

ORAL QUESTION—JULIE GREEN, MLA YELLOWKNIFE CENTRE

QUESTION 225-19(2): COVID-19 TESTING

May 26, 2020

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My questions are for the Minister of Health and Social Services. We've been told that testing and contact tracing is key to discovering and isolating COVID-19 cases. That has worked fine so far, but it's easy to see that it's more difficult if community spread of the virus begins. Let me start by asking how many tests of either the rapid or standard type the NWT has today? Thank you.

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

HON. DIANE THOM: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have a cooperation agreement with the National Microbiology Laboratory, which is responsible for acquiring and distributing the reagents kits, and then we allocate them based on jurisdictions' needs. Right now, in the Territories, we do have a database in stockpile, and I won't show my paper up, but we do have a database that is able to track how much PPE we have, including the tests. Right now, in the Northwest Territories, we're getting 40 tests per week.

MS. GREEN: Thank you to the Minister for that answer. It doesn't give me an idea of the size of your stockpile, but let me try to get at it another way. How quickly could the department wrap up testing and provide results if there was an outbreak within a facility like a school or a jail or a small community?

HON. DIANE THOM: There are several tests that we do here in the Northwest Territories. One is the swab test, which we send out to Alberta, and we usually get a response within three days; and that, we have basically an unlimited stockpile. It's the GeneXpert test, which is the point of care, this is rapid testing, so the turnaround time for those tests is about an hour. Right now, we have supplies in for 40 kits a week with that, and we continue to receive weekly supplies.

MS. GREEN: Thank you to the Minister. My next question is: what resources does the department have to conduct contact tracing and what kind of training do staff need to participate in contact tracing?

HON. DIANE THOM: We have two tests here at the Stanton hospital, and there is some training aspect required in order for us to administer it. We are still waiting for another form or test to come in so that we can send them out to Fort Smith, Hay River, and Inuvik. Right now, we have the training pieces administered for the one test and we're just waiting for the stockpile to come so that we can send it out to the regions.

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

MS. GREEN: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sorry my question wasn't clear. I was talking about contact tracing, where staff call all the people who the infected person has been in touch with to try and figure out who else needs to be tested. What is our capacity for contact tracing in the NWT?

HON. DIANE THOM: I can find out for the Member. We do have a system in place; I'm just not aware of what it is right now. Since we've had non-residents come in, they have to fill out a self-isolation plan. With the self-isolation plan, we have a mechanism that is in place so that, if their tests come back positive, we have a way to track where they've been so that we can do the contact testing. Thank you.