



29th September, 2020

Dear Resident, Family and Friends,

COVID-19 UPDATE

As we achieve four days of zero community transmission, we possibly have the right to feel very pleased with ourselves however like the other states NSW is unlikely to wipe out COVID-19 until a vaccine is available.

What we Know

- Coronavirus was still circulating in the community
- Low testing rates could mean a rise in "mystery cases" in NSW
- Without a vaccine, low rates of infection will be difficult to maintain; there is always the risk because we have got a non-immune population and no vaccine.
- Without a vaccine or treatment, we must remain vigilant; even if case numbers remained at zero for an extended period of time, COVID-19 restrictions (social distancing; masks; limitations to social occasions; travel limitations etc) would remain for some time.

There have been nearly 2.7 million COVID-19 tests carried out in NSW since the beginning of the outbreak. NSW Health is currently treating 55 cases, including three patients in intensive care. No patients are being ventilated.

Days since the last reported case of COVID-19 (includes Traveller Returns) – 29 September 2020

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| NSW: Nil | Vic: Nil | WA: Nil |
| QLD: 2 | SA: 4 | NT: 58 |
| TAS: 48 | ACT: 80 | |

Aged Care COVID-19 Cases: The Commonwealth Government released a data snapshot of residential aged care facilities which have recorded COVID-19 infections. The report provides greater transparency for residents and their families around the situation in aged care facilities. The data includes all aged care facilities where there has been more than one case in either a staff member or resident. It shows that of the 2,706 aged care facilities in Australia, 213 - or 8 per cent - have had cases of COVID-19.

Current situation in Australia: In Australia, a total of 26,513 cases of COVID-19 have been reported, including 1661 active cases, 23,031 recovered cases and 788 deaths.

- Of these, a total of 19,728 cases of COVID-19 have been reported in Victoria, including 1483 active cases, 17,484 recovered cases and 701 deaths.
- There are 83 residential aged care facilities currently active with COVID-19. 82 of these services are in Victoria and one is in Queensland.
- The data does not include details on facilities that have had a single case - there are 98 of these facilities across the country.

The report compares the current impact of COVID-19 in residential aged care to previous influenza outbreaks and demonstrates how Australia is performing internationally.

National comparison of 2020 residential aged care deaths with previous year and influenza comparisons: Across the 2020 calendar year to 31 July 2020, the total number of departures from residential care due to death is 32,398, compared with 33,383 at the same point in 2019. The lower number of deaths in 2020 in the data available to date compared to the same point in 2019 is likely the result of increased influenza immunisation rates, and increased infection control protocols introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sadly, influenza kills many elderly Australians each year many of whom live in aged care facilities.

- The 2017 influenza season recorded the highest levels of influenza activity since 2009 swine flu pandemic with over 1064 older Australians dying from influenza.
- In 2019, 837 older Australians died from influenza. In
- 2020, 28 older Australians have died from influenza to date.

International comparisons: Australia's overall COVID death rate as a proportion of cases is around 3.0 per cent (compared to 12.8 per cent in the UK). Our death rate in aged care across Australia as a proportion of total aged care residents is around 0.32 per cent (3.2 in 1000) compared to 5.3 per cent in the UK where nearly 20,000 deaths have been seen. In the UK, of the 9,081 care homes included in a recent study, 56% reported at least one confirmed case of coronavirus (staff or resident), as compared to 7.7% of all Australian aged care homes (source: UK Office of National Statistics). In Canada, 21 per cent (1,231 of 5,801) of care homes has one or more confirmed cases of COVID-19. Supports described in the report include testing, workforce and personal protective equipment support to help the aged care sector with its response to this pandemic.

The Morrison Government has continued to ensure quality of care for senior Australians remains a priority during the pandemic. It is why more than \$1.5 billion to date has been invested.

Vaccine: Coronavirus still poses a significant threat, but there are no vaccines proven to protect the body against the disease it causes - Covid-19. There are currently around 40 different coronavirus vaccines in clinical trials - including one being developed by the University of Oxford that is already in **an advanced stage of testing**.

Why is a coronavirus vaccine important? The virus spreads easily, and the majority of the world's population is still vulnerable to it. A vaccine would provide some protection by training people's immune systems to fight the virus so they should not become sick. This would allow lockdowns to be lifted more safely, and social distancing to be relaxed.

What sort of progress is being made? Research is happening at breakneck speed. About 240 vaccines are in early development, with 40 in clinical trials and nine already in the final stage of testing on thousands of people.

- Trials of the Oxford vaccine show it can **trigger an immune response**, and a deal has been signed with AstraZeneca to supply 100 million doses in the UK alone.
- The **first human trial data** back in May indicated the first eight patients taking part in a US study all produced antibodies that could neutralise the virus.
- A trial using viral proteins to **develop an immune response** is underway.
- A group in China showed **a vaccine was safe and led to protective antibodies** being made. It is being made available to the Chinese military.
- Other completely new approaches to vaccine development **are in human trials**.

However, no-one knows how effective any of these vaccines will be.

When will we have a coronavirus vaccine? A vaccine would normally take years, if not decades, to develop. Researchers hope to achieve the same amount of work in only a few months. Most experts think a vaccine is likely to become widely available by mid-2021, about 12-18 months after the new virus, known officially as Sars-CoV-2, first emerged.

Contact Tracing: The pandemic has certainly highlighted the varying skills; capacity and capability of our Public Health Units within Australia. All units operate independently and manage tracing of positive cases slightly differently. While it is important to acknowledge that there is no perfect system what is clear is that Australia needs a unified and singular system for contact tracing. This endeavour was announced this week and it is most likely that the NSW system will be introduced as a national contract tracing system.

The management of the system is yet to be determined but it is likely to fall within the purview of the Commonwealth Department of Health.

Emergency Leave: Minister Colbeck has announced an extension to the new emergency leave provision for permanent aged care residents until 30 June 2021. This will allow aged care residents to take emergency leave during the COVID-19 pandemic, rather than using and potentially exhausting their social leave entitlements. It will also provide certainty and reassurance to residents who have temporarily relocated to stay with family during the COVID-19 pandemic. Aged care homes will continue to be paid residential care subsidy when residents are on emergency leave, ensuring neither residents nor providers are disadvantaged.

Support for Residents on Emergency Leave: A national model of emergency support is available to aged care residents who choose to take Emergency Leave and temporarily move out of residential care due to COVID-19. Support is available through the Commonwealth Home Support Programme (CHSP) for up to eight weeks.

All of the above information is provided as a means of keeping you informed and to illustrate the continuing threat that COVID-19 plays in all our lives; this data also demonstrates the gravity of COVID-19 when our elderly citizens are impacted. We all have a place to play in maintaining a safe Australia and the restrictions that are in place now have a large part to play in this. So please think about maintaining social distancing; hand hygiene practices; wearing a mask and staying home if unwell and getting tested.

Take care

Jennifer