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Transcript: AMA President, Dr Tony Bartone, Seven, *Sunrise*, Thursday, 19 March 2020

Subject: Coronavirus testing kits

DAVID KOCH: Now, Australia's fight against COVID-19 could soon face a new challenge: a shortage of testing kits. Doctors say they've become a precious resource which must be rationed, as manufacturers warn they could run out of the overseas materials needed to make them within two months. For more, I'm joined by the President of the Australian Medical Association, Dr Tony Bartone.

Tony, good to see you again. How concerned are you about this shortage of test kits?

TONY BARTONE: Thanks again, Kochie. Look, very concerned, of course we are. And that's why we're very clear about who are the people that need to be tested. It's not about anyone with a cold symptom that has no direct exposure to overseas travel recently or any direct contact with a confirmed case. We need to appropriately limit the use of those testing kits to the people most at risk of coming up with a positive diagnosis.

At the moment, it's about a one per cent case finding on those testings. So that means for every hundred we're doing, we're only getting about one positive, which shows us that we're testing roughly the right amount of people.

Ideally, we'd love to test more, but we've got to be very cautious and very precious about a very limited resource. Remember, three months ago, we didn't even have a test. Now, 200,000 people around the world have had that test at least once. And so it's of course no surprise that it's scarce and we're running low. But the Government is looking at some novel new measures - additional different tests - to help us at the front line, and they are hopefully just days away.

DAVID KOCH: Okay. So, everyone's scared about this, understandably. So, when should you go and ask for a test? Is it just when you get a sore throat? Because people are panicking a bit, aren't they?

TONY BARTONE: And look, in the clinic, yesterday, the day before, it was quite palpable, the level of anxiety in my patients, the concern, they're frightened. They've got that look of blankness in their eyes, say doc, tell me, what do I need to know? But this is what you need to know: if you've been overseas in the last 14 days and/or you've been in contact and you've got symptoms, the sore throat, the fever, the cough, the chest symptoms, the shortness of breath, you need to have a test.

DAVID KOCH: Okay. Should we be comforted by the fact that, at the moment, the mortality rate - we've tragically had six deaths from almost 600 cases - one per cent seems to be a lot lower than other Asian countries are experiencing.

TONY BARTONE: Look, that's a question obviously that when we look back, we'll find out whether that is a reflective number. We're learning about this virus all the time. We're getting more and more information. Some places clearly with higher rates are showing- are actually of a result of not testing enough. So, I think that we're in line with some of the numbers that we've seen.

South Korea's got a lower reported death rate, but they were testing hundreds of thousands of people, so potentially much lower, negative rates. So that's really, I think, what we'll find when we look back.

DAVID KOCH: Okay. Alright, testing is the key. Thank you, Tony.

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