



The Hon. Scott Morrison MP
Prime Minister

STATEMENT

Thursday 16 April 2020

UPDATE ON CORONAVIRUS MEASURES

The National Cabinet met today to continue its coordinated work to save lives, and to save livelihoods.

Leaders thanked Australians for staying home where possible over the Easter long weekend and stressed the critical importance of continuing to adhere to self-isolation, social distancing and quarantine arrangements, particularly for returned travellers. National Cabinet also highlighted the importance of people who are self-isolating and registering on the COVID-19 app.

The Chief Medical Officer Dr Brendan Murphy provided an update on the measures underway on the latest data and medical advice in relation to coronavirus.

There are more than 6,400 confirmed cases in Australia and sadly 63 people have died.

Testing keeps Australians safe. Australia has one of the most rigorous coronavirus testing systems in the world with more than 374,500 tests completed.

National Cabinet agreed that Australia will continue to progress a successful suppression/elimination strategy for the virus.

National Cabinet noted new modelling that has confirmed that measures put in place to suppress the virus have largely been successful in slowing and reversing the growth of cases in Australia to ensure our health system has the capability to manage the epidemic.

It is estimated that overall, Australia is currently detecting approximately 92 per cent of all symptomatic cases, with each state and territory individually detecting at least 80 per cent. Australia's point estimate when compared with other countries is 84 per cent, the highest reported detection rate globally.

Modelling shows the current effective reproduction number, *Reff* for Australia and state and territories. For COVID-19 suppression strategies to be effective, *Reff* (the number of people a single case infects on average) needs to be less than 1.0. Currently, the results look very encouraging.

National Cabinet noted that Australia's epidemiology has only seen limited instances of local acquisition with the vast majority of cases linked to overseas arrivals or close contacts.

National Cabinet further noted that Australia was now in the suppression phase of the response, which will last for some time. Restrictions will be reviewed regularly and planning for the medium to long-term has begun. Over the following months further enhancements of the public health response capability will be implemented to allow future considerations of some relaxation of distancing measures.

The Governor of the Reserve Bank of Australia, Philip Lowe, and the Treasury Secretary, Steven Kennedy, provided National Cabinet with an economic update. National Cabinet agreed to meet again on Tuesday 21 April 2020.

Forward Planning Framework

National Cabinet agreed to a framework for future actions to plan the pathway for next steps in responding to the virus and conditions for relaxation.

National Cabinet agreed that any changes to the current measures must be underpinned by a strengthened public health response for case and contact identification and management, continued surge capacity in the healthcare system and a clear communications plan.

AHPPC's assessment is the precedent conditions required for change were unlikely to be in place within the next four weeks and cautioned against any material change in measures in this time. However, if Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) supply could be assured, there could be further consideration of recommencing some high value health service activity including elective surgery.

National Cabinet agreed to baseline measures remaining in place for the next four weeks, with individual states and territories who have put in place extended measures beyond baselines, to consider these measures based on up to date data and circumstances.

National Cabinet agreed to AHPPC advice on seven precedent conditions to any further relaxations, with work to continue over the next four weeks.

1. Situational awareness of current measures and their impact – sophisticated surveillance of disease incidence and spread, health system status, public health capabilities, stocks of material and community adherence to public health measures.
2. Finalised surveillance plan – enabled with adequate resources.
3. A better understanding of the implications of the modelling and a better understanding of the characteristics and transmission of the virus.
4. Complete maturation of public health capacity – including capacity to conduct testing more broadly; and public health workforce and technology for contact tracing, data collection and analysis.
5. Advanced technology for contact tracing – the role of a mobile phone application should be wholly explored, as it could be a valuable tool in contact tracing if numbers increase and the application is widely taken up. This would act to complement and augment our current public health contact tracing strategies and enable scale-back strategies.

6. Assurance of adequate health system capacity – should control measures fail, there must be assurance that the system will cope with any surge in cases, including the requirement for hospital beds, ventilators, PPE and ongoing workforce training.
7. Assurance of supply lines for – PPE, pathology consumables, ventilators.

Leaders noted the AHPPC advice on international strategies being used to address COVID19 include an 'eliminate' strategy, 'suppress' strategy and 'controlled transmission' strategy.

National Cabinet agreed that Australia will continue to progress a successful suppression/elimination strategy.

Leaders noted the AHPPC advice that there are very different epidemics occurring in different countries, which are closely aligned with the relevant local public health responses, including physical distancing measures, testing and contact tracing measures as well as broader health system capacity. Measures taken during the response to suppress the COVID-19 pandemic in Australia are aimed at protecting the most vulnerable population groups from severe illness and mortality by reducing transmission in the general population and ensuring health system capacity.

Schools

National Cabinet agreed with the AHPPC health advice that "on current evidence, schools can be fully open" along with the "practical guidance and advice" the AHPPC provided school leaders to even further reduce the "relatively low risk" of transmission in schools during the COVID-19 pandemic.

National Cabinet also agreed to a series of National Principles for School Education, as follows:

1. Our schools are critical to the delivery of high quality education for students and to give our children the best possible start in life. Our education systems are based on the recognition that education is best delivered by professional teachers to students in the classroom on a school campus.
2. It is accepted that during the COVID-19 crisis, alternative flexible, remote delivery of education services may be needed
3. Our schools must be healthy and safe environments for students, teachers and other staff to ensure the effective and efficient delivery of education to students.
4. State and Territory Governments and non-government sector authorities are responsible for managing and making operational decisions for their school systems respectively, subject to compliance with relevant funding agreements with the Commonwealth.
5. Decisions regarding the response to COVID-19 in the schooling sector must continue to be informed by expert, official, national and state-based public health and education advice, consistent with these national principles.
6. All students must continue to be supported by their school to ensure participation in quality education during the COVID 19 crisis.
7. The health advice consistently provided by the AHPPC is that attendance at a school campus for education represents a very low health risk to students. The advice also notes that appropriate practices must be employed at schools, like at other workplaces, to provide a safe working environment for school staff, including teachers, and that the specific AHPPC advice regarding school campuses should be followed.

Protecting and supporting people with disability

National Cabinet reaffirmed its commitment to ensuring the well-being of Australians with disability are considered as the coronavirus pandemic unfolds.

National Cabinet endorsed the Management and Operational Plan for COVID-19 for People with Disability and agreed to its release on the Australian Government Department of Health's website.

The Plan ensures a national approach to protecting and supporting people with disability, their families and carers during the pandemic by providing guidance on a range of factors that need to be considered in managing and preventing the transmission of COVID-19.

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