one shot well what we've learned in uh when we did we're doing this contact tracing in november and december particularly was that doing that close contact uh tracing and then the subsequent isolation of people were identified as classroom contacts was incredibly disruptive to our school system and the families so we're not going to be isolating people anymore so essentially it comes back to whether you're identified as a close contact or not especially in the school setting where where that their their the the burden on on on continuing to do this contact this notification is significant uh when the message doesn't change at all um it's the as i said in my my remarks the message for everybody is get vaccinated um follow all the personal protective measures especially and if you're sick with new cold and flu-like symptoms stay home so that that that message doesn't change just because somebody has been a close contact and so to have that substantive burden on on schools and and public health when they're both stretched we need them to be focusing on other aspects of of covid and their and their uh uncertain schools are underlying mandate an important mandate of teaching and learning um uh we need them to focus on those things that are effective uh not things that uh that really don't change any action on the on the part of uh families and individuals go ahead mike with your follow-up um it strikes me that are our viral situation here in nova scotia is not terribly different from our neighbors in pei and new brunswick and yet the approach being used in those two provinces is different than what we're doing here dr strang what are you seeing in our epidemiology that makes you confident about the approach we're using and premier why do you feel comfortable using a less restrictive approach here in nova scotia at a time when our hospitals under just as much strain as what they're seeing in pei in new brunswick so maybe i'll start first certainly if you look at new brunswick they started in a very different position because of decisions they had made they had a substantive delta wave in the fall and their hospital's already had a substantive burden of of uh of patience uh before omicron hit we were we were in a very different situation and if you look at prince edward island there are several weeks behind us and they are just now seeing the surge that we had several weeks ago and also they're in a different position that they're they have much less capacity in their hospitals and icu beds than we have in nova scotia so every province has a different starting point as a different circumstances uh and what we're looking at we feel it's it's lots of pressure but we feel that uh that we have the right balance of of of restrictions uh to slow down the spread but also we know that all of the restrictions come with our own sets of harm so we're very cognizant of not going further than we need to and thank you thank you michael and of course dr strang and i think you just heard the reason why i'm confident i'm confident because public health has confidence so in in this province we've done well through the pandemic through three premiers now because we've respected the advice of public health we've listened to the experts and we continue to do that so i have incredible confidence in in dr strang and his team at public health and i assure you uh from my discussions with them they have the very best interests of nova scotians at heart this is about the safety of nova scotians but as elected officials as leaders we we should listen to the experts and that's exactly what we're doing in this province and i thank dr strang and his team for their incredible dedication to the safety of nova scotians next we'll go to alicia drost from global go ahead alicia thank you just i guess as a bit of a follow-up to that question um is there a threshold for nova scotia to maybe be more restrictive or follow you know what new brunswick or pi is doing is there a certain amount of hospitalizations or maybe even if we reach a certain number of healthcare workers off isolating is there any kind of target no i i get asked the question a lot i have been for the last two years what you know about specific targets it's not about one target we're we're in continual discussions myself and my colleagues within the department of health and wellness with our

colleagues in the nsh in the iwk uh understanding all the different parameters that go into their assessment of their situation and then also how they're responding to that so it is a it is really on a daily basis we look at where we're at both of the epidemiology and and the capacity issues in the healthcare system and how they are mitigating those pressures um and so far uh we're all at it the judgment that yeah things are very very tough uh very tight uh but we feel that uh that from a restrictions perspective that we have the right level of restrictions to help slow down the spread i i i'm gonna take the opportunity of your question to emphasize once again um that what we need the most from all nova scotians is to very strictly adhere to the level of restrictions we have and all the personal measures that we're asking every nova scotian to take we need to do the best possible job with what we put in place to give that its maximum impact to protect the health care system to me that's much more important than than than tightening up some restrictions uh where which which may actually create more people just kind of giving up and stop stopping following the personal measures go ahead alicia with your follow-up thank you and can you talk about if it's believed that nova scotia has reached the peak of omicron and maybe if or when that happened and how can we actually know when if we do hit the peak if rapid test results for the most part aren't being reported so we certainly have uh uh we've said all uh you know for several weeks we are no longer in a position where we need to know every every case we have several thousand uh people being tested every day with pcr tests that is certainly a very sufficient amount of testing uh to monitor the progress of the of the omicron wave whether whether it's going up plateaued and then starting to come down we only will never know for certain where we are after the fact and we can look back and go oh that's when we started to come down so right now uh you know as i said last week we were right in the middle of uh of of the of the omicron wave and which means we're right at the at the peak uh and how long that's going to go on for uh there you know there's a number of factors that go into that but we continue to watch both our um the pcr results for that overall surveillance perspective as well as our hospitalization data uh which as scary as it looks has been relatively stable for the last uh number of days so that's encouraging signs but it by no means dimini diminishes the impact it's having right now in our hospitals so we're right in the middle of things i think you know we expect that it's the next week and then the rest of this week and in the next week we'll start to get a clearer picture of what is the trend uh and where we might be on on that peak perhaps starting to come down um but again we watch things very carefully on a daily basis to get that sense of where we're at but but ultimately we will only know for sure where we were are in the peak uh in the rear view mirror next we'll go to natasha pace from ctv go ahead and natasha thank you um dr stern can you speak a bit about the the impacts of having more than 500 nova scotia health employees currently off work either because they've tested positive or waiting on test results or were exposed to coped like what impact does that have on an already struggling health care system in the province it's certainly a major factor because you know for every person in hospital you need you need a bed and you need staff and you need not just the direct care staff but all the supporting staff around them that makes the hospital run all the laboratory the diagnostic imaging cleaning dietary everything so there's no doubt that having those workers off is is a significant contributor to the pressures um we've made adjustments uh in terms of allowing people identified as close contacts to go back uh to work uh or to school uh with with appropriate protocols and certainly the healthcare has significant protocols of what we call return to work protocols there also continue to look at what are their necessary occupational health and safety and infection control protocols that would allow people to come back to work uh whether they're recovered from an infection or they're identified as a contact in a safe manner so we're certainly working to mitigate that as as best as possible it is no doubt it's certainly a major part of the of the pressures the the hospitals are facing right now go ahead natasha with your follow-up thank you premier many businesses specifically those who work in you know spas and salons say they need more help from government um because of the restrictions are currently in place they can't offer all their services or have to limit how many clients they work with on a daily basis are you looking at providing any additional assistance to some of these struggling businesses it's a constant discussion i spoke to the minister about this yesterday actually and and i think it's important to know that you know when we went through this before with different lockdowns and restrictions there was you know every time we we look at the supports that are there and so we we've kind of we've kind of been building on on the supports that are there where we can where it's appropriate so it's it's an ongoing discussion but the the restrictions uh there's not a single nova scotian that the restrictions are easy on they're hard on everyone for sure we we know that we we feel that we respect that um so we'll continue to have have the discussion um for the most part the the supports have been like very direct impacts we understand there are indirect impacts but as well we'll continue to have the discussions and and see if it's if we can do something we will next we'll go to john mcphree from the chronicle herald go ahead john thank you uh this is a question for the premier uh do we have a sense of how the impact of the cancellation of procedures and surgeries uh related to the staffing crisis i talked to a young woman today who's been basically confined to bed for months because her spinal surgery has been canceled twice and what kind of assurances can you give to these people that their health care needs will be met at some point yeah we we the the the the impacts are real the postponements are real and we know that uh

the the status of the system you know as it's been deteriorating over over a number of years now a lot of times when you get your appointment it's long past when it you know opt-in would have been hot so we know that these are real i i i certainly hear from a number of people every day and in similar situations and it's heartbreaking but we'll get through this wave and then we will we'll we're completely focused on on on catching up and supporting those and getting those procedures done i don't have a timeline for that we have to get through this wave first and then we can really focus on on getting people those types of care go ahead john with your follow-up thank you uh this is for dr strang the the number of lab confirmed uh positive cases appears to be on the decline in the last week uh we're we're down in the 400 daily uh case range somewhere we're in that around there do you expect that to continue or can we expect of spiking cases in the coming weeks as we heard from the federal public health department this week uh what's your sense of where where the omnicorn wave is going

so our our number of lab confirmed cases and our percent positivity if you look back uh prior to the the weekend we've just been through it was relatively stable for about a week uh our lab numbers went down or the you know a lot of positive tests went down but also the total number of tests went down over the weekend simply because of the storm so i wouldn't put too much stock in the reductions uh over the last few days today we saw the volume of tests had gone up but our our our number of positives still remained uh lower than we were seeing and our percent positivity is down a few percentage points but that's only one day um you know you know why i'm as i said we watch things every day and my my hope is that we see that trend continue for a number of days and we'd have to see that that happened before we could make some firmer conclusions about where we're at excuse me the federal government always makes you know statements about from a national level but we know that we were one of the earlier provinces hit by the the omicron uh uh you know wave and therefore the spike and as i referenced earlier with pei they're a few weeks behind us and they're just now getting their surge now so maybe from a national perspective we're still on the upswing but we're one of the provinces who are fortunately or not we are ahead ahead of the game somewhat and so we're in a different position when we look at our epidemiology and we i think we're we've gone through the major uh spike and exactly where we are and how long that high level is going to be maintained is is what i'm focusing on right now and trying to analyze next we'll go to keith doosat from the canadian press go ahead keith good afternoon dr strang um you mentioned uh that we've had eight deaths in the last week it's actually eight deaths in the last three days i also noticed from last week that the icu numbers have tripled they've gone from five to 15. so my question to you is about what's your sense of the severity of the disease and who exactly is getting sick enough that they have to go to the icu is it is it actually people who are in the hospital for other reasons and you know may have had serious surgery and couldn't afford to get some kind of an infection but did um do we have any sense of how that's breaking down so what we're seeing is again i've talked to my you know colleagues nationally as well as my clinical colleagues here in nova scotia there is being we're seeing a shift as the omicron gets into older age groups uh earlier we were seeing more classic kind of respiratory illness now we're seeing as older people because of age and often with you know multiple chronic health conditions we're seeing more that is an exacerbation of of that chronic health that cluster of chronic health conditions and exacerbation of failure of frailty in an elderly person which is resulting in them being in hospital and they are now into getting in that age group where there is a greater likelihood of needing icu uh care so the pattern is changing as we get into as i said as the the demographic that's been impacted slowly slowly shifts and that is consistent of what other provinces are seeing as well go ahead keith with your follow-up and this one's for uh premier houston good afternoon um you just issued a news release uh healthcare workers not currently in the workforce force are being asked to fill positions in long-term care facilities i wonder if you can talk a bit about that and why that decision was taken yeah thank you keith and look we basically there's a lot of pressure there's a lot of pressure across the system and we put the call out for for people who could help with boosters we had an overwhelming response and we had actually heard from a lot of people who said hey i'll do i'll do more when you when you need it so so this is just just a recognition that there's pressure on the system there's pressure on long-term care if there's people who can step up and help out uh you you are welcome so that that's what that's all about and uh i've no doubt that many many people will step up because that's what we're really seeing that that spirit in in we've seen that bluenoser spirit come through loud and clear next we'll go to adrian blanc radio canada go ahead adrian thank you dr strang you mentioned the list that parents have started writing about cases in schools you warned against a false sense of security for people who don't see their score in the list but the argument from many parents is that at least they feel they are not being left in the dark and not leaving it to the rumor so what do you think clearly do you think this kind of list can provide some help to parents or is it dangerous so i think the basic the message is certainly if parents want to share that information and about their the status their own status or the status of the children or teachers want to do that there they can do that but the we need everybody to to uh act under the the the common understanding that there will be covered in schools um that but it's also covered everywhere else that all of us

now have to basically uh assume that if we're out and about among other around other people there's a possibility we've been exposed we don't need an official notification to uh to tell us that in fact relying on the official notification as i said earlier can cause that false sense of security though just assume you might have been exposed if you're out about in public and therefore you need to every time you go out closely follow the the public health measures around masking maintaining distancing uh all those other factors be vaccinated and if you develop new cold or flu-like symptoms stay home and follow the testing protocol that doesn't change whether you've been notified or not so there really is not a lot of added value in terms of what actions you need to take whether you have an official notification or not and it can cause that that that uh that false sense of security and and have people not take the necessary actions they need to do because somehow they feel they're not at risk because they haven't been notified go ahead adrian with your follow-up yes i believe you mentioned that more test kits will be sent to schools to allow all students and staff to test if they need so how many rapid test kits are we talking about and how will they be used in schools we're still working out our supply and then you know what is the long you know you know then we have to divide that up week by week so i we don't have a specific number but then the testing is also through schools making test kits available through schools is not the only place we are in the process of of uh we'll have more to say on this in the days ahead as we get now you know we talked about last week of being having some challenges around supply the supplies are coming through and so we're going to be able to then reopen other other points of community access whether it's through uh primary assessment centers other community points like library in the daily libraries in the days ahead for people to get uh rapid rapid kits but it still means we still have to focus on those who have symptoms or who who have maybe maybe in a in a place where they have been identified as a close contact so we're still asking people to for the test kits that are available through schools is the primary use of those is so people have a test at hand in their home if and when they develop the the the new cold and flu symptoms and they need a rapid test kits and the vast majority of students and most teachers will or will are eligible for a rapid test kit rather rapid to use a rapid test rather than a pcr but we've also acknowledged that because of some of the concerns and and the realities of our potential ongoing exposure in in schools that that teachers and families can choose to use those rapid test kits for just regular testing once or twice a week we have to limit it to that amount and we wouldn't recommend more than twice a week regular testing anyway um but we are working through and we can we'll continue to do the best we can to uh make sure there is some availability of test kits through schools as one of the places uh points of access uh in our comprehensive testing program next we'll go to paul bacon from all nova scotia go ahead paul thank you i'm not sure if my question is for the premiere of dr strang but we've talked about rapid tests in schools will the province continue to provide rapid tests to day cares we have we have heard that last week they were told they might not be a priority going forward as every everything i just said about schools is the same daycares are part of that we will be continuing to provide rapid kits in daycares under the same parameters uh that i just identified as for schools go ahead paul with your follow-up and and premier uh i guess dr strang just alluded to this but uh at an earlier briefing you had hoped by the time students went back to school to have more uh more information an update about the large order for rapid tests that the province had placed with the federal government and that was overdue is is there an update yeah just to look we keep continuing to get updated information on the arrival of of supply we we we know that supply is under pressure uh across the country around the world um it's amazing the stories i'm hearing about the the the pressure on the supply chain in general but certainly around rapid tests so so we're we the federal government has advised us of you know different chunks of orders that are coming through and as uh my my message to nova scotians is that as as we have the supply we will distribute it to you um in in the best ways possible but so it's a moving target um but it is moving and some supply will start to arrive next we'll go to ed halverson from qccr radio go ahead go ahead ed thank you uh doctor strang you mentioned that teachers are not required to notify if a student or their parent lets them know there's a positive test that's different than the teacher or the principal not being allowed to share that information i'm not sure if this question is for you dr strange or free premier but why are teachers and and principals not allowed to share that information well the in fact that is misinformation that's been put out there by various groups that there's somehow a ban or a gag order that's not true uh however uh the school system and you know individual teachers need to be aware that there's there's legislation that governs how uh somebody else's personal health information is actually disclosed it's fine if you as a parent choose to disclose the the personal health your or your child's personal health information it's fine if a teacher chooses to disclose that but there's all sorts of issues when they when people start to get into this into disclosing other people's health information and so those are things that the school system needs to take very seriously we take it extremely seriously in the health system and and i would warn the people who are out there potentially using social media disclosing other people's health information that they need to be very careful about how they do that go ahead ed with your follow-up thanks dr strang and i can appreciate the unique privacy i do need to uh i have to contradict what you're saying there because i have a letter from a principal in which i can quote the principle saying i am also not permitted to communicate with classes or with staff when positive cases occur

discussions in the last couple of days with my colleagues in education and that that that has been clarified uh um and that is not actually the appropriate uh phrasing and language that has been shared with most recently shared with uh school administration and that's all the time we have for questions go ahead premier uh thank you uh thank you for for the questions and uh we know we're moving forward we're moving forward through all this together and i'll say uh we've reminded last weekend nothing brings bluenosers together like a good storm whether it's snowblowing a neighbor's driveway or chatting across the yard and gale force wins uh we know that uh we've seen this past weekend certainly i've heard from lots of people that just that that connection with other people and the ability to see them and to talk to them we're all missing that it's a tough time um and it's it's our nature to be kind to one another so what i would say to to nova scotians is don't let the pandemic change that public health your governments your teachers your people around you they have your best interest at heart uh there's no question about that so we'll get through this together we're closer to being through it now than we were yesterday and tomorrow we'll be in closer again so stick together we'll get through this have a good afternoon everyone

you

good afternoon and welcome to today's covet 19 update i'm heather fairbairn and i'll be your moderator today before we begin allow me to introduce the honorable tim houston premier of nova scotia and dr robert strang chief medical officer of health for nova scotia premiere thank you heather good afternoon everyone we've suffered significant loss of life since our last covet briefing my sincere condolences to the 16 families who have lost loved ones since that time the impact of this wave has been obvious for all to see we all know people that had or have kovitz and that will continue for some time but let's talk about where we are today so i'll touch on hospitalizations schools boosters and restrictions there are 91 nova scotians in hospital today with admissions related to covet of this group 15 are in the icu of those in the icu 26.7 are unvaccinated the average age of those in the hospital is 67. there are two children in hospital and my understanding is that they are being treated for non-covet reasons the average length of stay of a covered patient in nova scotia hospital right now is 7.3 days besides those admitted to hospital exclusively for covid we have 221 others in hospital who have coveted in addition to the reason that brought them into the hospital this is a total of 312 nova scotians in hospital with covid impacting the health care system that means that in addition to the 91 the total of 312 also includes 100 patients in hospital who were admitted for other reasons other issues but were discovered to have covid on arrival at the hospital it also includes 121 patients who were already admitted to the hospital for other reasons and have contracted the virus while they were in hospital we know that every patient with covid no matter how they arrived in the hospital requires specialized treatment and attention so we know uh it's a big stress on the system so that's kind of a summary of the of the current situation we've had a lot of cases over the past month in a bit a lot and we've all been through a lot but understanding where we are today and looking forward there's still a path to loosening restrictions but it's a path that extends past january 31st many many things factor into the decisions around restrictions and two of the primary considerations at this stage are number one the stress on the health care system i've just updated you on the hospital on the hospital situation and number two the the booster program so while the hospitalization situation has to be closely monitored and we're we're all you know watching that very very closely the booster program success is something that we can all be encouraged by and we'll talk about that but all in all the most restrictions will remain in place past january 31st but there is a path forward and it's important that we focus on that path it's important that we focus on mental health that we acknowledge the importance of arts culture sports and physical activity particularly for our youth and it's important that we talk about these things especially on on today which is bill let's talk day so the goal that we're that we're shooting towards that we're working towards is to relax some restrictions in the arts and culture and have sports teams be able to resume full practices with no with no fans around february 7th and and ultimately recitals and competitions and games back by february 14th still possibly with no fans but but these are just the goals and there's we have to watch what's happening between now and then so with the return to school uh we we've been very clear that school would return on a certain date but the government had to take care of a number of things on its side to make that return happen ventilation masking and stuff so this time the timeline is not dependent on government action so much as it's dependent on continuing the positive momentum of the booster campaign and obviously contingent upon watching the hospitalizations and stress on the health care system at any given point in time so i know dr strang will have more to say on the restrictions but that's kind of where we're at so if we talk about the situation in our schools dr strang has been clear that life for the time being it won't be covet-free which is why it's incredibly important that each of us do what we can to reduce our contacts and to do our part to keep our communities safer because by doing our part we can help achieve the goal of allowing our children to be in school and to date with the return to school we have not seen any operational interruptions in our schools approximately 11 percent of teachers were absent teachers and staff were absent yesterday that puts the stress on on the system but it's manageable at this point we have seen a shortage of bus drivers over the last week and a half and that's caused some delays certainly but we're in the process of onboarding more staff to try to address this particular issue so these types of challenges were expected we always knew that there'd be some challenges but but people are stepping up because the overwhelming number of nova scotians respect the importance of in-person learning normal school attendance is in the range of 90 to 92 percent uh this week average attendance has been in the range of 85 percent um so we know that there are students that are that are absent in addition to what would normally be the case and for those students who aren't at school they are able to receive the lessons of their of their class and and hopefully not as not fall as far behind as they might have otherwise we are completely focused on the students of this province this is absolutely about them and i want to thank all of those teachers and those families and and those students that have reached out to me telling me how happy they are to be back i thank you for that we're we are also very happy that you are back in school i want to talk about the boosters i mentioned how impressed i am with the booster program last week i told you that the initial plan was to do in the range of 139 000 boosters in the month of january as of yesterday we had 255 000 booster shots in arms in january alone and we are on track to hit 296 000 boosters in arms by the end of the month with our with our pre-january doses this means somewhere in the range of 485

000 nova scotians will have been boosted boosted by the end of this month so this is absolutely incredible this is a testament to the team that got to work standing up the clinics dave noella angela collin tracy and your entire teams i can't thank you enough this is also a testament to all those healthcare workers who who stepped up and pitched in to help and to all of those eligible nova scotians who wanted to be part of the solution by getting their shot thank you to each and every one of them in a world of all kinds of tough news we see it all around us every day we can stop for a moment and be proud of what has been accomplished here in nova scotia with boosters there is more to be done for sure and the work will continue at the same pace but we can be proud of what's been accomplished by the team so thank you also on friday we announced that going forward the pfizer vaccine would be available to anyone who was eligible for their for their vaccination or for their booster up until this point we had a limited quantity of pfizer and we had to save it for anyone who was under the age of 30. since moderna was not recommended for that age group and i know that there were some people hesitant to mix doses as well so but but to each and every one of you you can now book your pfizer and there are lots of appointments available across the province so please book it i also want to give a bit more additional information on the booster program to date 66 percent of children aged 5 to 11 have one dose of the vaccine including those who have booked an appointment we're at 72 percent we are right up there with newfoundland um newfoundland is leading the country but we are right up there with newfoundland in terms of vaccinating our children this is this is incredibly positive news we'll be seeing second doses for this age group starting this week for those 18 and over who are eligible 56.9 percent have either had their booster or booked their shot and i i thank you for that i'm increa extremely encouraged by the progress today we now have an abundance of appointments across the province so we will start winding down the mass clinics that were stood up and we will focus on more targeted programming across the province at those areas where we can get the rates up a little higher our pharmacies have not let us down over the last couple of years we can't thank them enough we're going to lean on them again pharmacies will be the primary source of vaccines and they will continue to have wide access to the doses the appointments are there please book your appointment before i turn things over to dr strang i know there's a lot of discussion there's discussion about highway blockades possibly coming to nova scotia this weekend my message to anyone planning on blockade a highway don't do it just don't do it nova scotians have no patience for highway blockades and personally many people would know i have even less so please don't do it don't block our highways dr strang

it helps if you come unmuted uh before you start to speak so thank you premier and good afternoon everyone uh it also saddens me to acknowledge that 16 more people have died from covet in the last week uh and my deepest sympathies are go to their families and loved ones this is a very upsetting reminder that we need to continue to take omicron seriously the omicron strain continues to make many people quite sick and land some in hospital and for some unfortunately it is deadly while it's true that most nova scotians who died during this wave are primarily older people with underlying health conditions that doesn't mean that we do not need to be cautious just the opposite the elderly in our communities need to be valued and protected by the rest of us we absolutely need to continue to be cautious about covet carefully balancing limiting the spread of omicron and the impact on our most vulnerable and healthcare system while limiting the equally serious impacts of restrictions but there's also reason to be optimistic at this stage thanks to our high vaccination rates and the hard work of nova scotians so the most important thing you can do to protect yourself and others is to get vaccinated with your primary series and if eligible your booster dose when we look at the data number of cases vaccination rate the number of people who are unvaccinated our deaths and hospitalizations the message is clear the vaccines work so here are the facts evidence from around the globe shows that while covered vaccines have modest impact on stopping the spread of the omocron variant they are highly effective in reducing severe outcomes including hospitalization and death vaccinated people are getting cope with 19 this is expected with about 850 000 nova scotians fully vaccinated and a highly infectious variant cases in vaccinated people as well as hospitalizations and death while relatively small compared to the number of people fully vaccinated are inevitable no vaccine is 100 effective but in contrast about seven percent or or just just around seventy two thousand people who are eligible for vaccine are not vaccinated in our province this small group has been disproportionately impacted by omicron and that seven percent account for 21 of hospitalizations and 30 percent of deaths since december 8. this significantly higher risk for unvaccinated people for getting severely ill or dying is being seen across the country and the world

think of it like riding a motorcycle if you wear a good helmet and protective clothing you can still get hurt if you crash but you're much less hurt than if you were wearing shorts and sandals being vaccinated is like wearing protective gear wearing a mask and keeping your distance is like driving safely and following the rules of the road and when those around you also get vaccinated and follow the rules it's like everyone is driving safely on the road on the roads minimizing the risk that you'll have an accident and especially getting severely injured from an accident i don't mean to

sit to simplify what is a very serious topic but it's important that we're honest about and that nova scotians understand what the data is telling us it tells us that vaccines are protecting hundreds of thousands of people in this province from being hospitalized or dying from covid 19. it tells us that the impact of the omicron wave would have been far worse if our vaccine coverage was low so as you know we're focused on getting first and second doses to children aged 5 to 11 and booster doses to those 18 and over like the first round of our vaccine program there are really two phases as the premier's talked about the first phase was about mass clinics and good access to get the most the large majority of people vaccinated as quickly as possible and that's why we stood up mass community clinics over the past few weeks in january alone uh almost two two thousand two two hundred ninety seven thousand booster doses will have been administered or booked that's a massive effort and i wanna thank everyone who played a part hundreds of people in the health care system including many who had retired and our colleagues in the federal government where now we're able to start winding down clinics at the end of the month but it's important to nova scotians understand that there are still plenty of appointments available and vaccine will continue to be available in the months ahead through the iwk pharmacies family practices and collaborative care practices across the province and we'll move from uh from large clinics to focusing our attention to more targeted community outreach to increase vaccine coverage in certain areas or groups this is exactly what we did last year in the first round of our vaccine program and for that second phase those targeted approaches will start by looking at vaccine uptake numbers by community and from there try to understand the reasons why people in a particular group or community have not yet been vaccinated this work is just as important as the mass clinics but it takes more time and planning working with community leaders and developing targeted solutions it could mean things like dropping clinics the use of public health mobile outreach bands or clinics in community halls or schools but what works best in one community may be different from others and so we have to work community by community now let me talk briefly about the current covid activity the good news and and part of our optimism is that we are past our peak a peak for cases based on what we're seeing when we look at our pcr or lab confirm cases things are start trending downwards we know hospitalizations come a couple of weeks after cases so that means we're likely right within the peak of hospitalization hospitalized cases now but we're not out of this wave yet the virus continues to have significant significant impacts on more vulnerable nova scotians and the impacts on the health system continue to be very significant that's why we're extending current restrictions for two weeks until february 14th and i won't list what these are what those are as they've been in place for some time now but i'll make two comments first keeping restrictions in place a little longer should give more time for cases to continue trending downward and help relieve the pressure on the health care system and second we are working on a plan now to start lifting restrictions in a phased approach we'll be monitoring cases and hospitalizations closely and if things go well we'll start allowing larger gathering limits and a return to sport events and games arts and cultural events and performances and if it's possible to safely allow some things to start earlier than february 14th we will before i wrap up i want to mention a few common questions that come my way around vaccines everyone 18 and older is eligible for a booster dose now as long as it's been at least 168 days after your second dose some people are eligible for a third dose and a booster dose if you meet our definition for moderately to severely immune compromised you should have three doses for your primary series and then you should still get a booster dose 168 days at least 168 days after your third day dose you can get vaccine any dose after you've recovered from a covid infection there is active discussion around national experts on the best time to wait for vaccination after infection and more guidance is expected soon

in closing i'd like to say we all need each other to hang on for a couple more weeks and please if you haven't gotten your booster or any doses of vaccine book it now remaining cautious now allows optimism for all of us as we move through winter and closer to spring it can be easy in times like this to lose hope we all want to return to care more carefree times and we will get there today of course is bell let's talk day it carries with it an important reminder to all of us to be mindful of our own mental wellness and the wellness of our family and friends as we continue to navigate through this pandemic the past two years have had many challenges for people's mental wellness so i encourage nova scotians to check in on their mental health and to reach out and have conversations with their family friends and colleagues please don't try to go it alone talk to someone and ask for help

we'll now take questions from media participating by telephone we've got quite a list to get through so we'll uh we'll do the best we can to get to everyone in the time that we have available we'll take one question one follow-up starting with cbc's jean laroche go ahead jean thanks heather good afternoon this question is for dr strang you touched on it uh during your presentation but i just want to explore something that i think has confused some people the medical consensus seems to be that the omicron variant produces as you have said less severe disease and less likelihood of death than the covid 19 virus that we foresaw in nova scotia in march of 2020 given that why are so many nova scotians dying from it

during this wave it's simply because of the the the the extent of the spread that this wave is much more infectious than any of the previous variants so even with the vaccine uh in place uh and we also know that along with the infectiousness that uh the the current vaccines they're still better than no vaccine but they have modest uh effect on on preventing infection and therefore preventing the spread between people but they still so that means lots of people are gonna be uh have been um uh infected through this wave and it's simply when you have even if even if you have a very low risk of severe disease and a lot of that comes from the ongoing protection of the vaccine against hospitalization and death if you have large numbers of people infected even a very low uh uh percentage turns into a fairly large absolute number of people and that is what is putting the pressure on our health care system at this time do you have a follow-up jean i do again to dr strang based on the modeling because you said we're at the peak is there any way to estimate the number of nova scotians who have already uh contracted kobit 19 so that's that's a bit of a complicated piece because you know we're knowing we've shifted and we're nowhere for a number of weeks now where before christmas we are we uh changed our testing strategy so only uh people at greater greatest risk of severe disease are getting a pcr and where we have reliable results we do have established a process asking people to report in if they're positive uh by a pcr test and that's not just so we can count those numbers in fact it's very important that people understand that if they're positive the health they need to report it because the health system uses that information they provide to uh understand if they actually meet the criteria for home monitoring or for actually some of the newer oral medications that are that are coming on board so that's a bit of an aside but those are two critically important reasons why people need to uh report if they are positive with a with a rapid test um so we are doing some work uh right now with our epidemiologists to use both our hospitalization data our our lab data and possibly that uh that rapid test data even though we know that that's going to be uh very incomplete uh to to create some estimate estimation of the of the of the number or percentage of nova scotians who uh will now have immunity from a combination of vaccine or infection or both next we'll go to global's alicia droughts go ahead alicia you dr strang you mentioned that more details will be coming out just in regards to timing of getting vaccinated after getting the virus but can you give any indication of maybe how long someone should wait and is there a difference between um you know first or second dose and booster after recovering from the virus well the answer to the to the the first the second part of your question is no that it doesn't matter which do which dose you're eligible for right now the national advisory committee and immunization is saying that once you're recovered uh you're you're okay to go get uh you know go get whatever your dose of vaccine you're eligible for but again the experts are looking at baths and we will have some updated guidance coming in and i expect in the next a few weeks alicia do you have a follow-up yes i do um i'm just wondering in terms of pax levitt if you can give any details i know that the province has a supply for 900 individuals when do we expect it to start being distributed and how best is it going to be used so my understanding i'm not directly involved in that work we have a whole therapeutics group but my understanding from uh you know briefings of that this morning is that we've got criteria in place we have 900 you know our initial allotment from the national supplies 900 uh courses of treatment and we're we're in the process now of getting those out to specific pharmacies uh and then and then having nova scotians it's important you know people have to be very early on within the first five days of getting symptomatic and as people start to register and i'll make my point again this is one of the key reasons why it's important that people register if they even if they have a positive pcr sorry a positive rapid test at home that they need to register so the system can then use the information to determine if they're eligible and would benefit from the this this new treatment and there's other ones coming down the pipe as well um so we're very close to actually starting to implement and start to use that medication and and but it's important with a limited supply there are very specific indications for its use and there are many interactions with other other medications so uh this isn't for everybody uh it's gonna have some impact but it's certainly only it's not the the the uh the golden ticket if you will it's just another uh targeted tool in our toolbox next we'll go to ctv's natasha pace go ahead natasha thank you uh premier you mentioned this off the top but just wanted to ask you again there was obviously a protest over the weekend at the nova scotia new brunswick border tomorrow morning it's expected truck drivers will be leaving enfield for the truckers for freedom convoy what is your reaction to this are you surprised or discouraged by these rallies and the blockades that are happening not just in this province but right across the country yeah i mean the the the blockades for sure there's no there's no patience or you know just you can't do it you can't block a highway um i understand people have different opinions on government policy and certainly have different opinions on on vaccines and mandates but you can't block the highway so so our messages is the same like uh this is a tough time for everyone but the vaccines work the vaccines are effective those that get that can get vaccinated should get vaccinated that's that's the way that's the path forward the path forward does not involve blocking highways it involves getting vaccinated go ahead with your follow-up natasha thank you uh dr strang last week um british columbia said they were starting to manage covet 19 cases more like the common cold that province has abandoned contact tracing and they're reserving pcr tests for high-risk individuals a lot of their approach sounds similar to what nova scotia is now doing so

i'm wondering if um nova scotia will soon be treating covid 19 like the common cold as well so i don't think we'll ever treat that's unfortunate language i don't you know the covid 19 uh is not like the common cold and you know the people even if they're sick at home they are they can be a lot sicker than you would normally get with a cold however uh we are on the road uh like bc uh to actually uh moving away uh incrementally from not only starting to lift restrictions but also incrementally moving away from things like contact tracing we started with schools for the reasons we've outlined and and part of moving forward uh in the next few weeks is also going to be along with lifting restrictions uh further moving away from uh from contact tracing having all contacts isolate all those steps you can't do it all at once uh you can't just throw the door wide open so as our we'll have a phased approach to lifting restrictions we're going to continue in a step like a stepwise manner of backing away from uh intensive public health uh you know contact tracing uh and ultimately moving away from testing at some point we move we get into a space where we have an approach to testing much more like influenza where it's really only where it's clinically important to know what virus somebody has that you use testing and then you have a certain amount of testing to help with surveillance purposes but the majority of people you don't need to test we're not there yet but that is also a direction we will incrementally move towards moving along we'll go to steward petal with the herald go ahead steward

thank you i was wondering if there could be more clarity but the vaccine status of those who have died whether they're fully vaccinated or boosted or perhaps if there was underlying conditions that applied to all of them i don't know that we've seen any particular breakdown for this particular wave so what i can say is we as we know 30 of the of the people who have died 30 percent of the 30 individuals who have died uh since december 8th so during the omicron wave uh we were unvaccinated that's out of uh total population that or total group that represents just a little bit over seven percent of the population so again a disproportionately disproportionate uh impact on those who remain unvaccinated and that is consistent with what we're seeing across the country uh we need people to be vaccinated to protect themselves and others because what we're also seeing um in in a in the other hospitalizations as i said in my remarks the people who are ending up in hospital those who are uh elderly usually with chronic multiple chronic conditions uh we know that even if they have uh a booster uh three doses of vaccine they still because of their underlying health status aren't going to mount the the the the most effective immune response and they so therefore they rely on other people around them being immunized to give them the layers of protection uh necessary um so but so that's that's a challenge for all of us what are we doing to make sure we protect those in our community and our family who are more vulnerable because of underlying health conditions and and where we need to minimize the risk to them and minimize the number who are going into hospital you have a follow-up steward i do wondering why um no other health officials have been taking part in these briefings to discuss the the deaths in particular uh hospital capacities um previously we've had health experts take part in these briefings but it doesn't seem to have happened since they've resumed

um i i'm not sure that there's it's been a frequent thing i mean i've i can remember a couple times over the last two years where there's been other health officials but for the most part it's been dr strang and the premier the province and i'm now the third premier that's done these with dr strang but uh is is the question about do you need more information there's lots of information that comes out but these are covid briefings dr strang's the chief medical officer of the province and i'm the premier of the province and as premier and chief medical officer we should be able to to answer the questions come that's why we attend these briefings the premier's correct on a very few circumstances we've done technical briefings mostly around vaccine where we wanted to dive much deeper into uh the rollout and the specific technical questions of vaccine programs but uh that i'm the lead uh in the department of health and wellness on the covered response but uh i'm well briefed by uh you know by a number of colleagues in the department and other parts of the health system before briefings and there's lots of opportunity through our communications i see them every day that other people in the health care system provide responses on details of the covid response moving on we'll go to keith toussette with canadian press go ahead keith uh thanks uh dr strang i'm wondering if we're doing anything to look for the new uh ba2 variant and if so have we found any cases yet so that is just a uh slowly emerging in other parts of the world um i have not been involved in direct conversations but every time there's a new variant that occurs uh we have a group called the public health laboratory network which is led by the national microbiological biology lab in winnipeg and nova scotia you know has our our lab leads dr hatchet and others at that table so they would be having discussions about what we need to put into place to be uh looking for this uh latest uh variant it really is uh it is a it's a it's a it is a type of it's just a sub-variant of the omicron strain um so we'd have to look at how we detect that from a lab perspective and i'll take the opportunity of your question to say that we really don't know if there's anything significant of this other than it's a you know a cousin of uh of the current omicron and we don't know really whether it has any different characteristics and therefore any different challenges than the current over-crowd strain that will be uh identified uh in in

over the days and weeks ahead go ahead with your follow-up keith yeah uh one for the premier given your comments on uh your your thoughts about protests and blockades especially at the border i'm wondering what your expectations are about how any potential blockades may go um have you actually talked to police about how to handle it and were you satisfied with the way it was handled uh the blockade that we had uh i think it was last last spring um obviously i don't give you know direction to the police on how to uphold the laws but i think there's you know there's lots of discussions back and forth about what may happen what could happen and i have complete confidence in law enforcement that they'll handle it appropriately my personal my personal beliefs are well known there's no you can't block the highway you just can't do it so but i have great confidence in the law enforcement in this province next we'll go to edgerambla with radio canada go ahead edurin thank you dr strang you mentioned details about targeting programming for vaccination and do you know it like communities can reach out to public health to request more drop in vaccination for example no the process is and we they said we've been doing this uh led by nova scotia public health since last spring uh where we look at we can look at our vaccine coverage rates by uh very small geographic areas you know community health network areas uh and then we identify where you know there are areas uh that are that are uh need may need some extra supports because they're lagging behind uh in terms of vaccine uptake um and then what we do is we then reach out to community leaders uh within those communities and it can be a geographic community or a subset of the overall population from a community perspective and then we will work closely with those community leaders too because you have to it's not oh we know that we have made vaccines very accessible so there's a lot of it's more complicated than just increasing access to vaccination so and one community has different factors than another community so we need to work with communities to understand well what are the reasons why people may not be uh willing to come forward to get vaccinated and what are the solutions that are going to be effective so that's why it takes time but it worked we did we did this for a number of months uh and we were leading at the end of the day when we got into last fall we were leading right up there at the top of the country in terms of our overall vaccine coverage rates so we know that this kind of approach works it has a work through the fall even for uh as early as late as a december where we're using this to even start to get into booster coverage and five to 11 year olds this more targeted approach does work uh but it requires public health identifying the communities with our data and then building up you know working with community leaders to create effective solutions do you have a follow-up adrian yes i wanted to know where we are at in the omicron wave in nova scotia and why wait a few more weeks to leave and lift some restrictions so as i said in my remarks we are looking now if you look at the epidemiologic curve based on our lab data we are past the peak um but we know that there's a two to three week lag and we're right now we expect we're right in the middle of the peak for hospitalizations our health system is under a health system both hospitals and long-term care facilities are under extreme stress and pressure we need to give them a couple more weeks of of the of the the impact of the restrictions and helping continue to slow down the spread uh they need more time before we can safely uh start to lift uh restrictions moving along we'll go to paul bacon with all nova scotia.com go ahead paul thank you uh premier for several weeks your government has been talking about possibly giving more support to businesses with news that restrictions are being extended uh are they going to get some more help well we'll talk to the uh talk to the minister i know the minister is having ongoing discussions with with different industries but um you know we we our general philosophy was we we continued on a lot of the restrict a lot of the support that was in place uh from prior waves added to added to it in some cases but the support that's been available is is no less than what was in the past and it's generally more in some situations but we'll continue to monitor it and see what we can do but i mean as dr as dr strang has said you know we're the delight is is there at the end of the tunnel so i want to thank all those small business owners and and everyone else across this province who's been through a lot for sure but um but we're getting there we'll do what we can to support and and will continue to monitor what's necessary what's possible go ahead with your follow-up paul premier when you were in opposition you criticized the liberals for not showing urgency on this matter what would you say to businesses who feel like they need help urgently now i would say that to look at look at those programs uh there's an extensive array of programs there i wouldn't i wouldn't want to leave anyone with the impression that there's nothing being done there's lots being done there's always a call for more there's lots of lots of things go across my desk every single day that are looking looking for more but you know it's the government can't do everything even even when we want to but but i would say to those uh to those nova scotians there are there are lots of programs in place there are there are programs that were in place from before that were reactivated very quickly some cases added to uh but uh look we're everyone is is feeling this wave everyone has felt every wave and you know as government we'll always look and see if we can do more but i never want to discount the fact that government is doing a lot already next we'll go to the examiners tim busquet go ahead time hi good afternoon uh dr shang uh we're a week and a half into the school being in person um and you've always said and i think the numbers bear out that the children themselves aren't at great risk although we're hearing of lots of cases among children but are you concerned that there may be a sort of echo in terms of

hospitalizations as these children go home and interact with their uh with their more at risk housemates elderly parents grandparents that sort of thing

there certainly is that that is a potential i don't believe it's a huge risk and that's why uh we've said all along and it's not just schools right now that uh if kids are out and about or anybody's out and about uh whether it's at school work or other you know shopping whatever you're out about the public you're at a risk of being exposed and so that's why it's important that everybody follow the public health measures and if there are people in your life who are at increased risk because of age or underlying chronic conditions then it's not just because you've been at school that they're the people who are around them need to be very careful uh starting with making sure that they themselves are vaccinated to build that extra layer of protection around the individual following careful requirements around masking all those kind of things so uh each of us should have a risk an awareness of who in our lives that we're in contact with maybe at increased risk and then therefore be especially careful around following the public health measures around those individuals it's not just specific to school tim do you have a follow-up i do lots and lots of people have asked me about the 12 to 17 age group by my math uh at least the very earliest of them would have been otherwise eligible for booster shots last week is there a plan to uh to open up booster appointments to that age group soon

right now that the there there's been no first of all the vaccines are not licensed for this age group for boosters and there's been no recommendations about giving them boosters other than for uh people who are um uh immune compromised uh so right now the vaccines are licensed for people 18 plus for boosters and we're doing that if that changes for the for the younger age groups we will follow uh both health canada uh regulatory approval and then nasty recommendations moving along we'll go to lindsay armstrong with the coast thank you so much a question for dr strang and the premier we saw about 25 deaths in the last two weeks are you still confident in the current level of public health protection in place

yes i am if you look at that's unfortunate 30 deaths are i don't mean to diminish them at all those are 30 people in 30 families but if you look at the many thousands and thousands of people have been infected uh the the risk of uh of somebody dying the case fatality rate is the technical arm is extremely low um however there so we have a good set of measures in place starting with vaccination which has kept that case fatality rate extremely low um but again what i take from from the ongoing uh the deaths that we're still continuing to see that's why i use the words we have to remain cautious for the next few weeks there's optimism but there's also we have to continue to hold our restrictions continue everybody following the public health measures continuing to make progress and vaccination uh for the next few weeks ahead to minimize the risk of any uh future deaths go ahead with your follow-up lindsay thank you very much um and dr stein there's an estimated 4250 active coveted cases i'm wondering if this tally includes reported positive results from rapid tests or if this is just from pcr results and if it is just pcr how much more would this sort of number be if it covered them so that that is just based on pcr results we have uh uh just started that support to report program for people to uh uh you know report in their their their rapid test results um uh i don't think we have uh you know that's one of the things i talked about earlier we're looking at the epidemiologist and it's fairly sophisticated epidemiology knowing that uh the reporting of uh of of the rapid results is incomplete invest and there may be a lot of duplicates the same person reporting and we don't know what the total population that they're reporting from you know what we call the denominator so there's a number of factors that you have to have some sophisticated epidemiology along with vaccination rates hospitalization rates and our lab results to make some estimate of the total number of nova scotians who may have been infected during the overcrown wave next we'll go to amherst news and darryl cole uh yes my questions for the trainer you sort of already answered this but i know last june when we had the the first major blockade of the border caused a lot of disruption and angst amongst people in the amherst area um if a blockade happens this weekend i guess what message would you have those people in amherst who were concerned about what may or may not happen on the highway this weekend yeah the the the ramifications of the blockade were certainly felt in the amherst region but they're felt far and wide wide with you know medical supply delivery being impeded the movement of healthcare professionals movement of product uh they're felt far and wide so um the the the message the message is is that um you know we don't we we don't tolerate the blockades of our highway and we have great faith in the law enforcement too to make sure the traffic continues to flow go ahead with your follow-up uh darrell no i don't have a call thank you all right we'll have time for one more i will go to the laker with pat healy go ahead pat all right question for dr strang now that so many more nova scotians have had covet what should they do when they are close contact of someone newly infected is there a period of immunity

yeah and so we're saying people yeah if you've been infected the all the science data would say that you're uh you're you're you have immunity uh due to that infection probably for about three weeks or 90 days uh it and it doesn't last longer than that so there's two things that people who have within that nine day period uh if they have been exposed and they they they they can consider themselves that they don't they they're not close contacts because they're they're not really at risk of being infected in that 90 day period but it's also important that they take the opportunity of getting back back completing their or starting or completing their their vaccine series because it's the vaccines that will give them that longer lasting immunity well beyond the 90 days do you have a follow-up pat yes i do dr strang or premier houston will the booster shot become part of the proof of vaccination for people to get served at say restaurants or businesses that require the proof of vaccination for service

so um i can answer that and start to answer anyway we're we're not looking at that enough right now we're uh we're focused on uh you know looking at our how we start to incrementally lift our restrictions and that would include looking at when we might be able to move away from a proof of vaccine uh policy as we enter into a phase of living with coven and and part of that would be not requiring proof of vaccination so it doesn't make a lot of sense to add to that for a very short period of time when we're hopeful to be able to start to move away from that in the near future and that's all the time we have questions today premiere thank you heather thank you dr strang um thank you to nova scotians young and old for for doing your part thank you for getting vaccinated thank you for getting your your children vaccinated you are you are doing your part to protect our most vulnerable and help us get back to a place where we can see our friends and family and and return to normal so thank you for everything you're doing and just just as a note if if um if things continue at this pace we will be back for a briefing in in two weeks so at this at this pace we won't have a briefing uh scheduled for next week but we do one in two weeks and we'll see you then

you

your loss we truly are but we also know that more Canadians will continue to be lost uh to covet going forward and that's also heartbreaking but we have to acknowledge the the necessity of continuing to move forward our current set of restrictions are in place until February 14th but we're at a stage where Nova Scotia is ready to make gradual changes and we can make those changes with confidence our public health team has been incredible and is incredible they haven't changed Dr Strang hasn't changed he's the same compassionate thoughtful brilliant leader that has led us this far and he has earned our trust as has his team we can have confidence in his guidance um i know i certainly do so today we will be announcing easing of some restrictions effective February 14th and we'll also be sharing a plan to continue the easing that easing gradually in phases going forward from there the reality is is that the more we continue to let COVID control our daily lives the longer we will see the negative impacts especially on our children and on our seniors so Dr Strang will provide more details but in in high level i guess effective February 14th sports arts and culture events can resume gathering limits will increase from for informal events from 10 to 25. restaurants and gyms will increase capacity to 75 percent retail can increase capacity to back to 100 percent uh cosmetologists can resume their full services so all of those things will be effective February 14th and there will be lots more to say uh about about the moving forward over the coming of weeks coming weeks we'll have a lot to say about that um but i but i i do want to be very clear about why this is happening why we are able to ease restrictions and and this is it's happening because of our our high vaccination rates um and the fact that we're leading the country in booster doses these are not things to be ignored it's also happening because we we know the need to balance between restrictions and the risk of COVID in in terms of our overall public health so every step of the way for two years we have followed the science and today and every day we will continue to be guided by Dr Strang and the team at public health so as we move forward and Nova Scotians continue to do their part we also recognize that government has work to do as well everything we've done has been to support our health care system and make sure that it is there for each of us should we need it for any reason and that remains the priority today so we don't have to think too hard to remember the videos of people around the world banging pots and pans on their balconies and on their front doorsteps to show their appreciation and gratitude to our frontline heroes as they rotate it through their shift changes we all remember that uh that that admiration for our healthcare professionals and and frontline professionals cannot change um in those moments we were we were together and we know that to move forward we we have to stay together and work together to take pressure off the system and that means government has to take some immediate steps to increase healthcare capacity so i'll say last week all all 13 premiers came together to discuss the state of health care in Canada everyone is experiencing challenges with their health care systems it's consistent across the country it is it is clear that Canada's health care system is significantly underfunded Canada's health care system has struggled to meet the to meet the needs and treat covert patients and non-coveted patients at the same time it's been a struggle meeting with the other other premiers i was struck by the comments of of one uh premier who's who shared a story where a constituent told him just said quite simply for two years i i've done everything that's been asked i'm i'm boosted i'm vaccinated i've got my kids home i've done everything but she asked him what has the government done to improve capacity in the health care system and i've reflected a lot on that question as have the other premiers i know from talking to them but

we it's clear that we have more to do as a government so in Nova Scotia one necessary step to increasing capacity is with is working with the long-term care sector to open more beds as quickly as possible the biggest issue that we have in opening more beds in long-term care is that there's not enough workers so there are people in hospitals that could be you know better cared for in long-term care there's space in long-term care but they don't have the staff to open those beds so this is this is something that we can do um and and the fact that they don't have enough staff is happening at the same time that there are hundreds of continuing care assistants in this province who are trained and amazing at what they do but they aren't working in their chosen field and and i don't blame them to every Nova Scotian who might not fully understand the important work of a cca listen to uh Bruce Gatherer's song what makes a hero watch the video it's it's one of the most uh useful videos on on YouTube it's powerful and in that song uh Bruce says that a hero is is someone who does what needs to be done and needs no other reason they just do it so to our ccas um we we know um the important work you do and we know that we have work to to show that to you so this this week our government is taking an important step to reiterate the incredibly important role you play in our health care system uh you've been underpaid by almost every metric possible to look at it uh i heard loud and clear last night on a call with hundreds of ccas um some of the issues that they're facing and and the the compensation was a big part of that so i want them to know that today we're taking steps to fix that issue i'm happy to announce uh uh that we will we will be increasing the pay for every cca in this province um and we will make Nova Scotia a pay leader um with with the raises that we're putting forward so it'll work out to approximately 20 to 25 percent increase uh for ccas and we'll work through those details with you but it is

effective tomorrow so my message to those of you who have who have felt undervalued to the point that you left the profession please come back and we need you now more than ever we want you we need you we value you and we respect you um and um if we can get uh people to return to the industry it will have a incredibly positive impact and help us with our capacity issues so i know it's not a silver bullet to everything facing healthcare of course but it's one tool and and we're going to do it so so that'll be effective immediately before i close and pass it to dr strang i do want to i do want to speak about education the top line is from everything that i hear students are happy to be back in school and that's that's very good yes we are still seeing somewhere in the range of of 20 percent students absent but as one teacher said to me look at the positive that means 80 of our kids are attending school and that's what's important so like healthcare our schools are functioning but the systems are stressed there's no question about that so i just ask people parents and and family members and caregivers to please bear with the teachers and educators and the staff as they as they strive to find the balance between student well-being and student achievement just as we have had to adjust our expectations for health care like canceling non-emergency surgeries we we need to do that as well for our other systems as we work through this as we work through this wave so please be patient understanding that we are living through the pandemic that there are pressures on the systems um and they're bound to have an impact but the one thing we can never lose sight of is the need to focus on on student well-being so i thank those those teachers and educators and people working in the schools for doing just that um but uh dr strang good to see you again good to see you in person uh a step back a step of uh up or a show of optimism for for folks so uh thank you premier and i also want to offer my condolences to the families who have lost loved ones to covid 19 since our last briefing this pandemic has taken so much but none have suffered more than the families who will never see or hug their loved one again trying to protect people is what we've been doing for two years it's why we've had restrictions and rules things that have been frustrating but absolutely necessary today i'm optimistic that things are improving and i'm confident we are ready to start loosening restrictions we have passed the peak in our omicron wave and are seeing declining lab positives and and long cases in our long-term care facilities and other settings where we've had outbreaks the outbreaks are all uh substantively on decline even the number of new admissions to hospital looks like they've reached their peak but we have to acknowledge that our health care system continues to be under tremendous pressure with bad occupancy over 105 percent so we need to do what we can to help ease that pressure omicron while mild for many especially for children is more transmissible and continues to have significant impacts on our most vulnerable that's why we're announcing a phased plan to ease restrictions starting on february 14th we will continue to carefully balance limiting the impact of omicron on our most vulnerable in our health care system while starting to get back to normal restrictions do come with their own set of serious impacts economic emotional and physical it's been especially hard on children youth and the elderly and there have been many mental health consequences but here are the things we are looking for as we ease restrictions and this will help guide us through our phases looking to see continuing declining lab positive cases continue declining hospitalizations and new admissions for covid continued decline in cases in long-term care and other vulnerable settings improvements in our health system capacity and workforce pressures and continuing to build on our already good uh increased already good population immunity from both vaccine coverage and recent infections these are all important factors that we will consider how and when to further ease restrictions but based on experienced science and the proven impact of vaccines especially against severe disease i'm confident that we can safely start to ease restrictions contrary to what you may be reading and watching about the protests in ottawa and even here in our own backyard vaccination is safe and critically important to our ability to ease restrictions nova scotia is one of the leaders in the country in our vaccine uptake including for children and for those for with a percentage who have booster doses and while vaccine itself may not protect all infections there is no doubt that it offers substantive protection from serious illness hospitalization and death the situation in our province would have been much much worse if it were if it were not for our high level of vaccine coverage and the credit to that goes to every nova scotian who's stepped forward and rolled up their sleeve and to get their first second third or sometimes even our fourth dose of vaccine so while part of me would love to say we're done with covid and throw the doors of our province wide open it's my job to weigh the risks and benefits and recommend an approach that continues to protect the most vulnerable and our health care system in the least restrictive way pot possible i also know that easing restrictions will cause some anxiety that's understandable certainly covid and this latest omicron wave has not been easy we have lost 55 nova scotians since december 8th which is the start of the omicron wave and the physical and mental health of countless others has been impacted but it's time to change our perspective and our approach we're no longer trying to contain the virus it's here and likely will be for a long time our aim is to prevent serious illness it's time to accept that we will see ongoing spread as we ease restrictions but we will also rely on our high levels of immunity to protect us as much as possible from severe illness so it's time to start the shift towards living with covid i won't get into all the details of our plan to ease restrictions those will be on our coronavirus website but i will say that will happen gradually over three phases and we anticipate that each phase will

last about a month this will give us time to monitor how things are going and make adjustments if necessary at a high level in phase one which starts 1201 am february 14th we'll allow events again increase gathering limits and business capacity limits and remove border restrictions and in phase two gathering and capacity limits will increase again and in phase three there will be no more gathering or capacity limits and we will also lift physical distancing requirements and for now masks are still required in indoor public places and proof of vaccination is still necessary for discretionary activities and we will let our evolving epidemiology guide us when we can safely change these two components

today though i can give some certainty i'll give you more details about phase one as i said it starts 1201 am february 14th so in this first phase the informal gathering limit will increase to 25 people from 10 and they can be from the same household or consistent social group typically this is for gatherings at people's homes we will also increase the formal gathering limit to 50 of the capacity of a venue and allow a range of events again things like funerals wedding receptions festivals fundraisers and fundraisers and other special events performances and sports games will be allowed including when they take place as part of school extracurricular activities and the limit for participants uh like players or performers will increase to 60 and that's for both sports and arts and culture uh performances on games spectators will be allowed again following the formal gathering limits and that formal gathering limit will also apply to regular faith services performers like choirs will follow the limit for arts and culture participants and we recommend that choirs keep their masks on for singing in phase one congregations can sing again but the mask requirement will remain in place for them during phase one retail stores and malls can operate at maximum capacity possible with physical distancing fitness recreation leisure facilities businesses and organizations can operate at 75 capacity so this includes everything from gyms and arenas to libraries and museums to dance lessons and dog training bars and restaurants can operate at 75 percent capacity they will still need to have the distance of two meters between tables and there will be a limit of 25 people maximum at a single table and they'll be able to stay open one hour later providing table service now until midnight and closing at one am

they can continue to operate take out delivery and drive through for later hours however and any performers that follow the limits for arts and culture participants that are those are performers within uh within a licensed facility in our public schools enhanced public health measures such as classroom cohorts and masking will continue but singing and the use of wind and brass instruments can resume schools will now be allowed to resume all curricular activities following community guidance for sports arts and culture and in long-term care the key change is that residents can have now any two visitors at a time we were still we were restricting it to uh only two and they had to be consistent visitors but as of monday they will no longer need to be the same to two visitors but a maximum of two at a time and the visitors must still wear masks and be fully vaccinated except for end of life and other compassionate visits i know that this is a lot to digest and everyone's tired of trying to learn a new set of rules but this is a major step in the right direction a step towards some more normalcy in our lives i want to move on and just give a few key vaccine updates as of today adolescents 12 to 17 years old can get a booster dose of pfizer vaccine and it has to be at least 168 days after their second dose in their primary series however parents guardians and the adolescents themselves should be aware that there is limited data on a booster dose in this age group and there is still the rare risk of myocarditis and pericarditis following vaccination so the national advisory committee on immunization only recommends a booster dose in this age group 12 to for those who may be at a higher risk of severe illness including those who have an underlying medical condition that puts them in increased risk are residents of congregate living settings or belong to racialized or marginalized community dysport disproportionately affected by covet 19. nasty has not recommended abushidos for all adolescents given the risk of severe illnesses is generally quite low especially for those who have already had their first two doses of vaccine but if your child does not fall into one of the above groups i listed and you still want to have them give them a boost or dose you can do so but please review the information that will be available on our online booking site and make an informed choice

we're also implementing two other nasty guidelines that were recently issued the first is a recommendation that children 5 to 11 who are moderately to severely immune compromised at the time of their first or second dose in their primary series now receive a third dose of vaccine to complete their primary series children meeting these criteria are now eligible for this additional primary series dose to ensure they have maximum protection and again all the details of who is actually eligible will be on our online vaccine booking site and the second recent announcement we're adopting is that advice on timing for when to receive a covet 19 vaccine if you have been previously infected with covet if you test positive for coven 19 and have not been fully vaccinated now she advises you wait for two months to get your first or second dose if you've tested positive for covet 19 and have already been fully vaccinated nasty advises that you wait for

three months to get your booster dose and that is provided it's at least 168 days since your second dose and you are actually eligible for a booster

and for people who have already received the dose of vaccine immediately after recovering from covid and vaccine you don't need to worry you do not need to repeat the booster dose so as usual i've shared a lot of information in detail but the bottom line is this get vaccinated follow public health restrictions and follow the personal measures like masking these steps will continue to protect you and the people around you from severe disease nova scotians have shown extraordinary resilience in the face of this virus and we're asking for just a little bit more to put this wave behind us and move into the new era of living with covid and i want to take a moment and be very clear the reopening we have just outlined is in no way a response to recent protests quite the contrary it is based on following evolving science this entire pandemic it's built on our experience and the knowledge of the protection provided by vaccines this is why we're in a position to start to ease restrictions and i want to say a tremendous thank you to the vast majority of nova scotians who continue to protect each other take care of each other and show kindness and compassion for each other true shared freedom comes from love caring and compassion not from self-centered views division and anger tina thank you dr strang just a reminder to the reporters that we have on the phone we'll take one question and one follow-up in the allotted time that we have for today's briefing if you're not on mute and i'm hearing that some of you are not please ensure that you are on mute we'll start with taryn grant from cbc go ahead taryn thank you tina my question is for dr strang i'm hoping you can talk a little bit more about the projected pace of this reopening plan um going at one month at a time for each phase how did you arrive at the decision to go one month and could it actually go faster than that if the epidemiology warrants it so absolutely we will always look at our epidemiology and uh and if we are able to move faster we can but if you look at previous your previous reopenings we've often maybe gone in two or three week steps but we've had more smaller steps this is quite a large step from where we're where we're currently at and especially and so we really feel like and then the next step is another big step in reopening and then if at the third step it's uh at the place where we really are removing all restrictions so it really is a three-step uh approach um and the third step being our end so given where we're at we feel we can take those larger steps but they we have to watch them carefully and we need some time to make sure that we are not putting undue pressure on an already very fragile and stressed uh health care system um and so that's our approach we will condense i outlined in my remarks the kind of indicators that we are looked at to make the decision and uh today and we'll continue to look at those and if we can go a little far faster we'll look at that but we also uh are very uh cognizant of that this needs to be phased uh over the next couple of months uh and and we were making sure when we're uh continuing to uh support our colleagues in the acute care sector who are dealing with uh tremendous pressures at this time we ask for people's patience we will get there uh you know today today feels like spring as i walked over here and we know spring is not that far away uh but it's like winter ending you can't force it and so we're going to have to have a little bit of patience by the time we get to spring we will be in a far better place so let's let's just work together and be patient for the next couple of months go ahead taryn if you have a follow-up thank you this one's for the premiere um i premiere i understand that you had a meeting last night with ccas and i'm wondering if you announced the pay raise to them last night or if they learned about it with the rest of us just now and if they did hear about it last night what kind of reaction did you hear yeah thank you teren we gotta first off i want to say i want to thank the ccas we had a great great crowd last night a few hundred of them on the and and basically it was a listening where they were sharing the challenges of of doing their job and and certainly pay was one of the things that they uh it has a big impact on their on their lives so uh we did not announce it uh last night we wanted to listen to them last night on a whole suite of issues that they were raising um minister adams the minister of seniors of long-term care had a had a had a call i think with cch just just prior to the starting this briefing i think maybe just 2 30 or something and i think minister mcphaster the minister of finance was also going to have a have a chat with some of the unions before the briefing so they did not learn on the call last night certainly the call last night had a big influence on the decision i will say that and and we've started to share that information with them today next we'll go to calum smith from global go ahead callum thank you this question is for dr strang joshua strange i understand hospitalizations have been an important benchmark and i understand you're saying new admissions have been have peaked but we're still at about the 90 90 level and that's been the case since late january i'm wondering how how comfortable you are obviously you said your confident lifting restrictions uh with this phased approach but how can we be doing that when hospitalization numbers in total are still essentially flatlined so that's why you have to break out the numbers you're looking at and you know basic basic fundamental principle in epidemiology is the difference between an incident and those are the new things that are happening versus the prevalence which is the cumulative total so when we look at from the epi epidemiological perspective where are we at in the in the trend of the wave and and the and the the spread of the virus it's looking at new cases what are we seeing today in our communities which is most important uh and where we

are starting to see it very early our case numbers and outbreaks and all those things that i outlined are are well on their way trending downward starting to see the beginning of that downward trend in new admissions and hospitalizations but from the perspective of the capacity of the health care system and making sure that we and and being cognizant of how much pressure they're under it's the prevalence it's the total number of cases that we have to be concerned about and the two come together when we look at how fast can we go in this reopening because we have to remain cautious that our system is already at maximum capacity and so as we reopen uh again i'm comfortable that we are that we can reopen but we have to be careful to watch that we're not adding to that already uh substantive pressure that's on the health care system go ahead callum with your follow-up thank you again for dr strang i guess if phase three is the final stage how can we be considering uh still requiring masks and proof of vaccination if if phase three is the final stage i guess why was there a chance for restrictions at the time what will guide i know you say the epidemiology will guide it but what are you looking at specifically to lift both those restrictions we'll have to look at us but all the indicators that tell us what's the level of virus activity in community and we'll make final decisions uh both on phase two and then final decisions on phase three and especially phase three whether that can include include removing the proof of vaccination as well as removing mandatory masks at that time based on what happens uh we'll watch it on a week by week basis over the next couple of months next we'll go to jonathan jonathan mcginnis from ctv news go ahead jonathan hi good afternoon thank you very much dr strang we've heard you uh talk about these phases and how we will progress to each one or or we could even go faster do you see us going once we're in a phase do you see us going backward at all is there anything that would prompt that or are we in a phase until we can move forward so and there's always the possibility of some new variant or change that never rule that out right but i i really see that unless there's a a a very significant unexpected development globally around around variance and this virus we are we are on a progress that is forward-facing continuing to move in that and it's not so much about going backwards but also are we on the right what is the right timing for the next step in our forward progress go ahead jonathan with your follow-up i'm good thank you great next we'll go to keith doucet from the canadian press go ahead keith uh good afternoon dr strang i realized that uh this approach that you've announced today is probably in keeping with what you've been doing all along uh but i wonder given the situation that's going on in the country if you could just talk a little bit philosophically about the difference of your approach and say the approach of uh your colleague in manitoba you know province is similar size and probably with worse numbers than here yet uh there's a significant gulf i think it's fair to say in what they're doing and what we're now doing here in nova scotia i wonder if you could address that so a couple of things uh you know i was on a national call yesterday we were with my chief medical officer of colleagues and we did a round table and there's actually a lot of consistency we're all going within the next couple of months in in in a very similar kind of sequence reopening some are just going a little faster than others each province throughout the whole pandemic there's been these variations where different contexts different decision making we've never compared ourselves and said well we have to follow another province we've always done what's right here in nova scotia go ahead keate with your follow-up yeah okay and uh one for the premier on the uh on the cca increase it's not insignificant it's rather large when you look at what most public servants have been getting in the last you know 10 years or so um you have other people to to also uh negotiate with i mean are you concerned or not concerned now that you may have to dull out a lot more money across the system than you're doing right now with ccas uh who admittedly have been underpaid for years yeah thank you thank you keith and certainly we're we're we're aware of that that situation but you know the reality is is when you look at where we're at right now with the capacity issues in our hospital in our hospital situ in our hospital system uh we need to take steps to address that and and the the clearest path that we can see that's within our control is to help move people from the hospital system to the long-term care where that's appropriate and and then we realized well there was a there was a problem there because there wasn't enough staff so so ccas are are front and center on this one because they place such a significant role in in helping relieve some pressure from the hospital system but uh to your your point absolutely i mean there's there's a lot of people in line and for ccas i was quite i was quite shocked when i realized that we had some of the cc some of the lowest paid ccas in in in the country it was just it was just way out of line with what was being asked so so we today we have to we just have to start there it's the right thing to do and that's why we're doing it next we'll go to john mcphiee from the chronicle herald go ahead john thank you uh this is also for the premiere and it's it's also on the cca uh so it's in the 20 to 25 uh range i'm just wondering how was that determined and where does that leave us now compared to other provinces you just said we were very low before where are we now it'll bring us it'll bring us to the top or or close to the top um maybe out in front um so in terms of in terms of you know the range of 20 to 25 there's a number of factors in you know different agreements on a number of hours worked per day versus the you know breaks and lunch time and all there's there's just a number of factors but but the message um to ccas and certainly the message that was reiterated quite strongly uh last night in in the call with hundreds of them was that it was it was it was it was time to address that issue and be um it was also very clear and it is very clear that the underpayments has having a

significant impact on our ability to care for care for our seniors and having a significant impact on our hospital capacity issues so it's it's not insignificant uh you know we're we're trying to as a government as a as a as still a new government we we have a lot of issues that we have to kind of catch up on and deal with and you know things that have been kind of uh languishing we're not we're not uh we're not in the languishing team we're in the doing team so we're getting to work on a lot of these files go ahead john with your follow-up thank you this is for dr strang in recent news releases there's been a consistent number of new outbreaks in hospitals and in nursing homes i'm just wondering can you give a general overview of what the situation is there and uh is that's a concerning thing for you well yeah i mean that both those outbreaks are reflection of the level of virus activity in community so for hospitals it's uh uh you know there's a lot of attention being paid to uh you know infection control measures and and people uh you know staff wearing personal protective equipment but uh it's inevitable that there is going to be uh you know with a such an infectious variant that's uh highly prevalent that's going to be spread into hospitals so it's part of what's putting pressure on hospitals and uh but those numbers are starting to uh uh they will start to come down as we start to you know as they start to reflect the decreased virus activity in communities uh the same thing in our long-term care facilities that we uh but we're actually when you look at the overall number of outbreaks and the total number of staff and residents involved that has been trending downwards substantively and i think as their long-term care

sector and the outbreaks there is actually a very positive story around the benefit of vaccines we have most of our long-term care residents are are have had a booster dose so even though we've had a large number of i don't have the exact number in front of me a large number of residents who have been ill we've had just slightly into double digits in terms of number of hospitalizations and even a lower number of deaths so certainly even though there's been a lot of uh illness amongst residents from coven 19 there's been a very small percentage of them who have gotten so serious ill enough that needed to be hospitalized and and i don't mean to diminish the the deaths we've had but that number of people that have died has been relatively small from a percentage perspective the reason that the key reason to that is quite clearly the the impact of having of the decision uh to provide booster doses of vaccine to our long-term care residents as soon as we were able to uh and based on the nasty recommendation that has saved a lot of lives next we'll go to paul bacon from all nova scotia go ahead paul my first question is for premier houston um a few days ago your economic development minister met with business organizations who were looking for a beefed-up sector import support program with restrictions easing on monday is that something your government is likely to pursue pursue in terms of re-evaluating this support programs is that the question that's good that's the question yeah i mean look those discussions have been ongoing and and when we listen we listen carefully we come up with the best uh suite of um supports that um that we we thought was necessary based on the all the information we had uh there will certainly be uh many people who who would say more support is necessary and there'll be many others who say it's just fine but we build on the we built on the system that was been in place through multiple waves of the pandemic and and i think now as as we start to ease restrictions and start to have a gradual um methodical move forward i'm hopeful that uh business owners will share in that optimism that we have uh that we're moving forward and and that's that's the best that's the best possible outcome for everyone i think go ahead paul with your follow-up and dr strang among the last restrictions i guess that will be listed would be basking and the vaccine the proof of vaccination can you explain why why those will be towards the end well while there's still lots of virus circulating we know that masking is critically important to help minimize the spread when you bring more people together masking has a significant impact on reducing the amount of virus and the ability for the virus to be transmitted the proof of vaccination we know we we uh that that still has some impact around the spread uh even though the the against omicron uh a vaccine is only modestly effective against preventing infection it's still uh you know we're in the range of 35 to 40 vaccine effectiveness that's still a lot better than having zero zero protection and zero effectiveness if you're unimmunized so it does contribute to min you know to decreasing spread but even more importantly we know that vaccination people who are vaccinated even with two doses are still well protected against severe disease and are very well protected if they have a booster dose so as we bring more people together uh there is increased risk of transmission for sure but as we bring them together if we maintain the proof of vaccination at least for the first couple of phases what we're doing is substantively helping protect the health care system by by as we bring people together requiring proof of vaccination minimizes the chance of anybody from that gathering getting affected and getting severe illness and ending up in hospital so keeping proof of vaccination now becomes a very important tool as we open things up to keep people out of hospital from a coveted infection next we'll go to pat healy from the laker go ahead pat hi uh dr strength if you have a child say five to twelve years old that tested positive for covet before their scheduled first facting dose how long should they wait before rescheduling some of the question can you repeat that again it was a bit faint pat okay if you have a child five to twelve years old that tested positive for covit before their scheduled first vaccine dose how long should they wait before rescheduling where's that

so so the advice from nasty is that people who are haven't begun are still in the midst of their primary series they should wait uh two months uh from the from the time of their when they were diagnosed with covid to then continue their va or start or continue their primary vaccine series go ahead pat if you have a follow-up yes i do dr strang with the news today of the reopening plan can planning begin by schools for a return to normal graduation and proms with full capacity at larger venues for this june i see absolutely no reason why schools can't con again to can start to make those plans i'll be very happy to see the those types of graduations in june next we'll go to lois andor from the guys pro journal go go ahead lois yes hello thank you can you hear me

lois go ahead

all right we'll see if lois connects again we'll go to tim busquet from the halifax examiner go ahead tim if you're there hi dr steering um i i wonder if you can help us uh the public uh kind of think through the death issue a bit uh um recognizing that we're we're doing this balancing act between the costs of of restrictions and and and the risk of death and covid uh still it does strike some as as as complex i'll say that you're announcing easing of restrictions on the same day that five people died uh 25 people have died since the last uh briefing are we to expect another 25 to die in the next two weeks and and on the path to endemic there will be some level of ongoing death i suppose and what does that look like in the long term i mean i'm not going to speculate on what that looks like in the long term part of living moving to living with covid is accepting that the fact we now have another respiratory virus that for some people will because of age and underlying health conditions uh may put them at risk of severe disease ending up in hospitalization or may contribute to their death that is no different than what we have with whether it's influenza or a whole range of other infections uh we we have to return to a for longer term sustainability the ability for for for coving most people are not where they're vaccinated are at low risk of severe disease there are some people that are a much greater risk so for me what this calls on we we have to lift the restrictions but and we'll be talking about more about this in the coming days over the next week or so as around for those who remain at increased risk what do they need to do to keep them building layers of protection but as much about what is for the rest of us what are our obligations about starting with us getting vaccinated us taking more precautions when say we want to visit an elderly relative or a friend or somebody that may be in our classroom that has an underlying health condition what things are we prepared to do uh to make sure that they have some layers of protection uh around them uh but i think it's a fundamental point that you that that we need to make that it can't be all about just ourselves we have to be aware that there are others around us in our communities that are at increased risk whether it's coveted whether it's flu whether it's a whole range of other things and that i would like to think that we what we've learned from covet is that we need to be more aware of how all of us can contribute to protecting those who are most vulnerable and that to me is the fundamental piece that we need to understand around vaccination vaccination is what you do to protect others around you and i want those who aren't vaccinated to hear that go ahead tim with your follow-up yeah i guess along the same sort of lines but not as as drastic i guess on the on the march towards endemic um there's been kind of a limiting of those who uh have access to pcr testing and i'm wondering given given the lower numbers now of of positive cases and and uh testing could pcr testing uh be opened up to a broader part of the population or is that just something that's going to decrease over time as well so we're actively looking at today is about restrictions we're actively looking at the other components of our of our response whether it's testing our case and contact management uh and surveillance which goes along hand in hand with testing so we're we're looking at that and we'll be you know talking more about how we evolve those into this living with covet uh along with uh along with lifting restrictions and you know so we'll have more to say in the days in the next couple of weeks around how we evolve our testing strategy specifically we'll try to go to lois andor again to see if she's there lois are you there yes i am can you hear me yep go ahead lois uh yes hello thank you um one question i have is is data published by the canadian institute for health information for long-term care facility ownership in nova scotia for 2021 it appears that almost half are private for-profit centers will the announcement on wages for ccas affect those homes yeah so so thank you lois and for the question and um essentially if if a cca is working in a in a home that's funded by the government that this raise will flow through to them and and that's the vast vast majority of ccas in the province go ahead lois ann if you have a follow-up yes i do thank you um there was announcement the other day of about um delayed uh diagnosis and treatment of cancer within the province due to covid is the province keeping track of what is going to end up being collateral damage due to covid both for cancer patients and other people with other serious illness so my understanding is that our cancer care program and other kind of programs of care are are certainly aware and are looking at some of those uh those impacts and uh and quantifying them and and coming up with plans about how to address them as soon as they're able to as uh that that's why it's important that we focus and not put more pressure on our health care system over the next couple of months so we can start to reopen those other programs of care as soon as we are able to and

that's all the time we have for questions today go ahead premier uh thank you thank you tina thank you thank you everyone for the for the questions uh i know the the reopening plan for some people will be too slow and for others it'll be too fast and they'll be they'll be a little bit nervous about that but what i want nova scotians to know is obviously this is this is a balance and it's it's one that dr strang and i uh constantly consider we consider it and talk about it each and every each and every day um public health not only has to consider the impact of the virus on our on our physical health but it also has an obligation to consider the mental well-being of our province and the the impact of lockdowns and restrictions on on nova scotians public health and and dr strang are looking at the whole picture and they're giving advice they feel is beneficial to the majority of the public and those are the restrictions we and and reductions of restrictions that we want to we want to move towards so for anyone asking if this is the right thing to do i just remind you trust the team at public health who have taken us through this far who have who have led us through the pandemic and and with valentine's day coming up on monday just a reminder to nova scotians to to think local when making purchases um our small businesses have have certainly been hit hard by kovitz and i'm also sure that more than a few spas would be happy to sell some gift certificates right now i encourage everyone to to show their local businesses some love as as we move forward and certainly as we move forward into the into valentine's day but thank you for your patience and thank you for your cooperation with the public health measures thank you everyone

what makes a hero by someone's side is a comfort in the world you'll be all right what makes a hero to those afraid is the one who faces danger every day what makes you heal in this story is you who sacrifice but won't know glory what makes the hero do what they do is everything i see in you

what makes a hero for those who pray are the hands that offer hope for one more day what makes a hero in a fight for life are the hands that offer hope for one more night what makes

do what they do is everything i see in you you're my saving grace when i fall apart the only light that shines when the world gets dark you make me feel safe you make mountains move you're the reason why we're gonna make it through it takes a special time with every sleepless night with every tear you cry i hope you know that i i hold you in my heart have you won my mind you're the backbone in the front line at the same time

what makes me

you

live having in person

good afternoon thank you for joining us for today's covet briefing joining us today the honorable tim houston premier of the province of nova scotia and dr robert strang chief medical officer of health for the province of nova scotia go ahead premier thank you tina good afternoon everyone um we'll start off i guess today we'll be announcing that assuming everything stays on course effective march 21st all remaining covet restrictions in nova scotia will be gone effective march 21st so this is significant and i know as much as this is the news so many have been waiting for there are many many others who will be extremely nervous by that news but no matter the emotions you are experiencing right now we can all agree this has been a long long run over the last two years we've been through an unimaginable journey as a province as nova scotians we've seen tragedies that are unparalleled we've experienced all the ups and downs of of covet itself we've mourned together for those who have lost loved ones we celebrated together when the virus eased and restrictions allowed we delayed weddings funerals birthdays and and delayed hugs we haven't seen our grandchildren but we did come out in incredible numbers uh to support our families uh friends neighbors and and really our entire province by getting vaccinated our healthcare professionals stepped up when we needed them most time and time again they answered the call they worked countless hours days and months really in impossible conditions and many many put themselves at risk all in the name of our public safety and in the name of duty and then there's one person who made nova scotia a real leader in pandemic response he's become a national a national leader in so many ways many many chief medical officers across the country look to look to our own uh for for guidance so i will say that the appreciation that i and that's uh nova scotians have for your service dr strang can't be it can't be properly uh articulated so we we thank you dr strang you are one of a kind um um and having had the opportunity to sit beside um you and work with your team uh over the past six months it's been it's been an incredible honor um the more i get to know dr strange the more respect i have for you and your family so i want to really thank you for that um and i do want to thank you for taking it easy on your third your third premiere on this uh on this journal the last couple of months easy but uh but uh no normally you know at this point uh i would be talking about case counts and hospitalizations in my in my remarks but today today is different and that's because you know we we know that covet zero is it's not a reality uh certainly not right now someday hopefully maybe it will be but it's not right now living with covet that's the reality that that has to become our new reality and i know uh and i respect that that is a scary thought for for some nova scotians uh many people have felt uh protected by the restrictions and they've seen the restrictions as the sense of security that they are and that they were meant to be i understand that and uh certainly as i say this i'm thinking my own mom who has been very nervous to leave the house for two years uh for others i know on the other side there's it feels like we've uh we've had restraints on them that have stopped them from being able to really live their lives they've missed their children's uh sports and dance recitals and and uh i i to them to you i know you want your your your life back to normal so today uh you should see this as is the announcing of a return to normalcy and in many ways this this road to normalcy it's going to be a long road we live in increasingly divided communities and sadly some relationships have been broken beyond repair some personal relationships have been broken beyond repair over the last the last two years but certainly the last few months others in time can be mended and and that's my hope but it's up to it's up to each of us to play a part in in healing our communities we can have different opinions on the on the path to return to normal how fast household we can have different opinions on that but we need to get back to a place a respectful place where we find ways to respectfully disagree where we find ways places that we can constantly remember that at our very core as as nova scotians as blue nose blue nosers we care about each other um that's the place where we're where hope we can get to a place where we stop viciously attacking those with different opinions and we remember that we're all on the same team because we are all on the same team and our leadership team works very closely and follows the advice of public health and as i've said that advice is that assuming everything stays on course effective march 21st all remaining coveted restrictions will be gone between now and then restrictions will methodically fall away there comes a point in time where the benefit of the restrictions is outweighed by the impact of those restrictions uh particularly on our children uh on our seniors and on on our collective mental well-being uh we've reached that point we've always said we would follow the science and and the science is saying we're ready there will be some that say it's not fast enough others will say it's too fast but the reality is that the pace we are moving and the pace we will move over the next month is right for our situation in our province so while we as we await for for march 30 march 21st we will we'll still work through short phases that gradually layer on additional risk some things will happen quicker like the removing of remaining restrictions around participating in sports and arts and cultural activities so tournaments and performances will be back soon uh kids can get back to uh full-on playing and and performing uh just like before all of this stuff will be part of a more comprehensive phase two which will begin march 7th but even before that uh even before march 7th we will see

the removal of the proof of vaccine the proof of vaccine will be eliminated on monday march 28th the proof of vaccine has served its purpose it has it has served nova scotians well but it was only ever meant as a temporary measure and its time has come we collectively know more about covid individually we know more about covid there is less uncertainty now vaccination rates are high access to vaccines is not an issue we can wear our mask if we choose we can keep our distance if we choose we've had time to understand the social impacts and now people have the tools that they can use to protect themselves and we are at a point where where we have to have confidence in nova scotian's ability to use the tools available to them without the government telling them that they have to it's time so dr strang will give you more details on what the uh robot of the phases actually looks like dr frank uh thank you premier and thank you for your kind words and i i just have to say that i have the privilege every time i'm up here with uh with you or previous premiers it's been my privilege to represent uh very dedicated and highly skilled colleagues on my team in public health and many professionals across the health care system that that's that those are the ones who really deserve the thanks but thank you and good afternoon to everybody before i start i want to acknowledge that the crew of hmcs halifax who are about to embark on a nato trip related to a situation in the in the ukraine you know thanks to that crew for standing on guard for all of us and and be safe as the premier said the situation in nova scotia is slowly improving a week and a half into our reopening and key indicators continue to trend in the right direction vaccine coverage is still going up as children in the 5 to 12 age group get their second doses and more people receive their booster doses our lab confirmed numbers continue to go downwards outbreaks in group settings like long-term care and more vulnerable communities are coming to an end and more there are more now more people being discharged from hospital then are being admitted with covid 19 which means fewer people in hospital overall due to covid where we are today is the direct result of the work we've done together over the past two years the sacrifices you've all made as individuals the public health measures we've deployed when we needed them and the covid 19 vaccines that continue to play an incredible sorry an incredibly important role during this transition phase however we have to remember our acute care system is still under tremendous strain and recovery will be slow but it will happen so i want to share a few more details with you about our plan to loosen restrictions and the changes being announced today as the premier said we are removing the need for proof of vaccine for discretionary activities so going to restaurants fitness facilities participating in sports and arts and culture events on february 28th you will still need to show your proof of vaccine however in high risk settings like hospitals and long-term care homes for a while longer and vaccine mandates for employees in high risk sectors like health care are well are still in place for now and we'll have more to say on those in the coming days proof of vaccination for discretionary activities was always meant to be a temporary measure to protect nova scotians and after nearly five months we're in a place now where it's no longer required for day-to-day activities most people 18 and over have had an opportunity to get their full series of covid 19 vaccine and a booster dose and by the way we are up there and with newfoundland leading the country in our percentage of the population who are eligible who have had a booster dose and children five years of age and over have had an opportunity to get their full series as well our level of immunity both from vaccine and recovery from recent covid infection is very high phase 2 will now begin a week earlier on march 7th with some adjustments effective march 7th restaurants and bars fitness facilities and movie theaters will be able to operate at 75 percent capacity with distancing as much as can be achieved within their specific physical space and the same goes for events including tournaments and competitions faith gatherings receptions meetings and so on the informal gathering limit will remain the same for indoors at 25 but will increase to 50 outdoors masks will still be required in indoor public places including restaurants gatherings and events but starting on march the 7th you will be able to remove your mask to eat or drink while in your seat at events like at a movie a concert or a sports event

we all know that there is some risk of exposure when we're out and about but we also know how to reduce our risk and we know to stay home and get tested if we develop cold or flu-like symptoms even if they are mild so as of march the 7th along with our phase 2 changes we will no longer be asking people who test positive for covid to tell their close contacts except for the people they live with although they can still do so if they want to and people living with a confirmed case will no longer be required to isolate as long as they do not have symptoms more details on this and the steps to take including around testing will be available starting on march the 7th on the nova scotia health authority's website and we will also be moving from daily to weekly reporting in phase two so starting the week of march the 7th we will start our weekly reporting and all the more details on phase two are included in today's press release and we're working on updating our website now phase two will last for two weeks and we'll be monitoring uh our usual indicators closely during that time and if everything remains stable we will move to phase three on march the 21st and at that point restrictions and mandates will end there will be no there will no longer be gathering limits there won't be any capacity limits for businesses masks will no longer be required in indoor public places but we will still recommend that people wear them and there will be no requirement for physical distancing although again you can still do so if you want to in

public schools there won't be any change until phase three the measures that are in place now such as cohorting and masking will stay the same until march break and when students and teachers return on march the 21st it will be to schools and classrooms with no restrictions or required measures for many this is welcome news it has been a long two years with a lot of uncertainty stress and heartache and that's true for all of us but for those who have lost loved ones those who work in health care long-term care in schools those who own their own business or work in the entertainment and service industries it has been particularly difficult there are a lot of people who are ready to get back to something that more closely resembles life before this pandemic but for others the idea of having no restrictions of going back to the way things were before comes with its own uncertainty and stress that is understandable and quite normal restrictions played a necessary and important role in our response to covid 19. they helped contain the spread of the virus in the in the first three waves before we had good vaccine coverage and they were critical in reducing the impact of the delta and omicron waves but they were never meant to be a permanent solution we always knew that they'd be lifted at some point and now it is time to move away from two years of crisis response and approach living with covid in a long term and manageable manner there is risk of course and that but that would be true if we did it last week or two months from now there is no textbook that lays out for us exactly when and how to do this it's a balance the same balance that we've tried to achieve over the last two years balancing doing what's in the best interest to limit the impact of a new virus with the impact of the restrictions themselves that wasn't what they have on our individual and collective well-being in our economy but i truly believe that we are ready that nova scotians are ready we have the tools to manage covid big things like contact tracing testing restrictions and vaccines that have set nova scotia apart from others and often put us at the head of the pack that we're phasing those out over time but other we have other things too that will remain and they are available anytime to all of us to use when we need them we can stay home when we're sick with cold or flu-like symptoms we can get tested when we have symptoms or are planning on visiting people at higher risk for severe disease we can continue to wash our hands and clean high touch services we can continue to wear masks in indoor public places where distancing is not possible and we can continue to be careful and cautious about the number of people in our close social circles and we should continue to do all those things as part of our new normal that has greater respect for covid influenza and many other types of infections it's how we do our part to keep each other safe especially those most vulnerable to severe disease covid is now moving in two very different ways in our communities for most vaccines now mean that covid is a mild to moderate disease that will not place us in hospital or put us at risk of dying although we have to be pay attention to the you know the evolving evidence of for some people of long-term impacts and for older nova scotians especially those in group living settings like long-term care for people with underlying medical conditions especially if they're immune compromised and for the few who cannot be vaccinated there is still a very real risk of severe disease and even death as we lift restrictions our choices and actions become even more important they will be the tools that we have to limit the spread of covid 19 and protect those around us who are more vulnerable these family members friends neighbors and colleagues are depending on each of us to be responsible and keep doing the things that have kept ourselves and others safe for the past two years it's also important to acknowledge that there are families larger groups within our communities and some communities within our province who have needed and will continue to need more support than others covered 19 the covid 19 pandemic has been a stark reminder that we are not all at the same starting place when it comes to protecting our health recognizing this and acting on it on it is an important way we can do better as we move beyond the crisis phase of the pandemic today's announcement does not mean that the pandemic is over and covid is gone far from it there is still a lot of virus circulating our communities but now we have the protection of vaccines and the experience to know what to do to protect ourselves and others which means it's time for a new approach to managing covid one that hopefully keeps us sorry one that hopefully helps us all get back to the people and places and things we love and we can do that safely by keeping the same things front and center that we always have caring compassion and community tina thank you dr strang just a reminder we'll take one question and follow up from reporters in the room first and then we'll go to the phone lines we'll start with callum smith from global go ahead callum thank you dr strang i just i wonder what today means to you uh highlighting this plan after the the two years that we've already discussed uh how significant of a milestone is this today's emergency campaign day you know i had lots of emotions you know yesterday and finalizing my remarks last night this is a this is a major transition piece from our you know that clear steps forward again we always epidemiologically dependent uh but a clear path forward into and again i have to emphasize it's not the pandemic is not over but it's a clear path into the longer term phase of how we adapt and with coving along with other viruses and minimize their impact for the long term so it's a major day and there's a there's lots of lots of feelings and thoughts and emotions in my head go ahead callum with your follow-up uh premier both both of you gentlemen alluded to division or different different opinions amongst the general population and you talked about the need to get back to the nova scotia that we were how do you think that happens are you confident that will happen or is there damage from velvet uh

opinions i guess that have have severely uh had a long term impact um thank you thank you thomas an important question um i have great uh confidence in nova scotians that we we we do look out for one another we we do care about one another and and uh but there is a lot of emotion and there's a lot incredible amount of division and i and i do think that sadly some relationships will have been broken by what's happened here but i i believe that the vast majority um will be mended when we can we can kind of you know move past this uh together without the division of who's vaccinated who's not and just kind of really come back together and remind ourselves what we care about what we care about is our family our friends and our communities that's at the core of every nova scotian so i have great confidence the future of this province next we'll go to mike gorman from cbc go ahead mike thanks dr strange this is quite a shift from what we heard about and what we were told might be possible a few weeks ago when you and the premier first uh released the the reopening plan so i'm wondering if this shift is a result of a recommendation that public health brought to the government or is this something that came about following conversation between the government and public health so i don't really distinguish with government public health we're part of government you know all government elected officials make make final decisions so you know ongoing conversations what we laid out a few weeks ago there was that was not written in stone and we caveated about a month and you know we were you know where and as we've as we've seen now uh over the last couple of weeks the the the epidemiologic trends that i the last briefing i pointed to that were starting to look like they were going in the right direction they have continued that and so we're more comfortable with more certainty about where the path that we're on so i've been at this for two years with now with the third premier that we've had a number of issues that uh you know different challenging issues that there's no easy decisions and my job is to bring in the public health perspective and to be part of conversations that many other perspectives uh have to be weighed in as well and then and then and then and then making a making a decision uh balancing all those and i'm very comfortable we have we have a very reasonable balance of all those different perspectives including the public health perspective in what we're announcing today and so premiere on that idea of uh you know balancing various voices and considerations to what degree was the decision to do this because ultimately you're the guy who makes the call to what degree was it influenced by the fact that it seems like every other province has has kicked up the speed for reopening and there's a segment of the public that's become far more vocal about their distaste for these uh restrictions yeah i think um i well what i would say is what happened in other jurisdictions i mean it's just it's just a just a piece of information but but always the nova scotia data points have been the points that public health has been concerned about that uh elected officials uh have always been been respectful of so you know we laid out a a plan um a couple weeks ago i guess and and i got a lot of grief from that because it where what are the dates what are the what are the actual triggers right there was a lot of grief so i think at that time what we were what we were trying to to signal to people is that um the change was coming you know the restrictions would fall away and we need we know that some people need to mentally prepare themselves for that today we're also signaling to people that you know there's there's there'll be around the removal of the proof of vaccine there's still issues to work out in certain workplaces you know so but we're signaling today that those changes are coming as well so you know we look at a lot of data points um but but i think the data points for it for this province um the return to school was a lot of people said that's a big mistake you shouldn't do that i mean i even saw some media reports saying won't last a week won't last a week they'll be shutting it back down uh return to school has has you know it's not been without its challenges but it's it's shown to be the right decision you know a couple weeks ago now we loosened up again so we're looking at what's happening in this province that's the most important factor in these decisions um considering the emotions of people i do think that we weigh up the the mental the mental health of nova scotians there's this has been tough um and it's weighing on on people very heavily and we have to be we have to be mindful of of the decisions we take and the and the the impact that they have on people in terms of you know crushing crushing people with decisions we make so this is the um as i said this is not fast enough for some people too fast for others um but it's just right for nova scotia when you consider our own situation here next we'll go to tim busquet from the health examiner go ahead tim dr strange i wonder if you could just speak a little bit to the cove of deaths we're still experiencing and put that in some sort of context i'm thinking last time we had numbers it's probably a month ago or so you said something like 30 of the people dying were on vaccinated is that percentage change and is it the fact that we're because we're so highly vaccinated in nova scotia that just necessarily a greater percentage of the people dying are are vaccinated but the total number of deaths is lower compared to elsewhere if you get one i'm asking you yeah you know you know there's a lot in there so yeah our death haven't looked at the very latest but i think it's holding about you know that less now less than seven percent of our population who can get who are eligibly vaccinated are unvaccinated but they're still representing about a third of death so so there's a disproportionate impact uh on on on both severe disease and hospitalization and death of those who are unvaccinated and that is consistent there's national data the same thing um but what we're seeing in their deaths now we have to remember that uh you know the the what what the deaths are reflective of the disease

activity several weeks ago because there's all the time lag between people getting infected and then getting severely ill and hospitalized and dying so so you know there were a lot of questions recently about well how can you do this when there's with such a high death rate even a week ago well that the those deaths are again are they they're not they're not reflective of what's currently going on and we are starting to see that the death rate go down so i don't know if i'm asking you answering your question but there still is this very disproportionate impact on uh on on severe disease and death for those who remain unvaccinated and i i think you've given me the opportunity i'll take it that it's still there are at that 6.7 percent who can get vaccinated or aren't it's still not too late there's still time to protect yourself still down to protect others around you um and then so we have lots of lots of vaccine and lots of access access to vaccine go ahead with your follow-up time um you ran on a platform in large part addressing health care issues i think uh not to put it entirely in the rearview mirror at this point but i think it showed that um just a relatively small outbreak in nova scotia compared to elsewhere really stressed the hospital system um and it's it's argued that you know had we had the hospital system we had two three decades ago that stressor wouldn't have happened how does that experience inform you about where we need to go with our health care expenditures and building our hospital system into the future it's it's absolutely true that the significant weaknesses of our and deficiencies of our health care system have been laid totally bare for everyone to see most nova scotians knew they existed had seen about them in some way shape or form heard about them but they are extremely obvious to people now so uh two two things that have kind of been confirmed for me one we have incredible people working in in health care i mean what they've what they've dedicated to nova scotians and how they've stepped up is pretty remarkable but it's also given me it's given me more resolve to address the issues that that we knew existed so i think over over the next couple weeks certainly the the covid situation has consumed a lot of um a lot of time and effort and focus rightfully so um but there's lots of issues to be focused on so i think over you know with the resumption of the legislature and and heading into the budget season uh you'll you'll see a lot of a lot of talk on uh things that can and will be done in healthcare we've made a lot of strides in certain areas incremental changes that will have positive uh effects but there's a long way to go and what i would say to to nova scotians is i'm even more committed right now than i was on august 17th i know absolutely uh what what i need to do and i will give everything i have to do it we'll go to the phone lines now we'll take some questions from reporters on the phone we'll start with keith doucet from the canadian press go ahead keith hi dr strang i'm wondering if you could talk about masks and why there's still going to be requirement for indoors i think people kind of make the link rightly or wrongly with masks and the the uh proof of vaccination right they kind of go hand in hand yet we're dropping the proof of vaccination continuing with masks so just i wonder if you could just talk about why you think it's important to keep this measure in place regardless of the fact that we're getting rid of almost all of our restrictions i mean they have different purposes proof of vaccination is around as we had a lot you know as we were people getting together was lots of virus around making sure that that that we were reducing the ability of the virus to spread and especially people were getting together were at the lowest risk from vaccination of getting severe disease masks have all along and we've had mass since august of 2020. mass have they have a very clear that that they play a critical role in limiting the transmission of the virus if i'm infected a mask properly worn really reduces the amount of vaccine that goes out into the close air space around me and we know now it's that close shared air space that is really a driver of transmission so even as we're opening up we still need to you know again taking on each phase in reopening it takes on a bit more risk but we can't you know keeping the mass as a way to mitigate the risk now until march uh the 21st and even though then we're at a point where i'm comfortable saying we no longer require it still strongly recommend that people continue to wear mass and i have said this before i hope that we retain a much stronger kind of culture of wearing masks in the future especially during the winter months because if if we all wear masks when we're around other people and can't be distanced especially in any areas of indoor shared airspace that will help prevent the spread of if covet is still around of influenza all the viruses that cause the common cold and a bunch of things better mask use by choice will actually have a significant contributor to our longer term health so but again there's a difference between requiring it as a as a time limited tool because of a pandemic and then promoting it and encouraging and supporting people to wear it by choice as a longer term measure go ahead keith with your follow-up and continuing with that if you want people to continue to wear it is it fair to say that masks have been perhaps the key to all these measures i mean vaccination obviously is tremendously important but masks themselves have they been just absolutely crucial in trying to reign in this virus i think maths have been you know there's no one thing that's been a massively very important but uh you know again you may have heard me and other folk you know the swiss cheese analogy every different measure we have in place they all have holes none of them are perfect and if if you just have one there's lots of holes for the virus to get through but if you stack them all up then you actually have a solid wall so it's the package of things that go together that have been been important and again with this but we're you know we're changing that we're in a place now where we still want people to build in on many of those things in their personal lives and the choices that they make is around masking or you know as i've gone through my

remarks we still have the responsibility to be covered safe it's just what they were in a place now that we we can transition from requiring it to uh to asking people to do it next we'll go to jonathan mcginnis from ctv go ahead jonathan

hi dr strang i'm just curious what you're anticipating will happen once these restrictions are are listed are you do you anticipate to see an increase in um in kogan numbers so i think the national modeling that was released last week uh which shows that if you know as we lift measures there's going to be some increased transmission so we might well see you know that we were that the progress we're making and the decline of cases may actually may slow down somewhat um but again a lot of that depends on actually what choices we make so just because we're not requiring things and i sound a bit like a broken record doesn't mean that people shouldn't keep doing certain things by choice especially for those around them who are more vulnerable to severe disease so the the impact of this actually depends a lot on how well nova scotians continue to adhere to uh the basic personal protective measures that we've been using for the last two years go ahead jonathan with your follow-up uh what is your level of concern regarding the amount of people that are still in hospital there are some i'm thinking more of rural obstacles i'm not sure what the city numbers are but um they're either at or above capacity right now so i mean i break it down so i from a public health perspective we look at what are the what is the the average number of weekly new admissions and that is well trending downwards and because that is a reflection of the virus activity in the community and that's that's trending and very well in a good place the the the sustained high numbers of people in the hospital they're more about the capacity of the health care system and they're certainly covert has exacerbated things but as the premier's talked about they're also reflected of some long-standing challenges in the health care system so as a as a as a citizen of nova scotia i am concerned that that we have to do you know we have we need better surge capacity in in our hospitals whether it's for the next pandemic whether it's the next bad flu season as we talk about climate change and maybe heat emergencies and having a prolonged heat event which could cause better hospital increase in hospitalizations we need to create invest in our health care system and have more flexibility and more surge capacity as as as events that create health issues happen in communities next we'll go to stephen cook from the chronicle herald go ahead stephen

stephen are you there

yes sorry about that um dr strang is there any chance that restrictions either fully or partially could come back into effect if there's a sizable wave or a new variant that could come down the pike well one of the things i was taught in medical school is never say never we always have to be open to the possibility that that a curveball could come at us we weren't expecting omicron we were you know i look back in november december that omicron took us all by surprise and i think flattened us because we had expectations that couldn't be met so we always have to be temper our expectations that we are still in a pandemic and and you know some something could come at it so i will continue to do my job my team will continue to do the surveillance and monitoring things here in the province and and elsewhere and as things evolve we will continue to come back and have conversations with the premier's office but right now we're on a good path but we'll always make sure that we're we're looking for things and reacting as quickly and as appropriately as is needed go ahead with your follow-up stephen and uh for premier houston at your last briefing two weeks ago uh of course the wage increase for continuing care assistance came into effect and i'm wondering if uh two weeks later we're starting to see places being filled more beds opening up the positive results that you were hoping for from that wage increase uh thank you stephen yeah so i haven't seen the numbers on like obviously it's it's going to be a slow grind to get people back to the workforce to get these beds opened up but i can tell you there's been a seismic shift in just the optimism and the outlook of those working working in in healthcare certainly as cca as a matter of fact two of them stopped me on the street last night and told me what uh what a change this has made in their in their lives and the lives of their families so those are good things we want people uh to to uh they see the important work that ccas do as a as a viable career opportunity and i think that needle is moving in the right direction for sure thank you for asking about that next we'll go to paul bacon from all nova scotia.com go ahead paul good afternoon premier the state of emergency has been extended to march 6. when will that state of emergency be lifted um thank you paul for that my my my initial thought is that march 21st uh we've still got there's a as i said there's a couple there's a couple of then we want to signal to nova scotians that this is coming and some of these things will require people to kind of really think about and and process um there's a couple impacts of uh that that shows itself as i said like in the proof of vaccine what happens in certain workplaces and stuff and the other place that shows up is in the um in the ramifications of the state of emergency i know it has some impacts around insurance for some long-term care facilities you know certainly around housing there were some impacts so um so but my expectation is is that the state of emergency will be ending uh when we move to the to the final phase of uh which is march 21st go ahead with your follow-up paul and you've heard uh dr strang talk about

the need for more surge capacity in our hospitals how will that inform your uh planned investments in health care yeah i mean so um sort of just as a blanket statement of how we're kind of approaching the the crisis that we see in healthcare across you know many different areas is you know of course we need to add capacity in in the in the form of um professional healthcare workers so we need more people we need more ccas we need more nurses we need more doctors so we need people to increase capacity but the other way we can increase capacity and that we're looking at is innovation and looking at different ways that technology can be used to to help people through the process so all of these things yes we need to um there's a long way to go in healthcare uh the the situation is going to take time and money to address but we're committed to addressing it and you'll see that in in retention and recruitment you'll see that in different processes and different innovations and stuff so uh we're we're looking forward to the positive changes and i know nova scotians are as well next we'll go to lindsey armstrong from the coast go ahead lindsay

lindsay are you there

we'll try again later we'll go to pat healey from the laker go ahead pat hi this question is for dr strang and premier houston what's your advice to those nova scotians who may have mixed feelings about this transition from the restrictions we've had to being restriction free after two years maybe also you know first of all having mixed feelings and feeling some anxiety and some concern about this is is is normal and so that's okay talk to people about that but also as we rely on there there are people have lots of things that they can do in terms of what what they do to minimize risk in their lives and if people are feeling concerned then they need to have conversations around and the people in their lives around them and really what those people as well are going to do to help if somebody's at increased risk well it's important that they have a conversation with other people in their family about how those other people can also keep them safe as well so this is about uh really about you know being open and having conversations and and then and and and and about asking people about you may have your own expectations about who gets to come into your house under what circumstances that's okay but you know what we're moving away from is requiring a bunch of stuff to giving that flexibility and that ability for individuals and families to uh to kind of figure out what their risk tolerance is but there are still lots of tools and we'll have we have lots of information and we'll continue to have that on our various nsh and and government websites to help inform people as they as they as they make their own choices and decisions around this yeah thank you thank you pat and thank you dr strength for that and it's it's absolutely it's it's okay it's normal to have mixed mixed feelings and lots of emotions around it i know i i certainly do on a personal level but uh but i'd say trust uh trust you know that the team at public health uh has has navigated us through this uh pandemic uh in i'd give them glowing reviews and i think many many many people around the world would so i'd say have some trust in in what what's happening but yeah take you know take uh take your steps to keep yourself safe in terms of limiting your own contacts if that's if that's what's comfortable for you wearing a mask if that's what's comfortable for you so um but i would say overall it's okay it's okay to have anxiety this is a this has been a it's been a difficult time um and this is a shift and shifts come with anxiety that's okay but but you can also take steps to you know wearing a mask after this is still okay so do what do what you think is necessary and right for your family go ahead pat with your follow-up yes premier houston what's the restriction teasing over the next month how much longer do you think you'll be holding these cobit 19 grieving well you're going to miss us aren't you pat that's why i don't wanna i don't wanna i think that will be the media will be most disappointed to not see us on a regular basis but uh um the expectation is you know we'll set this path uh you know this may be the last one uh it may not but i mean we'll be here when there's uh when there's when it's necessary if things change you know one way or the other we'll be here um and uh we we always look forward to them as well don't we i think we do right absolutely highlight of my week next we'll go to lois andor from the guys bro journal go ahead go ahead loisan yes hello thank you um if and when we no longer have proof of vaccination requirements will people who lost their employment due to not being vaccinated be allowed to apply for their old jobs if their employer doesn't want vaccinated workers will that be deemed a form of discrimination so i mean those are we're looking at that right now what we've you know the the the required vaccination in certain workplaces uh that that's being examined right now and all the questions you asked about you know what is the people coming back and under what conditions um those are all you know we'll have more more decisions on that various employers have to make those decisions um you know at the end of the day an individual employer always has the ability to set you know vaccination of other things as a condition of employment they always have to do that with their own appropriate legal and kind of human rights advice that they get to make those individual kind of business or corporate policy decisions go ahead lois anne with your follow-up okay thank you uh any thoughts on introducing waste water surveillance so we don't get caught out by a new wave or a new variant again so there's there's lots of ongoing discussion uh you know that the wastewater surveillance is still really in the research realm there's a there's a kind of research consortium at a national

level that the folks at dell house you're part of we're still connected to that work uh but our experience with that is that it may be helpful but there's still a lot of you know kind of things that have to be worked out to uh to really be able to rely on wastewater surveillance it's as a tool in what we call syndromic surveillance looking for patterns as early warning signals so there there still lots of work to do and it to figure out exactly what if the what role if any it might play long term and that's all the time we have for questions go ahead yep go ahead as these things all come off what will happen to the existing infrastructure for things like access to tests and and vaccines how will that change so two things our vaccine program is going to be in place for several months because we still have you know we still have uh you know we just just a couple of weeks ago where we said you know uh five you know sorry uh 12 to 17 year olds now need a booster uh we're we're in the process of of figuring out exactly when the latest vaccine uh novavax is going to come to nova scotia and how we make that available and they're still waiting for at some point we expect to see some recommendations or licensing and recommendations for kids under under five so we'll still need that and so we're certainly anticipating for the for the number of months ahead our pharmacy-based program and as we've talked about a previous briefing public health's doing some very creative innovative work or at a local level looking at local level data to you know create additional vaccine opportunities in communities or parts of our population that need uh need greater support so that's that's going to continue for the foreseeable future we have we're having lots of discussions right now in public health with our lab colleagues and our clinical colleagues about how do we evolve our testing program over the months and weeks ahead i think even if we move away from uh you know from you know not having everybody tested we always have to be cognizant and this is in my mind that we don't know what the fall might bring so even if we stand down things we still have to remember that and and have processes in place to be able to stand them back up quickly if it's necessary exactly like what we talked about last briefing as we stood down the border we we haven't kind of just dismantled all that we've asked make sure that we can have processes in place to re-establish these things if necessary you know whether it's a few months from now or next winter go ahead premiere you guys good yeah you're good thank you for that um in thinking about today's remarks and dr strang references a bit too but i i have to say i felt uh felt a lot of emotions over the last few days in particular a lot of reflection over what's happened over the past two years and what we've all been through um i'll personally never forget watching the first covet briefing with dr strang and premier mcneil and how surreal that was um i don't think any of us ever thought that there would be 100 covet briefings or that or that probably that nobody thought dr strang would cycle through premieres faster than any other province but in fact the day after the election last august the first call i made um that morning was to to dr strang and the first meeting we had as a kind of a newly elected leadership team in our new roles was with dr strang and and his team that afternoon so i tell you this just to try to show you uh the importance of the role that dr strang and his his team have played for me and for for my team um over over the last six months and and what what the province uh owes him and his team really they've been guiding us through uh some pretty dark days over the last two years and and i can't begin to imagine how how exhausted dr strang and his team are but um i want uh i want dr strang and i want the province to know that we will be uh forever grateful to you and your colleagues for keeping us safe i don't know you circling back to pat's question i don't know if today is is our last uh briefing but we always reserve the right to come back um to you to your screens and to to be here in front of you as necessary but um we'll always make ourselves available of course to answer any questions and address any concerns no matter what but for now um uh thank you dr strang and thank you dr strang's team and but but thank you to nova scotians for everything you've done to get us through these last two years and i look forward to seeing you in restaurants i look forward to seeing you at rinks and at concerts at farmers markets and i look forward to seeing you from the bay plex to the mariner center and um and and everywhere in between uh there are there are better days ahead and i thank you for everything you've done to help get us there thank you

you

okay great we'll get started good afternoon thank you for joining us today my name is marla mcginnis and i will be your moderator for today's update before i begin i'd like to introduce the honor bulletin houston premier of the province of nova scotia and dr robert strang chief medical officer of health for nova scotia go ahead premiere thank you thank you marlon thanks for uh everyone joining us this afternoon uh last month on february 23rd we announced that restrictions would end on march 21st march 21st is now upon us it's this monday and i can tell you that um every day really every day for the last two years but certainly every day since february 23rd dr strang's team at public health and now uh minister thompson's team at the department of health and ceo karen oldfield and her team at the health authority every single day all these people are tirelessly analyzing the data running what-if scenarios and really managing the system and i just want to say they've done they've done an absolutely incredible job there are many many talented dedicated people making sure that your safety is front and center and all in all i still believe that what was laid out on february 23rd was and is the right course of action for nova scotia the vax pass is gone uh people are back at games and events capacity limits are going uh the state of emergency is ending on monday and restrictions for the most part are ending on monday as well and i know many of us are nervous about ending restrictions i i certainly have for two years we've been conditioned to be afraid and nervous and and that's a difficult switch to to flip the other way but being nervous is normal and as my dad always says if you aren't nervous you aren't ready um but but i will tell you this we can move forward uh because individually we have the tools to make responsible decisions not only for ourselves uh but for those around us we know what to do and i'm hearing from people seeing them on the streets i'm hearing from people all the time who tell me that they plan on continuing to mask uh they've made that choice that's the right choice for them and those around them and this is good it means people are prepared and they can make those decisions to protect themselves and their loved ones safe and we can also move forward because collectively we've stepped up and have amongst the highest community vaccination rates in the country that's something we can be proud of and we shouldn't ignore that but and there is a but there is a tweak to that february 23rd announcement there's no playbook for managing this pandemic we make the best decisions we can with the information we have in front of us at any given point in time we agonize over every decision i know dr strang especially has carried an incredible burden uh for two years now and today we we have new information we when we have new information we reassess uh we've we've listened to um consistently through through the pandemic not just me but premieres before me in public health before me have listened to respected community leaders when they speak up and this week eight leading pediatricians spoke up and i've listened carefully to that and after speaking with dr strang and and also reaching out to dr link and listening very carefully there is one update to monday's removal of restrictions we will be continuing to mask in schools until mid april school is essential we've talked about this before and the high level of importance uh that i place on education and the level import of importance i place on children being in school so listening to these respected experts um it is clear that the best decision based on today's information is to keep masking in schools uh for now until the mid middle of the middle of april so mandatory masking remains in schools hospitals long-term care long-term care homes and jails congregate settings elsewhere everywhere else it is strongly recommended that you continue to mask you have the tools to make the right decisions and just like when you're crossing the road you make the responsible decision to look both place you don't need the government to make it mandatory to do so you intuitively know the right thing to do and and uh i i believe and have confidence that nova scotians intuitively know the right thing to do with masking it's been a bumpy road and there will no doubt be bumps uh along the way as we move forward but we are on the right road i am very confident about that and there'll be bumps ahead for sure but we're on the right road and we should all have confidence in that dr strang if you you have anything to add

there we go get unmuted sorry thank you premiere good afternoon everybody uh this week is the second anniversary of the first cases of covert 19 in nova scotia and reflecting on that my thoughts turned to all that nova scotians have been through together these past two years and especially to the families who have lost loved ones i also want to take time to thank the many health care workers public health staff colleagues in government and others for their tremendous work and dedication and commitment to protecting the health and wellness of nova scotians for the past two years today we know from the data on our positive per test that there is still a fair amount of virus out there in communities across the province for most healthy vaccinated people we do know that the omicron variant will continue to be a relatively mild illness but for some based on age and underlying health conditions uh getting sick me put it means that they're at a significant risk of being admitted to hospital and sadly some are still dying the pandemic is not over which means that the need for all of us to keep doing our part isn't over yet either as most of our province-wide public health restrictions lift on monday is even more important than ever to continue to do those things that we know work to keep us another safe they've worked for the past two years and it's not time to let go of them yet masking will no longer be mandatory

everybody but i still strongly recommend that you wear one in public places especially indoors where you can't maintain at least six feet distance from people not in your close social circle i strongly recommend that you keep rapid tests on hand and use them as a way to help protect the people you care about who are at higher risk so we're certainly recommending if you're symptomatic to test and if you're going to visit let's say an elderly relative in a long-term care facility do a rapid test before you go visit there won't be gathering limits anymore but i still strongly recommend that you keep your gathering small and your so-called social circles consistent restaurants bars retail stores gyms large venues can all operate at full capacity beginning monday but i still strongly recommend that people make careful choices about where you go and that you avoid the kind of crowded indoor places that can lead to rapid transmission of the virus and don't be surprised if some locations decide that they still want you to wear your mask any business or organization can make the decision the policy decision for themselves requiring people to be masked and this is because as i said earlier covid is still around us and even though your risk may not be particularly high the risk of people around you the ones you love and maybe the ones you don't even know but they're your neighbors or your coworkers may still be very high and that's why restrictions will stay in high-risk settings like long-term care facilities and hospitals and as the premier said we're also extending the masking requirement in schools for students staff and visitors for another few weeks although all other school related measures will end on monday this will help minimize spread as we bring back large groups of people together under a single roof with no other required public health measures i also want to be clear that after march 21st testing and isolation continue to be mandatory i've heard some confusion about that so certainly if you test positive whether it's a rapid test or a pcr test you will remain still be legally required to isolate for a seven day period so people who have symptoms of covid 19 will still need to stay home do the online self-assessment uh and if and book a pcr test if it's appropriate and people who uh and people who test positive again whether it's pcr or rapid whether you have symptoms or not if you're positive you'll need isolate for seven days these are these are very important public health measures that need to stay in place for some time yet so the most important actions that individual nova scotians can take are to protect yourself and the loved ones around you and other people in your community i've just outlined those but another one is vaccination if you're not fully vaccinated it is not too late and if you have a younger child who's ready for their second dose please book that now and if you're 18 or older and haven't gotten your booster dose don't wait unless you've had a recent infection and then you have to wait the three month period but as soon as you're able to and you if you haven't had a booster yet and you're over 18 year old please get it now this will give you the best possible protection against covid 19 and it all by protecting yourself you're protecting others as well i know that some nova scotians a lot lots of you are more than ready for the restrictions to lift but others want to keep them in place for a little longer this is an unsettling uncertain time uh and while there's still good reason to be cautious there's also reason to have hope the pandemic is coming to an end as we lift restrictions we all need to understand our own personal risk and the risk of people around us and take the precautions that are right for our situation these personal actions are also acts of kindness and caring to others

i continue to be humbled by the kindness and compassion that nova scotians have shown for one another for the last two years so let's keep that going this pandemic has been over yet it will end uh we have the tools to get through this last phase safely and when the pandemic does end let's let's have kindness uh or the legacy that nova scotia leaves behind over to you marla thank you dr strang thank you premiere we'll now take one question one follow-up from reporters in the amount of time that we have we'll start with channel rash with cpc go ahead sean thanks marla my question is for dr strang yesterday when you and i sat down to have this discussion about where we were at in terms of masking yes you did talk about the fact that you were going to highly recommend that people continue to mask up but when it came to whether or not it was going to be mandatory in schools uh you seem to suggest that that was not necessary what changed simply the change that uh that i had not yet been able to have a chance to have a conversation with the premier uh i've had for the last two years myself my public health colleagues have had ongoing dialogue with with with the premier uh simply we just had because the premier had been away was traveling we hadn't had a chance to have that conversation so we did later on in the day and and this is the decision the outcome of that conversation john do you have a follow-up question i do marla dr strang as you have said uh numerous times children are at low risk of serious injury and death uh they'll need to wear masks to protect themselves and their uh classmates from this virus why are adults particularly those who are at very serious risk of illness or even death uh not given that same protection this is simply about where you break in in schools it's it's the number of people all together uh that have bring all you know all their community exposures into one situation for prolonged periods of time during the day so it makes sense to continue to have uh their mask as a way to slow down any potential transmission within that school environment and then kids and teachers perhaps having to be off because they're now infected this is a this is a significant part of our commitment has always been to keeping kids in school and in class learning as much as possible and that's the major rationale for this

next we'll go to callum smith with global go ahead callum thanks marla uh premier both you and dr strang are obviously strongly recommending folks still mask up many public health experts outside of that are doing the same i guess you say folks know what to do but what's the harm in continuing with masks until the end of the respiratory season well in fact there is no harm that's why we're recommending that people make the decision to do that um i think the distinction is making it mandatory and i i think look we've it's been two years we look at we're looking at a lot of a lot of factors certainly weighing the mental health of people looking at what the the science is telling us and and people you know if they're comfortable wearing a mask and want to wear a mask they should absolutely wear a mask um and if they're in around people who are you know at a higher risk or in a big group wear a mask uh there's absolutely no issue with wearing a mask we strongly recommend that people continue to wear a mask but there's lots of things that government uh strongly recommends uh people to do and they don't have to make it illegal for somebody doing the opposite um with two years of experience with two years of knowledge with two years of focus on the pandemic and doing things that nova scotians can do to keep themselves safe i i believe that they know they know what to do do you have a follow-up question i do thanks marlon and just on that point premier i understand you say it's been two years and and we know what to do but if that's the case why did we have a mandate from the get-go i just wonder why that in particular is not continuing if the recommendation is so strong to continue to do so oh boy imagine what's imagine how much has changed in the last two years calvin i mean we didn't even have vaccine two years ago right now we have almost 92 percent of nova scotians are vaccinated so there's a lot that's changed over the two years i i think that the the response of of government and and certainly here in nova scotia dr strang's leadership in the team at public health then we make the best decisions that we can make at a certain point in time and i think uh really a world-renowned response for the for the response uh from from public health here in nova scotia but as things change vaccination rates change people's understanding of the virus changes the virus itself changes and so so you know we we recommend that uh the people that people continue to mask and do what they do what they can and what they know is necessary to keep their families uh safe i just don't think it's it's any it's necessary any longer for the government to to make it illegal to not do so next we'll go to heidi petrajik ctv go ahead heidi thanks marla um i'm just wondering uh you know the timing of this would the pediatric physicians the advisory group not have been consulted ahead of time uh or earlier when it came to masking in schools uh or is there a disconnect there and when they put out their open letter suddenly the you know the change has to be made no i i don't think it's i don't there's definitely not a disconnect and it's certainly not a sudden i know i know dr strang is in constant contact with a number of of medical colleagues um and i guess what i would take some responsibility for is i was i was uh i was kind of out of the out of the i was out of the province on some business and by the time we had a chance to really sit down and and really look at the information that's in front of us this is this is a decision um and um you know it's the right decision do you have a follow-up question i do just wondering when we look at other countries around the world who have gotten you know who have uh i guess uh loosened restrictions or eliminated restrictions uh cases have gone back up how prepared is this province to deal with that if it occurs i mean if dr fang if you want but i i think what i would say just in is like every every population is so unique i mean there's different vaccination rates there's different different demographics so um i mean certainly there's there's uh you know we're keeping an eye on data elsewhere but i mean i i don't think you just need to take one and and transpose it over over the population of nova scotia but dr strang yeah i know that brad i had this question that i did a number of interviews yesterday it's you have to be careful comparing one country to another because as the premier said there's all sorts of different factors about what type of public health measures they've used what is the vaccination rate what was even the schedule of vaccines in the interval between different doses all have impacts upon what's the law what's the underlying immunity and lasting immunity in the population so we'll certainly continue to monitor uh where we're at looking both at our case rates but even more importantly as we've done for now the past you know a couple of months really looking at the most important thing is where are we at with our hospitalizations and are we seeing what is the rate of severe illness no it's not i'm not as worried about cases what i'm much more concerned about is what is our what are the numbers of severe illness through hospitalizations that we're seeing so we'll continue to monitor that and uh as as always i've and then the premier knows as well i will monitor this and we'll uh constant communication with him and we'll bring forward our assessment of that and our recommendations uh as necessary as uh as we're not out of the pandemic yet so we public health still has a role in surveillance and monitoring and bringing forward our best public health advice next we'll go to john mcphree with the chronicle herald go ahead john thank you uh dr stern um you say that we should avoid crowded indoor places and yet we are lifting all gathering restrictions on monday the word the word disconnect will use was used earlier and there does seem to be a a disconnect between what you're saying and and what's going to happen on march 21st no i don't think so i think it's more around where you know we have to lift restrictions all the all the the impacts financial uh mental health impacts of restrictions are significant what i'm saying to be people all ultimately make their own choices based on their own level of comfort but i'm you know i'm saying we're

still uh in a pandemic that uh that going into a crowded indoor space especially if there's a lot of other people in very close contact and lots of other people be masked people need to be aware that is a higher risk situation

john do you have a follow-up question yes i do think so this is again for dr strang um if you say the pandemic is coming to an end i know that it's kind of a indefinite sort of statement but when you look at the case counts and the sub-variant fears in a lot of countries where this pandemic originally began and then the the wave of cases came our way i'm just wondering what's the reason for your optimism that that the pandemic is coming to an end soon or can you put a date on that in in terms of that statement no nobody has a crystal ball and maybe it's more it's really we're moving into a different phase uh which is a but it's a substantive change in our phase that it's the the pandem all pandemics and we don't know exactly when but what they do is they kind of there's not like a one day where all of a sudden the pandemic's over you make this transition where the virus is is going to continue at some level but you adapt and and society and communities and families and people learn to live with that have the right level awareness and protection but without having all the stronger uh more mandatory restrictive measures that were necessary for the first couple of years that's the big change we're making and then moving into the future where we still have to be very cautious and and public health will continue to advise people about what level of caution they need uh is likely to be different once we get into summer and then it might change again in the fall but again it's much more around going to be relying on what do choices we have to make to help keep ourselves safe and others safe but without the very the more stronger measures those are always in our toolbox but we i can only see going back to those if we had a substantive new variant that would almost be like starting the pandemic uh over again and i even hate to say those words

let's go to tim busquet with the helix examiner next go ahead tim hi dr strang um only 15 deaths this past reported week 16 before that are we going to continue to see this this number of deaths going into the future so it's important to understand and i've said this many times that deaths actually reflect the the activity of virus about a month ago so the deaths that we reported this week and last week uh you know early march they really reflect what was going on early february so we will we will see one of the things we're watching is uh as our hospitalizations are have been going down they're now you know uh plateauing a bit as we get more as we reopen we'll watch that carefully but uh and and one should we look at hospitalizations and deaths um but again i think it's important for people to understand that the time lag really deaths really reflect what was happening with much greater levels of virus circulation around a month ago did you have a follow-up question i do i just quickly comment that you said that a month ago too and same same general death level but moving on uh data um i understand why you went to weekly reporting makes sense but uh the the status the quality of the data has declined immensely and doesn't that make it difficult for people to be fully informed about how to live safely so we we we we've adjusted and we we heard over the last week and uh i believe just within the last hour so we've got a number of new graphic ways to portray case rates uh and then hospitalizations uh and trends over time through the omicron wave that those are now live on our on our dashboard next we'll go to lindsey armstrong with the codes go ahead lindsay thank you very much marla i understand there were about 300 health care staff off work earlier this week due to coving i'm wondering dr stern if you can tell us a little bit about what kind of impact absences of that number has on the system so i'm not directly involved in the operations of providing health care and and certainly that number uh has come down substantially but it is still 300 people that could otherwise be working so certainly it's one of the factors that continues to put pressure on uh on on the delivery of healthcare and we have to keep an eye on that along with a number of other factors

lindsey do you have a follow-up question thank you um are you anticipating or are you sort of planning to cope with uh having a potentially higher number of healthcare staff off work as restrictions are removed you'd have to ask that question directly to the health authority i think they're looking at a number of possibilities and adjusting to things but to further comment on your question this is a this is why one of the factors that we need all nova scotians to continue to do what we need we're asking them to do take kovitz seriously follow all those personal preventive measures which which will are critically important to helping continue to limit the spread of the virus even as as we necessarily reopen uh we all need we never know when we're going to need access to health care and we need to start to be able to open up our health care system as soon as we can do other types of non-covered health care so all nova scotians have a role to play in by doing all the measures that we that the premier and i are strongly recommending uh in the weeks ahead because that contributes to protecting our health care system okay next we'll go to pat healy with the laker go ahead pat hi this question for premier houston with the announcement here today of the uh masking still continuing in schools some people will see this as the province backpedaling on removing all restrictions what are you what do you say to those people it's it's a pandemic and we you know it's it's pandemics are unpredictable by their nature so i think as a province

we've always we've always been honest about what's the what's the right decision at a given point in time based on uh based on the information at that point in time so um look we're gonna we're gonna continue mandatory masking in schools that's the right decision um for the province based on all the information we have and there will be many many people that agree with it and many many people that disagree with it but that's not what's driving the decision what's driving the decision is what's the right thing to do uh for nova scotians and that's why it's being do you made a follow-up question no i do not thank you okay let's move on to lois and dort with the guys bro journal go ahead lausanne yes hello thank you um the stealth omicron variant is fueling china's biggest outbreak since the start of the pandemic two years ago a population that is also 87 fully vaccinated what um how are your feelings about this as a cause for concern so what we know is that uh the the the the the b uh a2 varia it's okay it's a cousin of omicron it's still wha the current vaccines provide the same level of protection against that variant as against omicron uh and so that's one of the reason we're saying we we've done a good job uh after christmas on on really getting our boosters uh into people especially older adults we still need younger adults 18 to 50 or need to need to do we need more work to do to get more of them with their booster dose so the vaccines continue to be what protects us whether it's against omokrom or this cousin of obamacare um and and we have all the other measures which have from which protect us everything we've outlined masking staying home if you're sick all those other measures limiting your social activities social circles those protect you no matter what variant is there so we have all the tools uh and we'll continue to monitor things but i i'm not overly concerned about the the cousin of omicron having any greater impact than omicron is currently having or or has had los angeles question yes please thank you uh is the government currently monitoring for the stealth omicron variant and will the public be notified if it is found

well we have actually had one one case which we reported on uh i think it was three or four weeks ago of that of that to that that new variant and yes we continue to uh uh monitor and do testing both locally to things that to look at the variants that we or our strains uh or sorry that virus that we can't that doesn't it isn't readily identified uh as a as a known variant and then those ones will continue to send samples off to the national lab so short answer is yes we are monitoring for it and we have had one case to date of that latest variant thank you so we'll go to nicole sullivan with the cape breton post go ahead nicole

nicole are you there

okay let's move on to adam cook with telly yellow community television go ahead adam thank you very much marilla dr strang i'd like to ask you how much does the case of the immunocompromised than the immune in the immunosuppressed factor into the current strategy for testing and monitoring covet 19 in nova scotia and further to that what do you say to those within the immunosuppressant immunocompromised community who have concerns with the swiftness of regulations being changed this coming monday

first of all we've with the people with underlying health conditions one of them being immune compromised uh they're they're the group that we have maintained uh along that all along that they need to get a pcr test because they're at a group where it's much more important to know for sure of the most accurate test possible so we have looked at that as part of our testing strategy we've also made sure that those are groups with certain uh meet a certain definition of immune compromise we've said follow the nasty recommendations and they should have four doses not three doses of vaccine so we're we're making sure that they're following the expert advice on on protection through vaccine for those groups that but that's your you're the second part of your question is that at the heart of why we need all the lumbus scotians to still uh take ko kovid seriously and and and to follow all those personal measures because it's while they protect you they're as important they're protecting others around you there are always people in our community well before covet and well after covid uh has gone there will always be people for one reason or another that are more vulnerable to whatever kind of infectious disease and so they all they always need the rest of us to be careful uh to help them to remain safe and then right now covet has highlighted that need and so that that is why a key reason why everybody needs to keep doing what we're asked asking them and strongly recommending to do because you don't know for sure who in your family who in your social circle or work may be one of those immune compromised people and they're relying on you to get vaccinated to wear a mask adam do you have a follow-up question yes i do thank you merla i'd like to ask as well dr strang what is the state of current pcr testing uh we have been advised to continue to have rapid test kits on available at home for us to test with but uh where and how far widespread is pcr testing in nova scotia at this stage so we're still maintaining our 30-plus uh access points the the nova scotia health authority for pcr testing we still have our groups all the information is on the nsh website that you know with their certain groups that i just referred to

that are because of age or underlying health condition we're recommending that they get a pcr test other people who are symptomatic can you we're saying use a rapid test but now we also have the option that if people have a positive rapid test they have the option of then going quickly and booking a confirmatory pcr test and for rapid tests we have broad access to rapid tests at a number of community access points uh across the province and again all that information is on both the government and the nova scotia health authority website so we have lots of access to both pcr and rapid testing next we'll go to blair rhodes with cbc go ahead blair yes thank you um my question is uh relating to the masking policy that's going to be continued on monday are being kept on in schools why not in daycares

so that simply their daycares are a smaller environment uh you know you they're and they're they're much more in even a larger daycare has really more much more defined and restricted cohorts of much smaller groups of uh of uh of kids and also there's uh though there's more challenges in in daycare age children around wearing mass and we've always accommodated that so our our our for for example our public health order we've always had the the claws that said that uh children two to four years old while you know uh that is that it's okay for them to not wear a mask if if their caregiver parent or caregiver uh is having challenges of getting to wear a mask do you have a follow-up blair yes uh we've managed to see some nova scotia health documents here at cbc uh about uh positivity rates for covert testing that are ranging between 19 and 26 and another document says that the risk of infection is severe in all four health zones why isn't that sort of information not being shared with the general public so first of all the the percent positivity is is is very uh uh different and the reason for that is that once we made it uh available for people who already had a positive uh rapid test to get a confirmatory test our our president positivity rate because of that change went from around 10 to 12 to the numbers that you're seeing so that is the reason for that change in percent positivity because we now haven't and we've we look at it at uh periodically some days it's as much as 60 percent of the people of the cases that we're reporting whereas positive pcr previously had a positive rapid test so that right away the likelihood of your percent positivity is greatly skewed because of that so i really don't watch the percent positivity anymore because of that that factor the risk levels that the health authority uses are are very different from the risk levels than than public health use it because they're based on what they need to do in terms of uh infection control and occupational health precautions within the health environment which is much more or much lower risk tolerance of bringing virus into those facilities so their use of the words risk related to community risk of viruses very different definition from what from what the public from the public health and the work that i do and my team looks at okay we have one final question from sarah savonski with all nova scotia uh sarah's having like issues so i'm going to read her question um do we expect cases and deaths to increase or stabilize stabilize with restrictions lifting are we expecting a number of deaths will become commonplace in a world where we're living with copiod so we know from and i've talked about this publicly from national modeling now which was about a month ago clearly showed that as you open up public health uh lift public health restrictions you will see more cases and there's a possibility of of having more hospitalizations uh and therefore there's a possibility of having more deaths um but the the the so that's why we're continuing to say those are possibilities the more severe disease so we're going to watch that carefully but a lot of that is that that's why we need people to continue to take this virus seriously to do the things that limit the spread of the virus in the community that protect those especially those who are most vulnerable for severe disease great thank you and that's all the time we have today thank you everyone for joining us have a great weekend thanks everyone thank you marla