

**2021**

**THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE  
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**Chief Health Officer Report on the Status of the Public Health Emergency due to  
COVID-19 Report 16 – 10 July 2021**

**Presented by  
Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA  
Minister for Health  
3 August 2021**



**ACT**  
Government

**ACT Health**

Ms Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA  
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Dear Minister

**CHIEF HEALTH OFFICER REPORT ON THE STATUS OF THE PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY DUE TO COVID-19 – 10 JULY 2021**

Please find herein my report to you, as Minister for Health, in relation to the declaration of a public health emergency in the ACT due to COVID-19.

Section 119 (4B) of the *Public Health Act 1997* provides that if the “COVID-19 declaration has been extended or further extended under subsection (4), the chief health officer must advise the Minister at least every 30 days about—

- (a) the status of the emergency; and
- (b) whether the chief health officer considers the declaration is still justified.”

Minister, my advice is that COVID-19 continues to pose a public health risk to the ACT community. My recommendation to you, as of 10 July 2021, is that the public health emergency declaration in the ACT remain in place at this time.

All Australian jurisdictions are maintaining public health emergency status or similar at this time and continue to focus on the suppression of COVID-19.

Yours sincerely

Dr Kerry Coleman  
Chief Health Officer  
10 July 2021

# CHIEF HEALTH OFFICER REPORT ON THE STATUS OF THE PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY DUE TO COVID-19 – 10 JULY 2021

## Declaration of a public health emergency in the ACT

A public health emergency declaration is in force in the ACT due to the public health risk of COVID-19 to the ACT community. As Chief Health Officer, I make a recommendation to the Minister for Health that the public health emergency declaration remain in place due to the ongoing public health risk COVID-19 presents.

The public health emergency declaration enables me, as Chief Health Officer, to take necessary actions to reduce threats to public health, including issuing public health directions that aim to limit the spread of COVID-19 in our community. These directions include the requirement for returned international travellers to undertake hotel quarantine and for confirmed cases of COVID-19 and their close contacts to self-isolate.

The ACT's public health response is guided by the advice of the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) and National Cabinet.

## Global situational update<sup>1</sup>

Globally, as at 9 July 2021, there have been 185,291,530 confirmed cases of COVID-19, and sadly 4,010,834 deaths, reported to the World Health Organization (WHO). The WHO reports that although the number of global cases and deaths have decreased over the past month, case and death incidences remain at high levels and significant increases have been reported in many countries in all regions of the world. In the past week, the European and South-East Asia Regions reported marked declines in the number of new cases while the African Region reported an increase as compared to the previous week. Despite relatively high COVID-19 vaccination rates, new reported cases have increased rapidly in the United Kingdom over the past two weeks, which experts attribute to the spread of the highly contagious Delta variant.

## National situational update<sup>2</sup>

As at 9:00am on 9 July 2021, there have been a total of 30,905 cases of COVID-19 reported in Australia and 910 deaths. Of the 260 positive cases reported nationally in the past week, 40 cases were overseas acquired, 213 cases were locally acquired, and 7 cases are under investigation.

Over the past month, two COVID-19 outbreaks have occurred in Australia (originating in New South Wales and Queensland) that have seeded numerous cases throughout other jurisdictions, as well as seeding the current major outbreak in New South Wales. There are currently 513 active cases in Australia, with the majority of locally acquired cases reported in the last week associated with the outbreak in Sydney. The widespread seeding of cases

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/situation-reports> Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) Weekly Epidemiological Update and Weekly Operational Update, accessed 9 July 2021

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert/coronavirus-covid-19-current-situation-and-case-numbers#covid19-summary-statistics> Coronavirus (COVID-19) at a glance – 8 July 2021, Australian Government Department of Health, accessed 9 July 2021

throughout Australia resulted in ACT declaring multiple jurisdictions of Australia Areas of Concern throughout the past month.

The origin of the New South Wales outbreak has been attributed to transmission from an international traveller (international flight crew) to a driver. The driver was diagnosed with COVID-19 (delta strain) on the 16 June 2021. They attended multiple public exposure locations whilst infectious, seeding the current ongoing New South Wales COVID-19 outbreak, as well as cases in Western Australia, Queensland and Victoria.

In Queensland, a domestic traveller from Victoria acquired COVID-19 whilst in hotel quarantine in Brisbane; the mine worker subsequently travelled to the Northern Territory during their infectious period and was diagnosed with COVID-19 (delta strain) on 25 June 2021. Due to the fly-in-fly out nature of work at the mine site, most close contacts (900/1600) from this case had rapidly dispersed to multiple jurisdictions in Australia and throughout the Northern Territory, seeding cases in the Northern Territory, Western Australia, New South Wales and South Australia. An additional localised outbreak with alpha strain that occurred in Queensland during the same period has also been attributed to hotel quarantine transmission.

#### New South Wales situation

In New South Wales, a case of COVID-19 was reported on 16 June 2021 in a worker transporting international flight crew. This case seeded an outbreak that, as at 9 July 2021, had grown to over 400 cases in New South Wales.

In response to a rise in locally acquired cases in the Greater Sydney region, particularly a persisting proportion that were infectious in community, the ACT declared Greater Sydney, Blue Mountains, Central Coast, Wollongong and Shellharbour as COVID-19 affected areas from 11:59pm on 9 July 2021. Anyone who leaves these COVID-19 affected areas on or after 11:59pm on 9 July 2021 and travels to the ACT must enter quarantine for 14 days upon their arrival. ACT residents and non-ACT residents are required to obtain an approved exemption from ACT Health prior to their travel however ACT residents will automatically receive an exemption to the ACT and will be supported to safely return to their homes.

As at 9:00am on 8 July 2021, ACT Health has received 3,141 exemption requests from travellers from the New South Wales. 1,012 have been approved, 1,150 have not been approved, 533 have been withdrawn and/or are not required under the Public Health Direction and 446 are yet to be processed.

#### **ACT situational update**

As at 10 July 2021, there are no active COVID-19 cases in the ACT and there is currently no evidence of community transmission. Of the ACT's 124 cases, 121 cases have recovered, and sadly there were three deaths early in the pandemic. There have been no new cases notified in the ACT in the past 30 days despite an increase in testing.

As at 11.59pm on 9 July 2021, the total number of vaccine doses administered by the ACT Government is 98,572.

In response to the increase of positive cases across the country and several outbreaks linked to the highly infectious 'Delta variant', the use of face masks became mandatory in the ACT from midnight 28 June 2021 in certain indoor settings and when using public transport. Venues where masks must be worn include supermarkets and retail stores, hospitality

venues, other restricted businesses where there is close contact with the public including hairdressers and gyms, and high-risk settings such as health and aged care facilities.

Following a risk assessment of the current COVID-19 situation in the ACT and surrounding region including the strengthened travel restrictions, the mandate for people to wear masks was lifted at 11:59pm on 9 July 2021. While it will no longer be mandatory to wear face masks, ACT Health is still encouraging people to wear them in settings where physical distancing is not possible such as public transport or crowded indoor venues.

The use of the Check In CBR app will be required in all retail settings, public transport, and taxi and rideshare from 12 noon on 15 July 2021, in the same way it is already mandatory for restricted businesses. The expanded coverage of the Check In CBR app will ensure contact tracing teams are able to access the best available data to quickly and effectively contact any individual who may be exposed to a COVID-19 case in the ACT. Additionally, from 11:59pm on 1 July 2021, anyone aged 16 years and older must check-in upon entry to a business or venue that is required to use Check In CBR, regardless of how long they will be on the premises. Previously people were not required to check-in if they would be in a setting for less than 15 minutes, however with more infectious strains of COVID-19 now present in Australia and some transmission events occurring between people who interact for only a few minutes, it has been determined that patrons and customers should check-in as soon as they enter a business or venue.

As at 9 July 2021, there are 102 people in quarantine in the ACT, the majority of whom are diplomats and government officials, and their family members. The ACT is continuing to manage the frequent return of diplomats and government officials travelling to Canberra for official duties.

The Health Protection Service, Access Canberra and ACT Policing are continuing to undertake compliance and enforcement activity across the ACT community to help protect the community as the pandemic response continues. Compliance activities are currently focused on supporting the use of the Check In CBR App and maximum occupancy compliance, particularly since the use of the app became mandatory on 6 March 2021.

As at 9 July 2021, ACT Policing has issued six criminal infringements (fines to three businesses and three individuals), 15 cautions, and made two arrests for the breach of COVID-19 Public Health Directions. ACT Policing will continue to conduct COVID-19 compliance activities including checking of individuals subject to current directions such as mandatory quarantine.

Access Canberra has undertaken a total of 8,332 COVID-19 compliance inspections as at 31 May 2021, with a focus on ensuring businesses and the wider community are complying with restrictions under the *Public Health (Restricted Activities – Gatherings, Business or Undertakings) Emergency Direction 2020 (No 3)*, including the mandated use of the Check In CBR app.

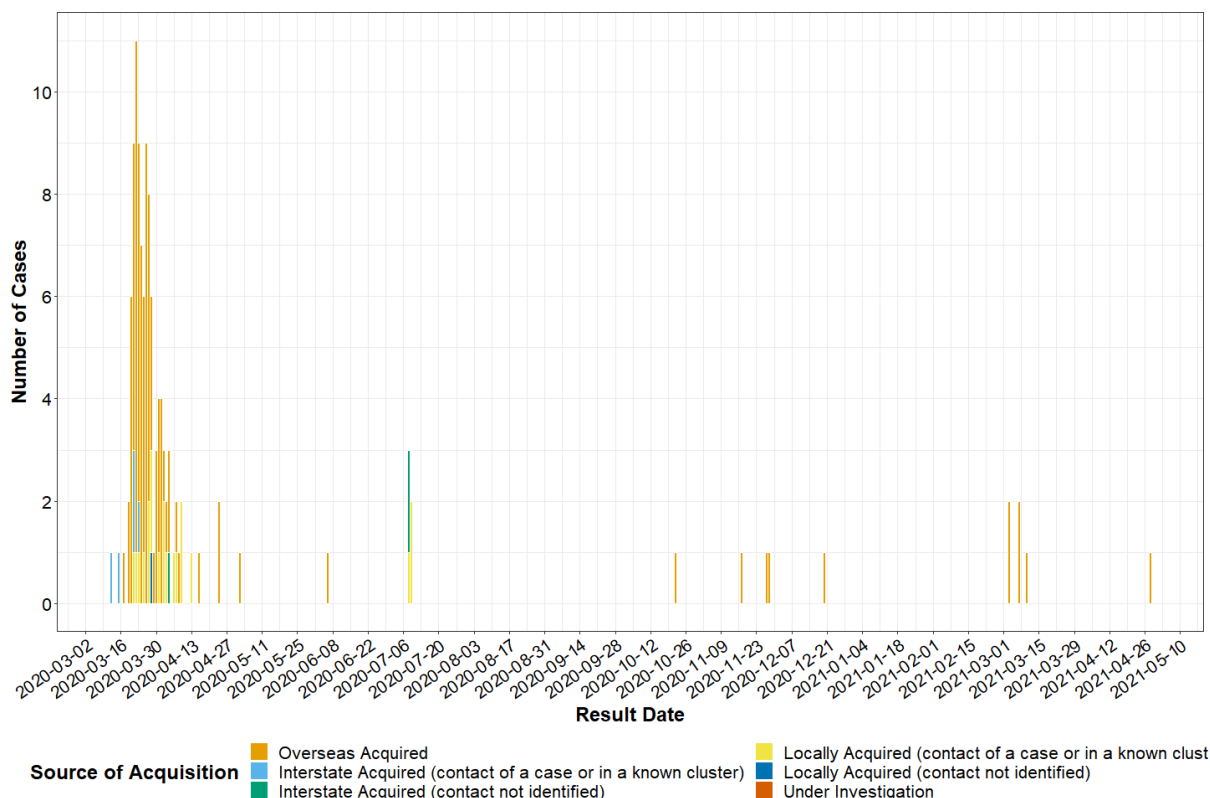
As at 31 May 2021, Health Protection Service's COVID-19 Compliance Team has undertaken 5,790 food related inspections. No warning letters were issued during the reporting period.

The rate of compliance with public health directions across the ACT remains relatively stable although compliance activity has found a reduction in compliance with occupancy limits

and/or COVID-19 Safety Plan requirements. Access Canberra and Health Protection Service are actively engaging with business to ensure they understand their requirements under the Public Health Direction and to resolve non-compliance.

As of 8 July 2021, there are 13,915 venues registered with Check in CBR. There have been more than 849,872 downloads of the app and more than 20.93 million people checked in since its launch. The use of this app by patrons attending businesses and venues in the ACT provides additional assurance to ACT Health and the local community that contact tracing teams can respond quickly and effectively if a new locally acquired case is identified.

**Confirmed ACT COVID-19 cases by date of notification (as at 1 July 2021)**



**ACT COVID-19 Vaccination Program**

The rollout of the ACT’s COVID-19 Vaccination Program is progressing well, and ACT Health is focused on ensuring the rollout continues in an efficient, and above all, safe manner.

The ACT Government has opened a third mass vaccination clinic at the Canberra Airport Precinct to increase delivery of Pfizer doses to the Canberra community. The Garran COVID-19 mass vaccination clinic is continuing to administer the Pfizer vaccine and the Calvary Public Hospital COVID-19 vaccination clinic is administering the AstraZeneca vaccine. Across the three dedicated ACT Government clinics there is current capacity to provide more than 10,000 vaccination doses per week. This capacity will be rapidly scaled up as Commonwealth supply of vaccine is received in coming weeks and months.

The ACT’s COVID-19 vaccination clinics are administering vaccinations to identified priority groups under Phases 1a, 1b in line with the national rollout strategy and anyone aged 40 years and over is now eligible for vaccination. All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 16 years and over are also eligible.

The ACT Government Vaccination Clinics are live on the Australian Government's Vaccine Eligibility Checker and eligible Canberrans can make a booking online, with the checker linking people directly to the MyDHR Digital Health Record platform. The ACT Government COVID-19 vaccination phone booking line is also available for those who are unable to register for MyDHR or who prefer to speak with someone to make a booking.

Participating GP clinics are administering AstraZeneca and Pfizer to those persons eligible. In primary care across the ACT there are now approximately 80 GPs onboarded as Commonwealth Vaccinating Sites, and in the week commencing 5 July 2021, nine of these have been onboarded with Pfizer. 21 have been approved to vaccinate with Pfizer to be onboarded over the next several weeks.

ACT Health are working with the Commonwealth, Public Health Network and aged care sector to assist staff to receive vaccinations through fast-tracked appointments at ACT Government clinics and primary care. The ACT's priority continues to be the delivery of a safe, efficient and targeted vaccination program. The ACT Government will continue to work closely with the Commonwealth Government to ensure Canberrans are well informed about the vaccination program and implement policies and procedures based on expert health advice.

### **Surveillance and monitoring**

Testing numbers in the ACT continue to reflect the COVID-19 case situation across Australia with a total of 248,229 negative tests conducted as at 10 July 2021.

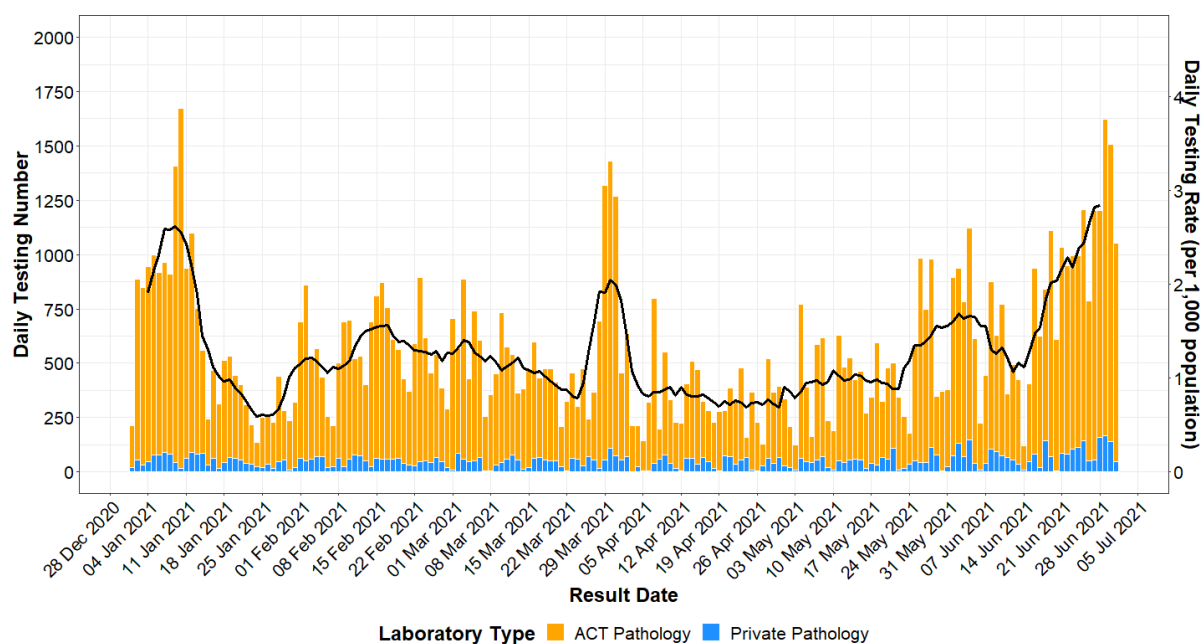
There have been no new cases of COVID-19 and no new evidence of community transmission. This is a testament to Canberrans doing the right thing and following public health advice, including notifying ACT Health before returning from a COVID affected area, and quarantining and getting tested if required.

The number of tests undertaken in the 14 days to 1 July 2021 was greater than the previous 14 days, with the testing rate being above 2 tests per 1,000 population per day (2.43). This increase in testing rates is likely the result of the ongoing jurisdictional outbreaks and provides further confidence that the ACT would be able to detect a positive case if incursion from another jurisdiction was to occur.

No fragments of COVID-19 have been detected in ACT's wastewater in the last 14 days.

ACT Health is continuing to encourage all Canberrans to present for testing if experiencing any COVID-19 symptoms, no matter how mild, to ensure any positive cases in the community are quickly identified. Strong testing rates are crucial for ACT Health to maintain rigorous surveillance, closely monitor the situation and act quickly if a case is detected or new cases emerge in other jurisdictions.

## All COVID-19 tests for ACT Residents in the ACT by result date: all laboratories (as at 1 July 2021)



### The ACT community's response

The ACT is operating under 'COVID normal' restrictions. The efforts of the ACT community, including businesses, have been vital in slowing the spread of COVID-19. Businesses are asked to follow their COVID Safety Plans to support the safety of the community and their staff. For certain restricted businesses, venues and facilities, the use of the Check In CBR app is mandatory, and businesses must use their best endeavours to ensure people aged 16 years and over check-in (including staff). This enables ACT Health to quickly access patron information to alert people who may have been in contact with a person with COVID-19, if required.

The community is being reminded to continue to follow the health advice to help to keep our community safe. As we move through this next stage of the pandemic, we ask Canberrans to:

- Physically distance from other groups whenever possible
  - Continue good hand and respiratory hygiene
  - Use the Check In CBR app to check in when out and about
  - Stay home if unwell and get tested if experiencing any COVID-19 symptoms
  - Monitor travel advice
- Book your COVID-19 vaccination when you are eligible to protect yourself and the community.

### Conclusion

The ACT remains well placed in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic with no evidence of community transmission at this time despite a rise in cases in nearby NSW, and the ACT's testing rates continue to reflect the epidemiological situation.



Recent locally acquired cases in Australia linked to the outbreak in Greater Sydney continue to demonstrate the need for public health restrictions to remain in place to ensure jurisdictions can respond quickly and effectively to any new cases within the community.

The ACT's COVID-19 Vaccination Program is progressing well with eligibility widening to allow more Canberrans to receive their vaccination at one of the three ACT Government COVID-19 vaccination clinics or through participating GPs. The number of vaccination bookings provided will continue to depend on Commonwealth supply of vaccine to the ACT Government.

The continuing rise in cases across the world demonstrates the need for all jurisdictions in Australia to maintain a robust quarantine program for returning international travellers and a level of public health restrictions to mitigate the risk of a resurgence of COVID-19 cases. Australia continues to see periodic outbreaks and new cases detected in the community, demonstrating the need for vigilance.

The ACT, along with all jurisdictions, continues to focus on suppression with the goal of no community transmission. The ACT's focus is early detection of cases; preparedness to thoroughly investigate cases, clusters and outbreaks and ensure our workforce is equipped to surge when required; and public messaging to businesses and the community about the importance of continuing to practise COVID safe behaviours. COVID-normal restrictions remain in place and are an important component in reducing the risk of virus transmission in the ACT.

### **Recommendation**

As Chief Health Officer, I advise the Minister for Health that the public health emergency declaration should remain in place due to the public health risk posed by COVID-19. At this time, it remains necessary to maintain public health control measures to safeguard against a resurgence of COVID-19 cases in the ACT. This recommendation is consistent with that of other Australian jurisdictions which are maintaining emergency status or similar at this time and focusing on suppression with a goal of no community transmission.