

Statement

The Hon James Merlino MP
Acting Premier
Minister for Education
Minister for Mental Health



Wednesday, 2 June 2021

STATEMENT FROM THE ACTING PREMIER

We now have 60 local cases and more than 350 exposure sites. And a variant of the virus that is quicker and more contagious than we've seen before.

To date, the approach has been to track the spread through friends, family and workmates. People spending time together for minutes and hours – not seconds.

What we're seeing now is something else – something even more serious. At least one in ten current cases have caught this virus from a stranger.

People brushing against each other in a small shop. Getting a take-away coffee from the same cafe. Being in the same place, at the same time for mere moments.

Just walking past someone you've never met can mean the virus is jumping to a whole new network.

And when you don't know someone – you don't know their name or where they live – you're looking for one person in 6.6 million.

The best way to stop the virus is vaccination. But as we know, with only two per cent of the population fully vaccinated – if we let this thing run then cases will explode.

If that happens, it's our most vulnerable – our parents and grandparents, Victorians with underlying conditions or compromised immunity – who will pay the price.

It's why, on the advice of Chief Health Officer Brett Sutton, the current restrictions will remain in place in Melbourne for a further seven days, with some small changes.

This will give us a full 14 days – one full cycle of the virus – to make sure we understand how and where this mutation is moving.

For Melbourne, there will still be only five reasons to leave home: shopping for food and supplies, authorised work and study, care and caregiving, exercise, and getting vaccinated. People will be able to travel further for exercise and shopping, with an expanded 10km radius.

Kids in Year 11 and 12 will return to face-to-face learning. That includes students in other year levels who are doing a Unit 3/4 VCE or VCAL subject, while that class is being taught.

And a number of outdoor jobs will be added to the authorised list – things like landscaping, painting, installing solar panels, or letterboxing.

Other restrictions – including mask wearing – will stay the same.

We know this will have a big impact on businesses, which is why we'll be extending our financial support, with an additional \$209 million in grants.

At the end of another seven days, we want to be in a position to begin carefully easing restrictions for Melbourne.

But I need to be upfront that even if all goes well, we won't be able to have people from Melbourne travelling to regional Victoria over the Queen's Birthday long weekend. The risk of exporting the virus is just too high.

With no community transmission in regional Victoria this week, regional restrictions are proposed to begin easing from 11:59pm tomorrow night. We'll use the next 24 hours to continue tracing and testing and confirm that this change can go ahead.

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We need to be clear though, this strain of the virus means we can't just snap back to where we were a week ago. We have to make sure it's safe and that means moving a bit slower.

I'll say from the outset, this won't be what everyone hoped for – but these are the responsible and proportional adjustments we can make now, while continuing to keep our regional communities safe.

That means lifting the travel restrictions and the 'five reasons'.

All year levels and all students will return to face-to-face schooling.

Public gatherings – catching up at a public place like the park or the beach – will be increased to ten people.

Restaurants and cafés can reopen to a maximum of 50. Retail, beauty and personal care, entertainment venues and community facilities will also open in line with density limits.

Religious ceremonies and funerals will be capped at 50, weddings at ten.

We'll also move to work or study from home if you can. Offices will be capped at 50 per cent.

Some things won't change. Visitors to the home are still not okay. And we still need masks to be worn inside.

Finally, regional Victorians will be able to travel in regional Victoria. Melburnians will not.

There'll be plenty more detail available online about what rules apply for which parts of Victoria.

But I need to be really clear, stopping the spread – and getting our whole state back to normal – means knowing the restrictions that apply to you, and sticking to them.

We've seen examples of people who left Melbourne, broke the rules and took the virus with them. We do not want that to happen again.

To that end, most businesses that are open in regional Victoria but closed in Melbourne – restaurants or beauty for example – must check the IDs of everyone they serve. We know it's an extra ask on staff and customers – but ultimately, it's about keeping your community safe.

We'll also expand our QR requirements to make it mandatory in retail settings like supermarkets and shops. The 15-minute threshold will also be removed so anyone entering a shop or a cafe will need to check-in.

No one wants to be here. And I know this news is tough for every Victorian, every family and every business in this state.

But the Chief Health Officer has no choice but to give this advice. And the Government has no choice but to follow it.

If we don't, this thing will get away from us and people will die.

No one wants to repeat last winter.

To stop that from happening, we need every Victorian to follow the rules, to get tested and to get vaccinated when it's your turn.

We can do this, but we need to do it together.