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Transcript: AMA President, Dr Omar Khorshid, Nine Network, *Today with Karl Stefanovic and Allison Langdon*, Monday, 1 February 2021

Subject: Western Australian COVID lockdown

KARL STEFANOVIC: Well, for the first time in almost 10 months, Perth has recorded its first case of community transmission, a hotel security guard contracting the virus.

ALLISON LANGDON: The positive infection sending the city into a five-day lockdown and borders across the country snapping shut to WA. Let's bring in President of the Australian Medical Association, Dr Omar Khorshid, in Perth. Doctor, thanks for your time. We know that more than two million people have been given stay at home orders until 6pm Friday. In your mind, is that the right response?

OMAR KHORSHID: Look, it's always been the strategy of the WA Government to rely on the border and let the public do what they want. And with no social distancing going on really at all in WA, it's imperative that this snap lockdown be brought in to give the contact tracers enough time to get out to all those places this chap has been to and see whether any Western Australians have picked up, potentially, this new transmissible UK strain of the virus.

KARL STEFANOVIC: Look, you're not going to find too many complaining about it, I'm sure, in WA, like Queensland, it's about preserving way of life almost, isn't it? We'll all know by Tuesday if the hotel worker has the UK strain of the virus, as you just mentioned. What difference does that make? And how much more serious is that?

OMAR KHORSHID: Well, it's just the chance of it spreading faster. It's probably not any more dangerous than the normal versions of COVID but, given that we've had most of the population doing normal stuff, and this chap has been to many locations around the city, there's a chance that there are actually already tens or even hundreds of West Australians who have the virus if he's one of these super spreaders. That's why it's absolutely imperative that anybody with any symptoms at all goes and gets tested. And, of course, those who've been to the hot spot locations already have been instructed to go and get a test.

ALLISON LANGDON: If we look at previous outbreaks, pretty much they've been all linked to hotel quarantine. We know the risks. When we then hear – and of course, this isn't on this person - having a second job, working as a ride share driver, visiting a lot of different places. Do we need to do be doing more to really lock up hotel quarantine and make that safer?

OMAR KHORSHID: We do. This was completely predictable, and we've been saying for months that WA was just one day away from this kind of lockdown. The quarantine is the front line of our border; it is at the core of the strategy preventing COVID getting into Australia, and that means the quarantine arrangements have got to be as tight as they can be. And I think the governments have learned along the way, and Victoria now has probably got the gold standard hotel quarantine because of the disaster there, and WA needs to move in the same direction.

KARL STEFANOVIC: So, if I'm in WA, I'm in Perth right now, I think Mark McGowan's done a terrific job, however, when I hear this has happened, when everyone around Australia knows what happened in Victoria, knows what happened in other parts of the country, that it has happened in Perth now would infuriate me. What needs to happen now to stop it happening again?

OMAR KHORSHID: Look, I think Western Australians are in shock today. We've been living in this little bubble, thinking that we're almost immune from the virus and we've been heaping

our praise on Mark McGowan. So now, his challenge is to: number one, get on top of this incident, make sure it doesn't turn into a disaster; but then to lock down the hotel quarantine, as well as look at other alternatives, if there are any, to hotel quarantine, or even just to moving the people who are infected with COVID to a more secure location. There's a number of different steps that could be taken that have not been taken here in WA.

Another one is personal protective equipment. It seems this virus may be transmitted more easily, could it be that it's aerosol spread and we need better masks for these hotel quarantine workers? Those sort of steps are cheap, they're easy, and they haven't yet been made, and I think West Australians will be asking now why haven't they.

ALLISON LANGDON: Are you pretty confident this five-day lockdown is going to be enough to get on top of this, and quickly?

OMAR KHORSHID: The five-day lockdown will tell us what's happening, but if there has already been spread, it won't be five days, this lockdown, it will be significantly longer because you've then got to go to the people who test positive, to their contacts, to work out where they have been. So it rolls out as we've seen in every other State. So the real test will be these five days. Does anybody test positive? If they do, we are in for a much longer battle here in Western Australia.

KARL STEFANOVIC: Good on you, Doctor. Thanks for being with us. Challenging times ahead now for everyone in WA.

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