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Transcript: AMA President, Dr Tony Bartone, Nine Network, *Today with Karl Stefanovic and Allison Langdon*, Friday, 12 June 2020

Subject: COVID-19 and large public gatherings

ALLISON LANGDON: Well, a protester who attended last weekend's Black Lives Matter rally in Melbourne's CBD - along with 10,000 other people - has now tested positive to coronavirus. It comes after the President of the Australian Medical Association, Dr Tony Bartone, asked everyone who attended to self-isolate. And that was a view that was later rejected by our Chief Medical Officers.

Dr Tony Bartone joins us now in Melbourne. A very good morning to you, Doctor. So this man, he developed symptoms on Sunday, would he have been contagious at that rally?

TONY BARTONE: Good morning, Ally, and thanks for having me on. Yes, there is quite the possibility that he may have been infectious at the rally on the Saturday. We know that people who develop symptoms can be infectious in that asymptomatic period about a day or so beforehand, before developing the symptoms.

So, that was the risk that we were concerned about. And indeed, this is a message to all the people who did attend the rally, that if they see any symptoms to immediately self-isolate, get themselves tested. And, you know, we went one step further to say that, in the abundance of caution, anyone who did attend the rally should consider distancing themselves from the rest of the community for that two-week period, that incubation period for the coronavirus.

ALLISON LANGDON: That was shot down by the Chief Medical Officers and, look, it is really tough to criticise them, because they have done an extraordinary job through a very tough time. But do you think they could have handled this better?

TONY BARTONE: I'm not here to gloat or criticise anyone, Ally. I expressed a view, it was a view considered on the evidence, and also on an abundance of caution. It's that abundance of caution that's really helped us through this significant first wave of COVID-19. There is no right or wrong. We've had to write those guidelines as we found out more and more about the virus as we went along. It was a novel virus. We got the information and we put out the guidelines along the way.

This is about following the message at least, and the clear message from all health authorities before the rallies was not to attend. Not because of the nature, the cause behind the rallies, of course we stand with those that did attend the rallies on those issues - we totally acknowledge that.

But we said that any mass gathering - be it on a ship, at a football game, in any location - was going to put at risk all the hard-won gains that we'd already achieved as a community in trying to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic.

ALLISON LANGDON: Alright, well, this man, he was wearing a mask - hopefully that helps. But I mean, my fear is with these protests is that they don't help, they're actually going to harm the cause. More organised for this weekend. Just very quickly, your advice to those planning on attending?

TONY BARTONE: My advice is simply listen to the advice of all our health authorities. Very clearly - please stay away. Find another way of supporting the cause, but not by putting yourself and other members of the public, and indeed the rest of the community, at risk by the potential of a mini-outbreak or a second wave, which we know is happening in many other parts of the world as we speak.

ALLISON LANGDON: Okay. So don't go. Good advice there. Thanks, Doctor.

TONY BARTONE: Thank you.

12 June 2020

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