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**AMA BACKS EARLY VACCINE AND BOLSTERED INTERNATIONAL ARRIVALS TESTING AND SCREENING**

Today’s National Cabinet decisions, including the accelerated rollout of the initial Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine, will help protect those most at risk of infection until a population-wide vaccine is available, AMA President, Dr Omar Khorshid, said.

“The appearance of the new UK strain of COVID-19 in Queensland shows the need to act quickly to head off any further outbreaks,” Dr Khorshid said.

“This UK strain appears to be a greater risk of breaking out of hotel quarantine, and then spreading quickly to outrun and overwhelm our last lines of defence - physical distancing and testing and tracing.

“It must be stopped before it enters the community, and we commend the Queensland Government for taking strong, fast action, and National Cabinet for backing those actions.

“The three-day lockdown across Brisbane and other south-east Queensland regions may not be popular. Nor may the stricter quarantine rules, and the testing of passengers before they board a plane to Australia.

“But we have seen in the past that decisive action, taken early, is the best way to stop this wicked enemy.”

The AMA welcomes the accelerated timeframe for the rollout of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, and the assurances that normal approval processes are being carried out.

“These processes will reassure the community that these are the safe vaccines that they appear to be,” Dr Khorshid said.

“The Therapeutic Goods Administration is yet to sign off on final approval for the Pfizer vaccine, and this process cannot be rushed.

“However, the initial rollout of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine to the highest priority groups- those that are most likely to be exposed to or become severely ill- will give them protection from infection.

“While this first phase must be delivered through hospitals only, given the storage and supply constraints, the AMA will continue to work with the Australian Government on the next, much more extensive phase of vaccination of the wider population.

“It is not a particular vaccine that will save us, but the safe and effective vaccination of the whole community that will protect us all.

“The second phase, whichever vaccine is decided upon, must harness the long recognised expertise of GPs in delivering safe vaccinations in a medically-appropriate environment, not shopping centres or discount outlets.

“GPs have a proven record in delivering vaccinations safely and effectively to their patients. This includes care in following pre and post vaccination processes, such as the high standards in recording of vaccinations.

“This will be critical because several COVID-19 vaccines are likely to be used and all those currently in development will require multiple doses, which will require careful on the Australian Immunisation Register.”

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