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AMA URGES NRL TO BE A GOOD SPORT AND LISTEN TO THE MEDICAL ADVICE

The AMA is urging the NRL, in the best interests of its players, coaches and officials, fans, and the broader community, to be cautious about its plans to fast track the restart of its 2020 season.

The NRL and its broadcasters have set a restart date of 28 May.

But across the world, all major sporting competitions remain on hold, and the Tokyo Olympics have been suspended for a full year.

AMA President, Dr Tony Bartone, said today that the AMA is cautioning the NRL and all sporting codes about rushing to start or restart competitions, and wait until the medical experts advise it is safe to do so.

“Sport is a big part of the Australian way of life, and the absence of sporting events is obviously affecting many people,” Dr Bartone said.

“We understand the financial and other pressures on the big sporting codes during the COVID-19 crisis, but we have to put the broader public health implications first.”

Dr Bartone said that all sports bodies must recognise the expertise of the AHPPC (Australian Health Protection Principal Committee), which will now be working with relevant State Governments advising on how and when the NRL could and should resume its competition.

“Any discussions and decisions about return to play before that advice is received is premature,” Dr Bartone said.

“There must be absolutely no risk to the health of players, officials, support staff, or anyone involved with the possible resumption of the NRL competition, including the fans and the general public.

“This includes the movement of squads of players from New Zealand and between States, and the behaviour of players in obeying safe distancing requirements.

“In recent days, we have seen a handful of elite sports people ignoring social distancing rules.

“These examples raise serious questions about the ability of all players to fully comply with requirements that are likely to be part of return to play, and a resumption of competitions.

“The rules on mass gatherings are designed to stop the spread of a deadly disease, and must be followed if we expect to see sport and other communal activities back as part of the everyday life of Australians.

“While we may see a return to some sports competitions over coming months, it is unlikely that fans will be able to attend the events in person, or even gather in large groups, to watch sporting events.

“AFL, the rugby codes, basketball, and some other sports involve close contact. There is not yet available a type of rapid testing that can check every player, every day.

“Until we have such equipment, or the spread of COVID-19 is deemed contained enough to lift the restrictions on mass gatherings, sporting codes should play it safe.

“The medical resources needed for general population should not be diverted for sport.

“The AMA thanks everyone involved in sport in Australia – the clubs, the administrators, the broadcasters, commentators, the coaches, officials, the players, and the fans – for doing their bit to help get Australia through the coronavirus pandemic.

“We understand how difficult these restrictions are on your lives and your livelihoods and your love of the game.

“As a team, we can see this through.”

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