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Transcript: AMA President, Dr Tony Bartone, Nine, *Today Show with Karl Stefanovic and Allison Langdon*, Tuesday, 11 February 2020

Subject: Coronavirus

KARL STEFANOVIC: Well, the number of coronavirus cases on board a luxury cruise ship quarantined off the coast of Japan has spiked, with four Australians among 66 new passengers testing positive.

ALLISON LANGDON: This comes as the death toll rises to more than 900 globally, with 40,000 people now infected. Dr Tony Bartone from the Australian Medical Association joins us now.

Tony, thanks for your time this morning. As we just heard, more confirmed cases on the Diamond Princess. The number of Australians infected now stands at 11. Does this mean that the quarantine isn't working?

TONY BARTONE: No, it doesn't, and good morning to you, Ally and to your viewers. It means, obviously, the incubation period being what it is, the day these people before the quarantine was in place, that they were obviously in close proximity, close contact, and that's why we're having that 14-day quarantine period to see the evolution and the coming out of anyone who was infected. So that's what these numbers show. The close proximity and the reasons why the quarantine was put in place in the first place.

ALLISON LANGDON: Well, Doctor, we're hearing reports this morning that the incubation period could in fact be 28 days, not 14.

TONY BARTONE: Well, it's true, Ally, that we are learning more about this virus as we go along all the time. And that information gathering will obviously inform our recommendations, our guidelines. At the moment, the best information we've got is that it is 14 days. We've had cases in Australia where people who were diagnosed with that virus have now been cured. They've eliminated the virus from their system and they've returned back to the community. So, on the balance of past information and current observable information, 14 days is the recommended period. But, of course, the information is being collated and some of that changes in a real time manner.

KARL STEFANOVIC: Gee, I tell you what, it sounds like there's an awful lot that's not known, isn't there, about this virus. We're just trying to keep up with it.

TONY BARTONE: Well, Karl, you're- in that respect, you're right. Because basically still they're trying to identify where it crossed over from the animal species that it came from. It's thought to be a bat coronavirus. There's a team of WHO researchers going into the epicentre to try and identify exactly how it evolved. That information will add to the ...

KARL STEFANOVIC: [Interrupts] And you're relying on China to give you that information and the world health authority. I mean, look, I think they're having a nightmare at

the moment, the world health authority. I mean, the flow of information from China, through to them, through to us, it's an absolute shemozzle.

TONY BARTONE: It's clear that there's been some areas where the information hasn't flowed as best as it could have. It's why Australian authorities have taken such a cautious approach right from the beginning, and why we've seen the relatively few number of cases that we have here in Australia.

KARL STEFANOVIC: Okay. British Airways, just on that, British Airways has announced this morning it will be cutting flights from Beijing and Shanghai. Given the fact that we don't know much about- or there's a lot of information we don't know about this virus, and the incubation may be increased now, would it not be prudent that we all stop these flights coming in and out of those particular areas for the time being?

TONY BARTONE: Well, the Australian Government made the announcement the weekend before last about the travel advisory, the highest level advisory going to China. In terms of many commercial airlines, they've stopped flying flights out of China. The quarantine that we've put in place and the fact that visas won't be issued to people coming out who have travelled through China in the last 14 days, they're some of the measures that are already in place to try and protect and minimise the possibility of spread in this country.

ALLISON LANGDON: Dr Bartone, if we look at the deaths from coronavirus, I mean, they're pretty much all in China. No-one has died here or has even been really that sick. Why is that?

TONY BARTONE: Look, one of the reasons, I suppose, is that people who are travelling tend to be well in the beginning, in the first place. Whereas the people that have suffered the significant complications and unfortunately have been killed by this virus, are people with other pre-existing conditions: asthma, lung conditions, diabetes, heart disease. So they're already at a disadvantage when trying to fight off this new coronavirus.

ALLISON LANGDON: Okay. Well. Doctor, obviously we'll stay across this. There's much more to learn about the coronavirus. We appreciate your time this morning.

TONY BARTONE: Thank you very much.

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