

Division 5 residents, businesses and landowners,

Municipal leaders were fortunate to have a town hall with the Minister Municipal Affairs, Minister of Finance, Dr. Deena Hinshaw, and Premier Jason Kenney tonight. There were 400 participants on the town hall tonight from municipalities across Alberta. As this is great information I have tried to report the questions and answers to the best of my ability. This is my interpretation of the discussion and not Council's. At the risk of some minor errors (and grammar mistakes) that may occur, I hope you find the information valuable.

One thing that was discussed a lot by both the Premier and Dr. Deena Hinshaw was the importance of downloading the Alberta contact tracing app. I have included the location of the app a couple of times in the report itself, but here it is again. Downloading the app is completely voluntary and I am not pressuring anyone to do it, I just wanted to make sure you have the information.

<https://www.alberta.ca/ab-trace-together.aspx>

Please feel free to pass this on to anyone you feel might like the information. If anyone would like to be removed from the distribution list or added, please let me know and I will comply.

All my best,

Angela Aalbers

Division 5 Councillor

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## **Telephone Town Hall with Municipal Leaders – COVID 19 Developments**

### **The Premier's opening remarks:**

- I want to express my gratitude to municipal leaders for their response during COVID.
- In the last few weeks there has been significant growth in the virus.
- We have recently introduced targeted measures to limit the COVID response but we are not going to chase zero. We are not an island nation by rather an open nation and sustained extreme lockdowns would be unsupported by the public so we are managing and controlling the spread.

- We are closely following non-COVID related health issues due to impacts from economic downturn and general health. We are below the average annual mortality of the over 65 population but we are above average for mortality rates under 65. Primarily the younger mortality is due to opioid overdoses and drug overdoses. This is because of interruptions of residential treatment programs and increased consumption. We need to keep our eye on the broader impacts while protecting the health care system. The surge in COVID cases is putting significant pressure on the health care system. We have learned better how to protect hospitals by using isolation rooms and isolation beds. We do have less capacity available in the health care system due to staff getting ill or having to self-isolate.
- We recently implemented restricting bar service and hospitality to 10pm as well as restrictions on sporting. We think indiscriminate measures are less effective than targeting. Coming forward with additional measure will be likely. We are trying to find that right balance to protect the health care system and minimize the impact on society.

## Question and Answer Period

Sylvan lake (Q) Given that the rise in COVID cases, will you reconsider a reinstating a state of public health emergency?

Premier (A) The measures under the state of public health emergency are not required at this time. We needed it before to direct the health care system but AHS is saying right now we do not need these powers. AHS has its' own powers to direct the health care system. The Minister can also introduce and impose restrictions as necessary. If we require the powers under the public health act we will do so in future

Lac La Biche (Q) We have had 6 years of slump and now a pandemic. The march 2020 budget is out the window. What are your strategies for the spring budget?

Minister of Finance (A) We are Alberta tough and we will get through this but there will be challenging days ahead. Regarding the 2021 budget, we are in the consultation phase now and don't want to be presumption. We are facing 5 tough years previously and inherited a tough fiscal challenge from the previous government. We had a plan to get to balance in 4 years, and this will be delayed now. We can't cut our way to balance. Job #1 is economic recovery and growth and this is predicated on Alberta having the most competitive environment possible to attract development. To support this we invested in a ramp up in strategic infrastructure spend which will lead to long term private sector spend. 2021 will include continued economic recovery and we must deliver our services more efficiently. We can no longer afford to be an outlier according to the MacKinnon report <https://www.alberta.ca/mackinnon-report-on-finances.aspx>. We have to position ourselves in the best way possible to attract investors to expand economic development and capacity.

Banff (Q) Is the province looking at allowing peace officers to enforce the measures of the health act?  
Premier (A) We certainly looked at that in the spring and did not see a compelling need, but we are looking at every option. We want to strike the right balance in keeping the public with leadership on AHS public health measures.

Town of Edson (Q) We have enacted a mandatory mask bylaw. The concern is social gatherings and people not getting the message. People are leaving bars and having house parties. Why has the province not put in enforcement measures?

Premier (A) We have, as a voluntary measure, requested for people to not travel outside the blue zones into other municipalities, blue zones being the higher risk COVID areas. If we make this a hard measure, your trade will reduce significantly. Social gatherings are a serious concern. The largest transmission of COVID is through social gatherings and we have limited the number people in cities and in the blue zones but this is voluntary. The next step will be to make it enforceable.

Mountain View County (Q) Currently contract tracing is far behind. Is the province giving up on this?

Dr. Hinshaw (A) Contact tracing is absolutely critical and we are working with AHS to hire additional staff. Initially the contract tracing team was staffed to handle 200-300 new cases of COVID per day and we are well beyond that. We are working to get back to a more robust contact tracing response. We need to bend the curve back over so our contact tracing staff can catch up. A big help would be if more people would download the app to increase technological assistance to target restrictions on businesses that are most affected <https://www.alberta.ca/ab-trace-together.aspx>. We are currently staffing up with hundreds of additional FTE's to build up capacity in the contract tracing department.

Blackfalds (Q) The Province has stated face masks decrease the chance of COVID transmission so why have you not mandated this instead of downloading the decision to municipalities?

Premier (A) We are being respectful of municipal authorities and do not see this decision as downloading. Rural and urban conditions are different so these decisions should be made by municipal leaders. We provided over 20 million masks in a free distribution program. People think masks are the only issues but it is important that the public realize that physical distancing and staying at home are more important and effective.

City of Grand Prairie (Q) Municipalities don't have health professionals and we rely on health metrics to make decisions on things like mandatory mask bylaws. Will we get more information from the Province on forward modeling to make our decisions?

Dr. Hinshaw (A) The same trajectory and growth that we predicted in the spring still holds true and we have not done the same kind of modeling now that we did in the spring. The production of a communications model has not been done and we are relying on in house modelling information.

Okotoks (Q) – You mentioned that you are expecting schools to spike with the COVID 19 cases. Will you extend the Christmas break for schools?

Dr. Hinshaw (A) To be clear, my comments was that schools are not areas where we have seen significant spread and they are very good at implementing AHS health measures. Schools are so

important to the development of children and are a priority area. Other provinces are looking at extending the Christmas break, but we have not made that decision. This will be a decision for the Ministers of Health and Education.

Vegreville (Q) Regarding contact tracing. We have the trace Alberta app. Can you legally make people download the app?

Premier (A) I wish everyone would download the app but to enforce it would be a violation of the privacy act. This has already been raised as a potential violation even though it is voluntary. This is not a conspiracy effort by governments to trace peoples movements, and people need to understand that. We have looked at if it is possible to enforce downloading the app as a requirement for people entering Canada. There is a difference between the federal app and provincial app, as the provincial app downloads directly into the contact tracing efforts. We are going to step up promotional efforts to get people to use it. <https://www.alberta.ca/ab-trace-together.aspx>.

Red Deer (Q) You have introduced enhanced restrictions for municipalities on the watch list. This has caused community issues where the lines are drawn. Events that can no longer occur in the city can move out to places with lower restrictions. This doesn't make sense in the harmony of a region? As an example, gatherings of 15 people in enhanced restriction areas can increase their gatherings to 50 people by driving 15 minutes down the road to a municipality of fewer restrictions. If the concern is the event itself it doesn't make sense moving the event to a different jurisdiction because we all use the same regional hospital?

Dr. Hinshaw (A) We tried to put in place a suite of mandatory and strong recommendation but they are not having the effect we were hoping. We were hoping that people would make better decisions, and drawing the targeted lines of geographic measures was difficult, but if this is not working we will take this back under consideration.

Devon (Q) How do we go about getting the data for a community specific? Currently the Town's data are combined with Counties and we find it difficult to make decisions like with respect to a mask bylaw. We are just looking for numbers, not names so can we get more specific data?

Dr. Hinshaw (A) Every municipality would like to get their own data, but this is a privacy consideration and by releasing numbers in small towns or counties the numbers could be identifiable. We will continue to have conversations to see if we can make data available to municipalities but not at the public level.

Northern sunrise county (Q) do not make one rule for all. I caution the people that are saying we need one provincial rule for all.

Premier (A) We will take that as input.

Lethbridge (Q) These are tough times for the economy. Is it advisable to go with some kind of circuit breaker (i.e a complete and temporary shutdown)?

Premier (A) Given the direction of spread, there is no doubt that we will be coming forward with more public health measures but we want to be targeted. Jurisdictions that went into full lockdown worldwide have still seen the resurgence of the virus, so a 2 week complete lock down (circuit breaker) does not appear to work. We have to find the appropriate balance, but focus on the most effective measures and not a complete lockdown. We need to respect the charter of rights and freedoms as well as the privacy act. Under section 2 lockdowns can be justified, however we should never do so lightly and only under trepidation. Any new measures we put in place will not be seen by the health care system for 2-3 weeks. If our ICU capacity starts to trend towards maximum we will need to implement more measures. One thing we did wrong in the first phase was to treat large and small retailers the same. We will need to be much more conscious of this if more measures are to be introduced.

St. Paul (Q) I hope Alberta will see some vaccines, when will we receive some?

Premier (A) Great reports from Pfizer and Madera. We should see significant access in the first and second quarter of next year. We are more effective at a national level with respect to purchasing power and access to vaccines. We are working on a distribution protocol for access, looking at the high priority population first (health care workers and seniors) and then getting to the general public. In the first quarter of 2021 we should receive sufficient doses for 10% of population and we are working on specifics of who will get those doses first.

Village of Sterling (Q) Are there going to be reduction to the Municipal Sustainable Infrastructure grant in 2021?

Minister of Municipal Affairs (A) The municipal budgets are ahead of the Provincial budget but I would be remiss to say your MSI would be complete. We are working to ensure that municipalities get what you need. I will get you this information as quickly as I can, but I urge you to prioritize your capital projects.

Chestemere (Q) We are under tremendous pressure from sports organizations, and the most recent AHS measures penalizes them and they would like the measures lifted?

Premier (A) Any organization that is under restrictive measures will say this negatively affects them. We are trying to base all imposed restrictions on data. A few organizations have not respected the rules and there have been large outbreaks as a result. Sporting is one of the activities that can lead to significant spread from 1 to many. The 2 week measures were implemented under the hope that we could target these locations aggressively, resulting in bending the curve over.

Village of consort (Q) Palliative care homes are moving COVID patients from private facilities to hospitals and we are told this is causing issues? Can they stay in the private facility if they cannot be helped?

Dr. Hinshaw (A) The care of individuals that get COVID, by our policy needs to align with their quality of care choices. If they would like to stay in their private facility they are able to do so. This has not yet been an issue or a major cause in COVID transmission.