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AMA CALLS FOR PAUSE IN EASING OF NATIONWIDE COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS UNTIL MELBOURNE HOTSPOTS ARE UNDER CONTROL

The AMA is today calling for a temporary pause in the easing of COVID-19 restrictions in all States and Territories until there are clear signs and evidence that the spikes in new coronavirus cases in Melbourne hotspots are under control.

There were 108 new cases yesterday, leading to stay-at-home orders for two additional postcodes and thousands of people, and a ‘hard lockdown’ for nine public housing towers, affecting around 3,000 people. This is on top of 10 postcodes affecting 300,000 plus residents already announced.

AMA President, Dr Tony Bartone, said that the new outbreaks in Melbourne, including yesterday’s second highest ever daily increase in coronavirus cases for Victoria, are a stark reminder that the battle against COVID is far from over, and that we all need to learn to live with the virus in our community.

“These new outbreaks send a strong signal that the other States should rethink the pace of easing of their COVID-19 restrictions until community transmission in Melbourne is under control to avoid the risk of a similar situation playing out in their own communities,” Dr Bartone said.

“We all want to get our lives back to normal, but it has to be a gradual and cautious process – and it must be with strict adherence to the medical advice and public health guidelines.

“All our governments are dealing with the enormous challenge of protecting the public health and generating economic activity to protect businesses and jobs – and in an ideal world allow people to return to everyday social activity and interaction in the safest possible environment.

“But as pubs and restaurants open up to more people, as the restart of elite and community sporting events picks up, and as the return to workplaces for thousands of workers accelerates nationally, the COVID-19 spikes in Melbourne are a warning for all Australians how quickly virus outbreaks can occur anywhere in the country.

“It is a stark reality check of how rapidly things can change. The disappointing reality is that the problems in Melbourne’s hotspots are directly linked to failures to follow established and successful public health guidelines.

“Against the expert medical advice, we have seen a range of failures relating to family and social events not following physical distance requirements, numerous quarantine breaches, and the irresponsible actions from elite sportsmen.

“The AFL breaches are worrying as all the Victorian teams now seek to relocate to interstate hubs. The AFL teams were given privileged exemptions, with strict guidelines, but some players have disrespected these privileges and then sought to plead exceptional circumstances in their defence.

“We all can and must do better. Australians should not rush back to pre-COVID ways. We have to do more to protect ourselves and each other. The virus will be with us for many months. We must all continue to follow physical distance and hygiene protections, and not become complacent.

“Before rushing back to the pub, the footy crowds, or the big weddings and parties, Australia should pause and play it safe until the Melbourne hotspots are back under control.”

5 July 2020

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