

2020

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

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

18 AUGUST 2020

**Presented by
Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA
Minister for Health
20 August 2020**



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 – 18 AUGUST 2020

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 18 August 2020, is that the public health emergency declaration in the ACT should remain in place until 19 November 2020 to enable sufficient measures to remain in place, including those requiring mandatory quarantine for returned international travellers and for confirmed cases of COVID-19 to self-isolate.

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
ACT Health Directorate
18 August 2020

CHIEF HEALTH OFFICER REPORT ON THE STATUS OF THE PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY DUE TO COVID-19 – 18 AUGUST 2020

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 be extended for a further 90 days 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 travellers to undertake hotel quarantine and for confirmed cases of COVID-19 to self-isolate.

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

National situational update

As at 16 August 2020, there have been a total of 23,288 COVID-19 cases in Australia and 396 deaths. Over the past week, there has been an average of 318 new cases reported each day, with the majority reported in Victoria.

Victoria is experiencing widespread community transmission, with 3,478 cases that may indicate community transmission and 7,671 currently active cases. Deaths are being reported each day, with a peak of 25 deaths reported on 17 August 2020. Stage 4 restrictions are currently in place for metropolitan Melbourne and Stage 3 restrictions for regional Victoria. It is a requirement for Victorians to wear a mask when they leave the home.

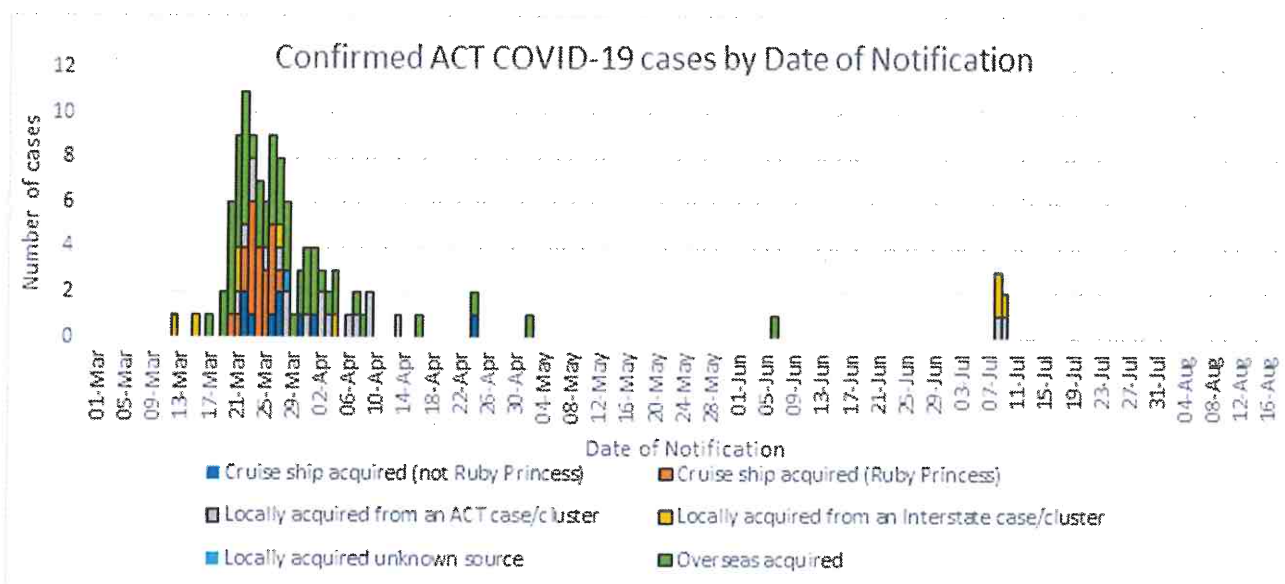
NSW is experiencing a small but steady number of daily cases, with an average of 75-80 cases per week over the past fortnight. Most recent cases have been linked to known clusters, with high testing rates and low case counts indicating limited community transmission.

ACT situational update

The ACT has recorded 113 COVID-19 cases and three deaths. As of 17 August 2020, there have been no COVID-19 cases notified in the ACT for 38 days and there are no active cases in the Territory.

ACT Health Directorate is monitoring the situation in NSW closely and updating its advice to ACT residents as required. Travel to Victoria is currently not permitted, except for absolutely essential reasons. The ACT implemented border restrictions with Victoria on 8 July 2020, restricting travel from Victoria to the ACT unless an exemption is granted by the ACT Chief Health Officer.

Since these measures came into place, ACT Health Directorate has received more than 2,900 exemption applications to enter the ACT and is currently managing around 400 people in quarantine (people returning from Victoria and overseas, as well as close contacts of confirmed cases) with support provided by ACT Health Directorate. Quarantine compliance is being monitored by ACT Policing.



Global situational update

The rate of cases and fatalities continue to accelerate in many regions of the world, with the World Health Organisation reporting a total of more than 21 million cases worldwide and over 750,000 deaths. A number of countries are experiencing a ‘second wave’ or resurgence of COVID-19 cases leading to the reintroduction of restrictions.

COVID-19 confirmed cases	Global ¹	Australia ²	ACT ³
Total confirmed	21,294,845	23,288	113
Total recovered	Not reported	14,080	110
Total deaths	761,779	396	3

1. https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20200816-covid-19-sitrep-209.pdf?sfvrsn=5dde1ca2_2 [access date 17 August 2020, data from 10:00 CEST, 16 August 2020]
2. <https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2020/08/coronavirus-covid-19-at-a-glance-16-august-2020.pdf> [access date 17 August 2020, data from 1500hrs 16 August 2020]
3. <https://www.covid19.act.gov.au/> [access date 17 August 2020, data from 09:00am 17 August 2020]

The ACT community’s response

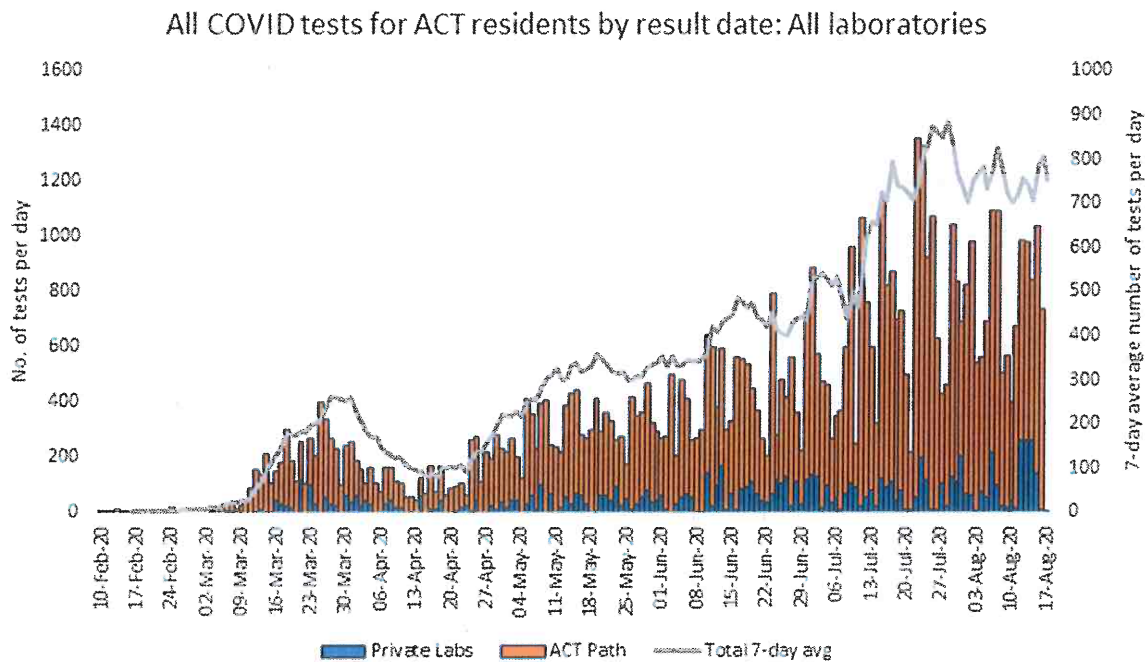
The efforts of the ACT community, including businesses, have been vital in slowing the spread of COVID-19. The continuation of these efforts, including following the public health advice and public health directions, is critical to control the spread of COVID-19 in the ACT. Businesses are being asked to follow their COVID Safety Plans to support the safety of the community and their staff. All members of the community are being reminded to:

- maintain physical distancing and avoid large gatherings
- practice good hand and respiratory hygiene
- stay home if unwell, and
- get tested if experiencing any COVID-19 symptoms.

Surveillance and monitoring

Testing numbers in the ACT are consistently high, with over 63,000 negative tests conducted to date (as at 14 August 2020). Increased demand for COVID-19 testing over recent months has seen three additional testing clinics opened in West Belconnen and Garran, and the commencement of a new drive-through facility in Kambah.

High rates of testing are essential to maintain rigorous surveillance and to closely monitor the situation as restrictions are eased. The community is being reminded to get tested if experiencing any of the common COVID-19 symptoms such as fever, cough, sore throat and shortness of breath.



Easing of restrictions

The ACT is in a good position which has enabled minor and cautious changes to restrictions for a small number of businesses and activities to recommence under strict COVID guidelines.

Step 3.1 of Canberra’s Recovery Plan commenced on 10 August 2020. This change has allowed for the opening of food courts for dine-in, casinos and gaming in clubs, steam-based services and adult services.

Restrictions were also eased in other settings, such as spectators at community sport activities, group bookings at bars, clubs and pubs, and the number of patrons allowed at gym and health club facilities when unstaffed.

Easing restrictions leads to a higher risk of a resurgence of COVID-19 cases. The impact of easing restrictions on COVID-19 case numbers in the ACT, as well as the impact of changes made in other jurisdictions, is being closely monitored to inform future decisions on easing restrictions. ACT Health Directorate is monitoring and assessing the impact of each step as public health control measures are gradually eased.

Conclusion

The continuing COVID-19 outbreaks in Victoria and ongoing community transmission serve as a strong reminder that the pandemic is not over. The Australian Health Protection Principal Committee advises that parts of Australia will continue to see cases and periodic outbreaks. The ACT is focusing on implementing risk mitigation measures in response to the outbreaks and continuing enhanced surveillance in the community and outbreak planning for at-risk settings.

The ACT's focus is early detection of cases; preparedness to thoroughly investigate cases, clusters and outbreaks; and public messaging to community and businesses around the importance of continuing to practise COVID safe behaviours. The community's continued adherence to health advice and public health directions remains critical to control the spread of COVID-19 in the ACT.

Recommendation

As Chief Health Officer, I advise the Minister for Health that the public health emergency declaration should remain in place for a further 90 days until 19 November 2020 due to the public health risk posed by COVID-19. It is necessary to maintain public health control measures to safeguard against a resurgence of COVID-19 cases in the ACT. All Australian jurisdictions are maintaining public health emergency status or similar at this time and continuing to focus on suppression of COVID-19.