

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 15 – 10 June 2021**

**Presented by
Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA
Minister for Health
22 June 2021**



ACT
Government

ACT Health

Ms Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA
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London Circuit
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Dear Minister

CHIEF HEALTH OFFICER REPORT ON THE STATUS OF THE PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY DUE TO COVID-19 – 10 JUNE 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 June 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 Kerryn Coleman
Chief Health Officer
ACT Health Directorate
10 June 2021

CHIEF HEALTH OFFICER REPORT ON THE STATUS OF THE PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY DUE TO COVID-19 – 10 JUNE 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 update¹

Globally, as at 10 June 2021, there have been 173,674,509 confirmed cases of COVID-19, and sadly 3,744,408 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.

National situational update²

As at 9:00am on 10 June 2021, there have been a total of 30,210 cases of COVID-19 reported in Australia and 910 deaths. Of the 80 positive cases reported nationally in the past week, 41 cases were overseas acquired, 27 cases locally acquired, and 12 cases are under investigation.

There are currently 133 active cases in Australia, with the majority of locally acquired cases reported in the last week associated with the Greater Melbourne outbreak.

Victoria situation

As of 9 June 2021, the Victorian Government has confirmed a total of 90 locally acquired cases linked to the Greater Melbourne outbreak. Genomic sequencing has linked most of these cases to an individual that acquired their infection in hotel quarantine in South Australia, reported on 11 May 2021, and then travelled to Victoria.

¹ <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/situation-reports> Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) Weekly Epidemiological Update and Weekly Operational Update, accessed 10 June 2021

² <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 – 10 June 2021, Australian Government Department of Health, accessed 10 June 2021

On 27 May 2021, the Victorian Government announced a state-wide 7-day 'circuit breaker', consisting of stay-at-home requirements and public health restrictions across the state. The ACT Government responded by implementing travel restrictions for anyone who left Victoria and entered the ACT after 11:59pm on 27 May 2021. 'Stay-at-home' requirements applied to anyone who was permitted to enter the ACT and mirrored Victoria's restrictions. Non-ACT residents who wanted to travel from Victoria to the ACT during this period required an approved exemption from ACT Health before being permitted to travel. In addition, anyone who had entered the ACT before these restrictions came into effect, and had been in Greater Melbourne in the preceding 14 days, was required to complete an online declaration form.

On 1 June 2021, NSW Health issued a public health alert regarding a confirmed case of COVID-19 from Victoria, who visited venues in the Shoalhaven and Goulburn LGAs and Jervis Bay Territory while infectious. NSW has, to date, not reported any new locally acquired cases. At the time of this report, there are three casual contacts from NSW exposure sites quarantining in the ACT.

On 2 June 2021, the Victorian Government announced that the 'circuit breaker' restrictions would be extended for Greater Melbourne for a further seven days and an eased set of restrictions would be implemented in regional Victoria. On 9 June 2021, the Victorian Government announced that from 11:59pm 10 June 2021, stay at home restrictions for Greater Melbourne will be eased, however a number of restrictions will remain in place, including that metropolitan Melbourne residents must not travel more than 25km from their home unless for work, education, care or getting vaccinated against COVID-19.

The ACT responded to this announcement by lifting stay-at-home requirements from 11.59pm on 10 June 2021 for anyone in the ACT who had travelled from Victoria. ACT Health advised that anyone seeking to travel from Victoria to the ACT must first ensure that they follow the Victorian Government's public health directions, and if permitted to travel, must complete an online declaration form 24 hours prior to arrival in the ACT.

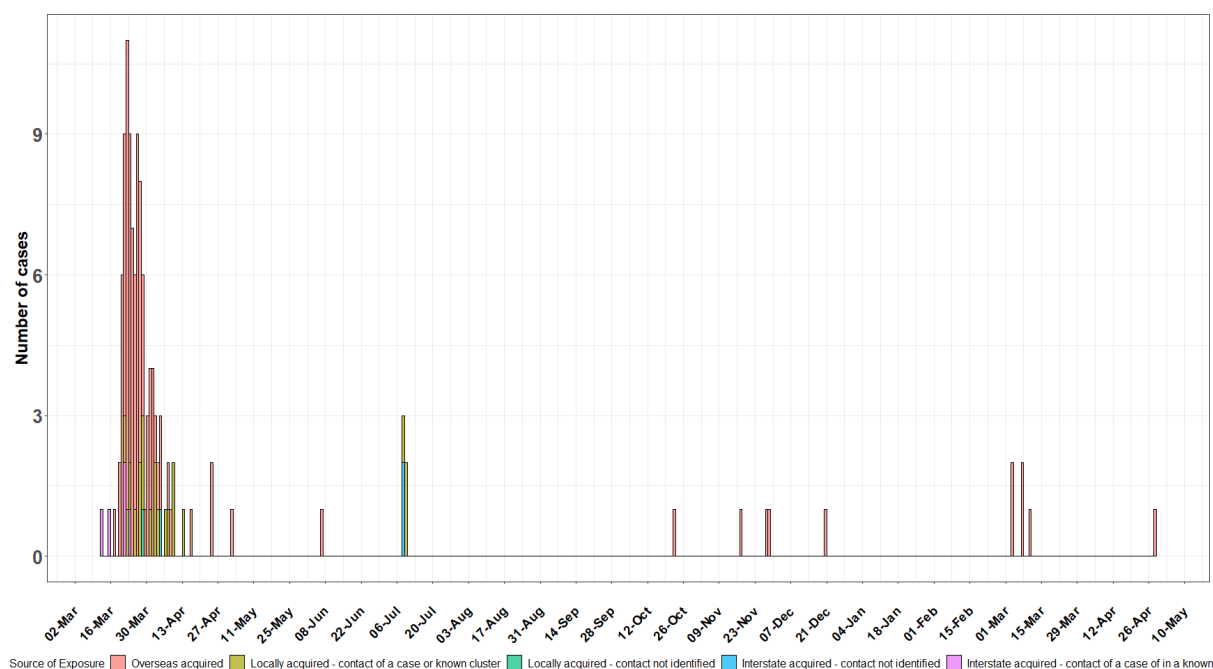
At the time of this report, there are six casual contacts in the ACT associated with the Victorian outbreak and 806 people in total have returned to the ACT and been subject to stay-at-home requirements. ACT Health has received a total of 8,871 self-declaration submissions since the restrictions have been in place.

On 9 June 2021, the Queensland Government reported a new positive case in a person who travelled to Queensland, via NSW, from Melbourne. A close contact of the first case also tested positive and a number of exposure sites have been identified. The ACT responded by advising people in the ACT who have been in NSW or Queensland in the last 14 days to check the COVID-19 Areas of Concern information on the ACT's COVID-19 website to see if they have visited a close or casual exposure locations during the dates and times specified, and follow the relevant health directions.

ACT situational update

As at 10 June 2021, there are no active COVID-19 cases in the ACT and there is no evidence of community transmission at this time. 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.

Confirmed ACT COVID-19 cases by date of notification (as at 3 June 2021)



The ACT continues to manage the frequent return of diplomats and government officials travelling to Canberra for official duties. As of 10 June 2021, there are 53 people in quarantine in the ACT, the majority of whom are returned international travellers consisting of diplomats, government officials and their family members. The ACT is also planning for the arrival of official delegations, including an official delegation of the Prime Minister of Australia which is scheduled to arrive in Canberra on 17 June 2021.

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.

To date, ACT Policing has issued six criminal infringements (fines to three businesses and three individuals), 15 cautions, and made one arrest 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 8,306 COVID-19 compliance inspections as at 23 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 23 May 2021, Health Protection Service’s COVID-19 Compliance Team has undertaken 5,237 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,

particularly from licensed venues, as well as complacency across the broader community with physical distancing advice.

As of 9 June 2021, there are more than 10,000 venues registered with Check in CBR. There have been more than 730,000 downloads of the app and more than 15.65 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. The Check In CBR app was recently improved to provide an add-on venue function which allows businesses to check-in patrons who are unable to do so themselves.

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.

At of 11.59pm on 9 June 2021, the total number of vaccine doses administered by the ACT Government is 59,586. In response to the Victorian outbreak, residential aged care workers were encouraged to get vaccinated at the Garran mass vaccination (Pfizer) clinic, regardless of age. The Chief Health Officer wrote directly to each residential aged care facility manager and officials conducted follow up phone calls to encourage greater uptake of vaccinations for their workforce. A new access and sensory COVID-19 vaccination clinic opened at Garran mass vaccination (Pfizer) clinic, to improve access for Canberrans with disability to better support individual needs.

The ACT Government's Garran COVID-19 mass vaccination clinic became a Pfizer only site from 3 May 2021. On the same day, the new Calvary Public Hospital COVID-19 vaccination clinic was opened to take bookings for the AstraZeneca vaccine. Subject to a consistent and regular supply, between the two dedicated ACT Government clinics there is capacity to provide more than 8,000 vaccination doses per week.

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.

ACT residents aged 50 or older also have the option of contacting participating general practices to book their appointment. Participating GP clinics are administering AstraZeneca to those persons eligible. More than 70 general practices and respiratory assessment clinics in the ACT are supporting the national rollout.

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.

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, use of the Check In CBR app is mandatory, and businesses must use their best endeavours to ensure people aged 16 years and over who are within the premises for 15 minutes or more 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.

Surveillance and monitoring

Testing numbers in the ACT continue to reflect the COVID-19 case situation across Australia with a total of 220,733 negative tests conducted as at 10 June 2021.

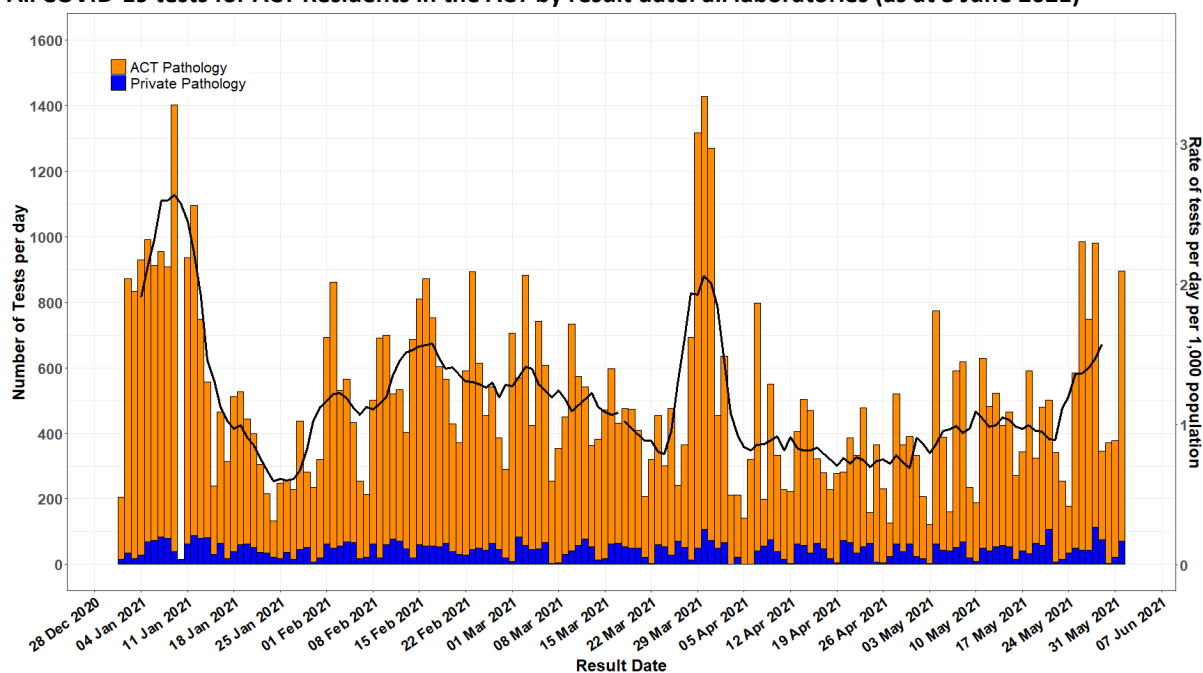
There have been no new cases of COVID-19 and no new evidence of community transmission. This is a testament to Canberrans doing the right thing and following public health advice, including notifying ACT Health before returning from a COVID affected area, and quarantining and getting tested if required.

The number of tests undertaken in the past 14 days is greater than the previous 14 days, with the testing rate being above 1 test per 1,000 population per day (1.32). This increase in testing rates is likely the result of the ongoing outbreak in Victoria.

No fragments of COVID-19 have been detected in ACT's wastewater in the last 30 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. It is crucial are crucial 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 3 June 2021)



Conclusion

The ACT remains well placed in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic with no evidence of community transmission at this time and testing rates continuing to reflect the epidemiological situation across Australia.

Recent locally acquired cases in Australia linked to the Greater Melbourne outbreak 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 two ACT Government COVID-19 vaccination clinics or through participating GPs. The ACT Government’s two COVID-19 vaccination clinics, the Garran COVID-19 mass vaccination clinic and the Calvary Public Hospital COVID-19 vaccination clinic are accepting an increasing number of vaccination bookings. 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.