

ORAL QUESTION—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE
QUESTION 221-19(2): COVID-19 AND SUPPORT FOR TOURISM

March 16, 2020

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to go over a few questions that I received over the weekend from constituents. The first is that a number of news releases or public advisories have gone out with phone numbers for people to call in the event that they have symptoms to report. My constituent called the Yellowknife number, which is the public health unit number, yesterday afternoon, and there was no answer. I'm concerned that, in fact, these numbers are only monitored during work hours. Can the Minister assure me that there is some kind of seven-day-a-week coverage of these phone numbers that are being advertised to people to call? Thank you.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Member for Yellowknife Centre. Minister of Health and Social Services.

HON. DIANE THOM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was not aware of the phone number and no one being on the other side of it. We do provide numerous numbers. We also have a website, www.hss.gov.nt.ca. That website contains the most up-to-date information on what to do to keep your family safe if you've been travelling or concerned that you may have been exposed to this virus.

MS. GREEN: I appreciate that answer from the Minister of Health, but it's simply not good enough. If somebody feels that they have symptoms and they require testing, a two-day delay can result in a lot more exposure between them, their families, and the public in a grocery store or any other place. Can the Minister make a commitment to have at least one number that everyone can call 24-7 to talk to somebody in person about their symptoms?

HON. DIANE THOM: I will go back and look into this, because it is crucial. Communication is key in keeping everybody up-to-date and informed. This is something I will look at.

MS. GREEN: Another question I received on the weekend was: why is it that the health department has decided that, if and when a case is confirmed, the location will not be shared with the public? Can the Minister tell us why that is the case?

HON. DIANE THOM: On Friday, when we did the press release with the Chief Public Health Officer, she did make that announcement. I don't know the rationale about why we won't disclose this, but it is something I can find out and get back to the Member.

MR. SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Final supplementary, Member for Yellowknife Centre.

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that this is really a key point. People will want to know, and they're going to be asking us, as Members, where this case is. From my point of view, it would be better to be able to provide factual information than for the rumour mill to crank up on social media, that it's in one place, another place, it turns out it's in 10 places that it's not. I would appreciate the response on this.

We know that we're asking tourists to self-isolate for 14 days. Are we reaching those people in languages other than English? Are we talking to them, for example, in Cantonese or in Japanese? Thank you.

HON. DIANE THOM: I'm not aware that we are, other than our official languages at this time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.