

**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 14 – 11 May 2021**

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



**ACT**  
Government

**ACT Health**

Ms Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA  
Minister for Health  
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London Circuit  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Minister

**CHIEF HEALTH OFFICER REPORT ON THE STATUS OF THE PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY DUE TO COVID 19 – 11 MAY 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 11 May 2021, is that the public health emergency declaration in the ACT should be extended for a further 90 days until 16 August 2021 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.

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  
11 May 2021

# CHIEF HEALTH OFFICER REPORT ON THE STATUS OF THE PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY DUE TO COVID-19 – 11 MAY 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 be extended for a further 90 days, until 16 August 2021, 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.

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

As at 9:00am on 11 May 2021, there have been a total of 29,931 cases of COVID-19 reported in Australia and 910 deaths. Of the 84 positive cases reported nationally in the past week, 82 cases were overseas acquired, and two cases locally acquired.

### Western Australia situation

In Western Australia (WA), one new positive case was reported on 23 April 2021 in an international returned traveller who was released from hotel quarantine on 17 April 2021 after returning a negative COVID-19 test. WA health authorities confirmed that this case was the result of intra-hotel transmission between the individual and another person who had tested positive to COVID-19 staying in a nearby room. This individual spent five days in the community before travelling to Melbourne by plane on 21 April 2021. Upon his arrival in Melbourne, he was deemed by Victorian authorities to be a close contact of the WA hotel case and was subsequently required to enter quarantine where he returned a positive COVID-19 test result. Through initial contact tracing, WA authorities identified that a close contact of the individual also tested positive for COVID-19.

In response, the WA Government announced a three-day lockdown for the Perth and Peel regions from 12:01am 24 April 2021. Following this announcement, the ACT introduced new stay-at-home restrictions for anyone travelling from the Perth and Peel regions after 8am on 24 April. In addition, travellers who had been to an identified exposure site were subject to additional conditions, dependent on their individual situation, including potential quarantine, self-isolation, testing and exemption conditions.

The stay-at-home requirements in the ACT were lifted with effect from 2:00am on 27 April 2021 in line with WA.

However, in a separate incident, on 1 May 2021, the WA Government announced three new COVID-19 cases. The initial case was a security guard, contracted to work in a different

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert/coronavirus-covid-19-current-situation-and-case-numbers> Coronavirus (COVID-19) at a glance – 10 May 2021, Australian Government Department of Health, accessed 10 May 2021

quarantine hotel, and was subsequently found to have been infected by a returned international traveller. Two of this individual's close contacts also tested positive. WA determined that a lockdown was not necessary at that time but introduced mandatory mask wearing indoors and outdoors and further tightened some gathering restrictions.

In response to this incident, the ACT updated its restrictions for travellers from the Perth and Peel regions commencing from 6.00pm on Sunday 2 May 2021.

The ACT reintroduced the requirement for an online declaration to be completed for anyone who had been in the Perth or Peel regions in the past 14 days who had not already completed the declaration since they were last in those regions.

As a result of the three additional cases, many new casual and close contact locations were identified, and any person affected was required to follow additional conditions, including quarantine, testing and exemption requirements.

To date, ACT Health has received a total of 111 exemption applications from people wanting to travel from WA to the ACT. 47 exemptions have been approved and 45 exemption applications have been withdrawn as they were not required under the Public Health Direction.

ACT Health is currently advising anyone in the ACT who is considering travel to WA to monitor the situation carefully, keep up to date with the latest public health advice and be prepared to comply with any restrictions in place, noting that situations can change quickly.

#### New South Wales situation

On 5 May 2021, NSW announced a new COVID-19 case in a Sydney resident who had not recently travelled overseas and does not work in a hotel quarantine, border or health setting. Genomic sequencing linked the case to a returned international traveller who had tested positive while undertaking quarantine at the Sydney Health Accommodation facility. NSW Health is investigating a possible missing link in transmission as there is no known link between the new case and the hotel quarantine case. As at 10 May 2021, this missing link has not been identified.

One household contact tested positive on 6 May 2021. The individuals had visited several locations in Sydney while potentially infectious.

Focused restrictions have been put in place within the ACT, which requires anyone who has attended any of the NSW exposure locations at the dates and times specified to immediately get tested, quarantine for 14 days from the time they were there, and contact ACT Health. ACT Health also requires anyone who has attended a source investigation location at the dates and times specified must get tested for COVID-19 and self-isolate until a negative test result is received.

Non-ACT residents who have been to a close contact exposure location must not enter the ACT unless they obtain an exemption before arriving. ACT residents who have been in a close contact exposure location and wish to return home should call ACT Health. Anyone who has recently travelled to Sydney is also being asked to continue to review the list of exposure locations and to follow the advice provided.

## Victoria situation

In Victoria, a new case of COVID-19 was reported on 11 May 2021 in an international returned traveller who was released from hotel quarantine in South Australia on 4 May 2021, after returning a negative test result. This individual travelled home to Melbourne, Victoria on 4 May 2021, developed symptoms on 8 May 2021 and presented for testing on 10 May 2021. Victorian Health authorities believe that this case was infectious from 6 May 2021 and as a result, a list of exposure locations has been published on the Victorian Health website.

In response to this new case, the ACT has implemented restrictions that require anyone who has attended any of the Victorian Tier One close contact exposure locations at the dates and times listed to immediately get tested, quarantine for 14 days from the time they were there, and contact ACT Health. Anyone who has attended any of the Victorian Tier Two casual contact exposure locations at the dates and times listed is required to get tested and self-isolate until they receive a negative test result.

Similar to the restrictions in place for WA and NSW, non-ACT residents who have been to a close contact exposure location in Victoria must not enter the ACT unless they obtain an exemption before arriving. ACT residents who have been in a Victorian close contact exposure location and wish to return home should call ACT Health. Anyone who has recently travelled to Melbourne is also being asked to continue to review the list of exposure locations and to follow the advice provided.

ACT Health will monitor the situation in Victoria as further information is obtained and amend travel restrictions if required.

### **ACT situational update**

As at 11 May 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.

The ACT is continuing to manage the frequent return of diplomats and government officials travelling to Canberra for official duties. As at 10 May 2021, there are 30 persons in quarantine in the ACT, the majority of whom are diplomats and government officials, and their family members.

One new positive case was recorded in a diplomat who arrived in Australia on 25 April 2021 and entered home quarantine in the ACT on the same date. A total of three close contacts were identified and required to quarantine for 14 days. To date, all three close contacts have returned negative COVID-19 test results. The positive case has since recovered and has been cleared to leave isolation.

The Health Protection Service, Access Canberra and ACT Policing are continuing to undertake compliance and enforcement activity across the ACT community. Compliance activities are currently focussed on supporting the use of the Check In CBR App and maximum occupancy compliance, particularly since the use of the app was made 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 8,108 COVID-19 compliance inspections as at 2 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 2)*, including the mandated use of the Check In CBR app.

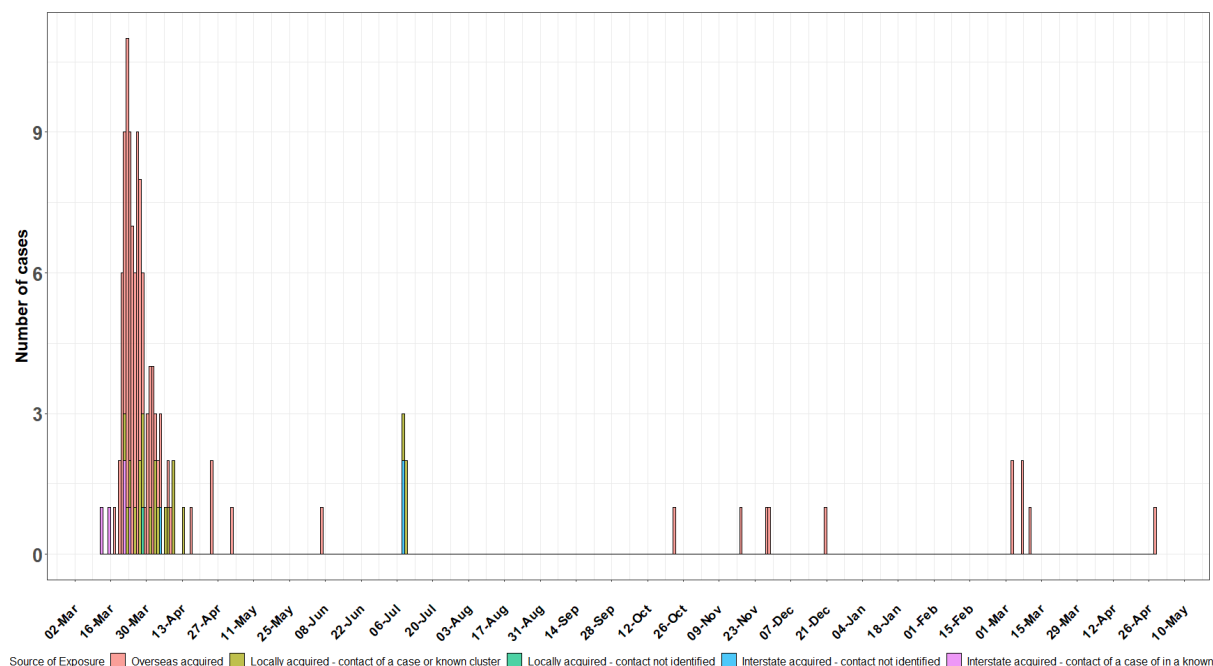
As at 2 May 2021, Health Protection Service’s COVID-19 Compliance Team has undertaken 5,109 food related inspections. No warning letters were issued during the reporting period 26 April 2021 to 2 May 2021.

The rate of compliance with public health directions across the ACT continues to remain 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 at 10 May 2021, more than 10,000 venues in the ACT are registered with the Check In CBR app, there have been more than 650,000 downloads of the app and more than 12.1 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.

Health Protection Services, Access Canberra and ACT Policing will continue to undertake compliance and enforcement activity to help protect the community as the pandemic response continues.

**Confirmed ACT COVID-19 cases by date of notification (as at 6 May 2021)**



## **Global situational update**

Globally, as at 10 May 2021, there have been 157,973,438 confirmed cases of COVID-19, including 3288,455 deaths, reported to the World Health Organization. Internationally, new COVID-19 cases have continued to rise with over five million cases reported in the past week. The largest increases in case incidence are in India, Brazil, the United States of America, Turkey and France.

## **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'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.

As at 11:59pm on 10 May 2021, a total of 34,757 vaccinations have been administered through the ACT Government's COVID-19 vaccination clinics.

The ACT's COVID-19 vaccination clinics are administering vaccinations to identified priority groups under Phases 1a, 1b and 2a in line with the re-calibrated national rollout strategy. Under the recalibration, any one aged 50 years and over is now eligible for vaccination as a result of Phase 2a commencing earlier than initially planned.

The ACT Government Vaccination Clinics are now live on the Australian Government's Vaccine Eligibility Checker and eligible Canberrans, in phases 1a, 1b, and the 2a cohort brought forward, 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 also have the option of contacting participating general practices to book their appointment. Participating GP clinics will commence administering AstraZeneca to those now eligible under 2a, persons aged 50 years and over, from 17 May onwards. More than 70 ACT general practices and respiratory assessment clinics are supporting the national rollout.

The ACT's priority continues to be the delivery of a safe, efficient and targeted vaccination program and we will continue to work closely with the Australian 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 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 203,050 negative tests conducted as at 10 May 2021.

While the number of tests undertaken in the 14-day period from 22 April 2021 to 6 May 2021 was higher than the previous 14 days, the testing rate is still below 1 test per 1,000 population (0.80). Since January 2021, testing rates overall have decreased across all age groups. These changes appear to be independent of sex.

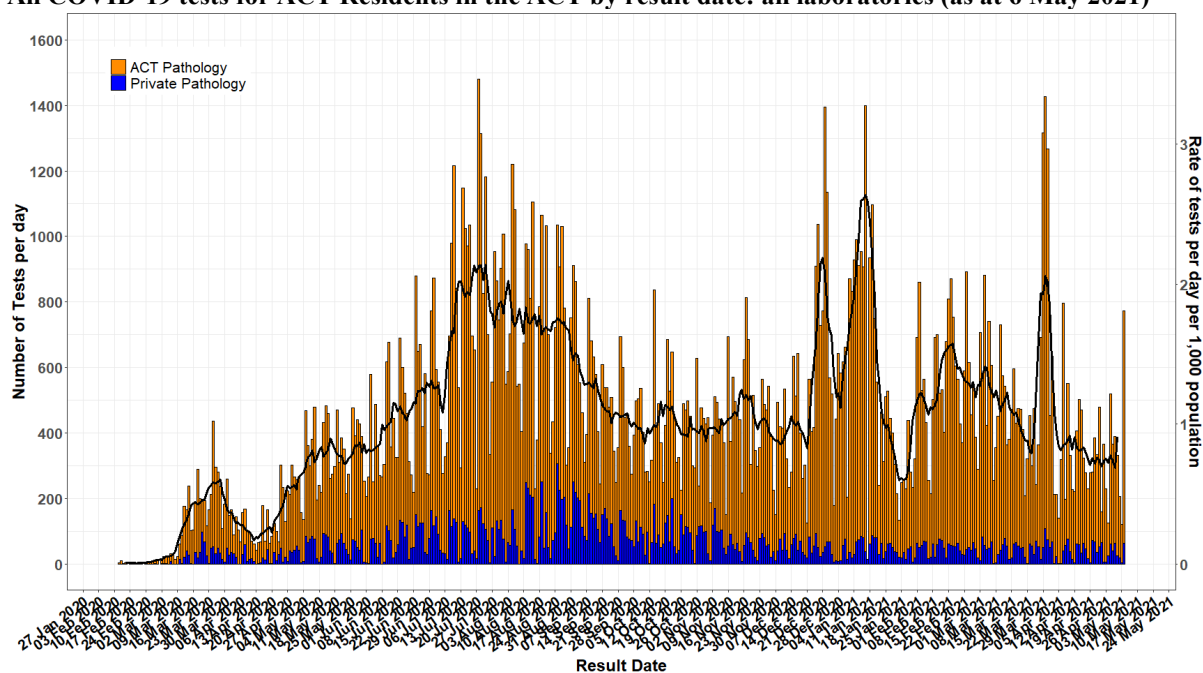
Of the total number of tests conducted in the past month, there have been no new cases of COVID-19 and no new evidence of community transmission. This is a testament to Canberrans doing the right thing and following public health advice, including notifying ACT Health before returning from a COVID affected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

There have been no COVID-19 fragments detected in ACT's ongoing wastewater surveillance program in the past 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. It is 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 6 May 2021)



### Conclusion

The ACT is well placed in our response 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 Western Australia and New South Wales 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 the ACT Government now operating two COVID-19 vaccination clinics, the Garran COVID-19 mass vaccination clinic and the Calvary Public Hospital COVID-19 vaccination clinic. Vaccination bookings and the capacity to administer vaccine doses remains strong with Canberrans eligible under Phases 1a and 1b as well as the brought forward 2a priority group able to receive their vaccinations at one of the two ACT Government COVID-19 vaccination clinics or through participating GPs.

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 third wave of COVID-19. AHPPC advises that Australia will continue to see new cases and periodic outbreaks. The recent community acquired cases detected in NSW demonstrate the likelihood of positive cases emerging within the community outside of a contained hotel quarantine setting.

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 community and businesses around 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 be extended for a further 90 days until 16 August 2021 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. The Australian Government extended the Australian Biosecurity Declaration for a further three months until 17 September 2021. Each state and territory is maintaining emergency status or similar at this time to uphold critical public health control measures which focus on suppressing the virus with a goal of no community transmission.