



Victoria records 11 new linked Covid cases as Scott Morrison urges lockdown be lifted 'as soon as possible'

Description

AUSTRALIA: Victoria has reported 11 new cases of Covid-19 on Monday, all linked to existing outbreaks, as the prime minister urged for the lockdown in Melbourne to be lifted as soon as possible.

Victoria's chief health officer, however, said the state's authorities were still making decisions on a day-by-day basis regarding the ongoing lockdown in Melbourne, which is due to end on Thursday.

It comes as the Victorian government announced \$30m for food banks, emergency relief and support for people on temporary visas.

No cases have been reported in the community in other states. Western Australia is investigating a case of "viral shedding" of a maritime worker who was released from quarantine on Friday and has since been returned to quarantine.

According to Victoria's coronavirus response commander, Jeroen Weimar, the state's cases of most concern are two aged care workers and an aged care resident at Arcare Maidstone. None are showing symptoms but were tested as close contacts. Two of those cases, the resident and one worker, were first reported on Sunday.

a man wearing a suit and tie: Victoria's chief health officer Brett Sutton and health minister Victoria Martin
© Photograph: Luis Ascui/EPA Victoria's chief health officer Brett Sutton and health minister Victoria Martin Foley. The state has recorded 11 new coronavirus cases linked to existing outbreaks .

The resident has been vaccinated and moved to a hospital for their own safety, Weimar said, bringing the number of people in hospital in Victoria with Covid-19 to three.

The other new cases reported on Monday include four people from one family – one adult and three

children – connected to the West Melbourne cluster, bringing that cluster to 14.

Three people who had been isolating as close contacts of the Whittlesea outbreak tested positive on their 13th day test, meaning they will have to spend another 14 days in isolation. However, some 1,000 people connected to that outbreak tested negative and were released from isolation.

There was also one more case connected to the Port Melbourne outbreak, bringing that cluster to 31.

There are 5,800 people still in isolation in connection to various outbreaks.

The chief health officer, Prof Brett Sutton, would not say what Monday's case numbers and the fact that they were all previously identified as close contacts meant for the Melbourne lockdown.

"As I've always said, we're looking at the numbers every day. We make those decisions on a day-by-day basis," he said.

Sutton said it was "good news" that the new cases did not result in the identification of any significant new exposure cases and said he would expect that trend to continue.

"I'm focused on providing the public health advice around what we think the minimum safe requirements are to get on top of this," he said.

"These 11 new cases today is what has happened after a week and a half of a very stringent lockdown. I can't tell you what an alternative universe would look like if we hadn't had a lockdown, but you don't have to have an overactive imagination to imagine that if you had the opportunity for any number of people to come to your household every day of the last 10 days, that it might look very different."

Speaking in Sydney earlier, the prime minister, Scott Morrison, said he was "hopeful that these restrictions in Victoria will be lifted as soon as possible".

"As the [New South Wales premier, Gladys Berejiklian] herself has said, when similar circumstances were faced here in NSW, the restrictions were contained to a very specific part of Sydney, so I would be urging that we move towards lifting those restrictions as soon as possible," Morrison said.

Sutton said that no other state had faced a situation similar to what Victoria was currently facing – except Victoria itself last year. He said the state had managed the Black Rock outbreak over New Year's Eve without locking down and the Park Royal outbreak in February with a snap lockdown.

Sutton said he would consider options of locking down specific parts of the city but that the 300 exposure sites currently identified are "very broadly spread" across metropolitan Melbourne.

"We acknowledge there are significant movements of people across Melbourne for essential work purposes and other essential reasons; we can't discount the significant movement across metro Melbourne," he said.

Morrison also appeared to downplay the role of the federal vaccine rollout in preventing new outbreaks, saying "for some context that" there were 4,393 new cases per day in the United Kingdom.

“That is in a country that has a 75.8% vaccination [rate] on first dose,” he said. “In Canada, there are over 2,000 cases every single day. They have a vaccination rate of 67% on first doses.”

The funding announced by the Victorian government comprises \$4.5m for community food relief organisations, including Foodbank, and student groceries, \$12m directed toward support for multicultural communities and \$13.5m for temporary or undocumented migrants, which will fund \$800 payments for people not eligible for any commonwealth support.

The Victorian community minister, Luke Donnellan, said the funding would ensure that no one was left behind.

“This is about ensuring there is nobody that is left behind in the community because that is not what we do in Victoria,” Donnellan said.

“There are a whole lot of people whose voice is not particularly loud sometimes but we need to ensure we are providing that support and getting through to them.”

The commonwealth has provided Victoria with an additional 100,000 doses of the Pfizer vaccine and 230,000 additional doses of AstraZeneca to meet continually growing demand.

The Victorian health minister, Martin Foley, said 40% of all vaccine doses administered in Australia last week were administered in Victoria.

“Victorians are really showing that, given the opportunity, they want to get vaccinated as soon as possible – that is the ticket out of this pandemic,” he said.

About 20% of Victorians aged 40-49 have received their first dose of Pfizer, with second doses to begin in a fortnight, and about 36% of Victorians aged 50-59 have received their first dose.

Weimar said Victoria was not holding back second doses of vaccines, saying that everything the state receives is going to hubs or doctors’ clinics within a week. Asked when younger people would be allowed to access the vaccine, he said: “We will drop the age when we start to see demand soften.”

by Calla Wahlquist

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