



Australian Government

Department of Health

Chief Medical Officer

The Hon Greg Hunt MP
Minister for Health
PO Box 6022
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Minister

I am writing to recommend an extension to the current human biosecurity emergency period regarding 'human coronavirus with pandemic potential' (COVID-19) to 17 December 2021. The current human biosecurity emergency period is scheduled to end on 17 September 2021.

I last provided you with advice to extend the declaration in May 2021.

The Biosecurity Act 2015

On 18 March 2020 the Governor-General declared a human biosecurity emergency in relation to COVID-19 under section 475 of the *Biosecurity Act 2015* (the Act). This enabled you to determine requirements and give directions under the Act that are necessary to prevent or control the entry, emergence, establishment or spread of COVID-19 in Australian territory or part of Australian territory.

Under section 476 of the Act, the Governor-General may vary a human biosecurity emergency declaration to extend the human biosecurity emergency period for a period of up to three months on the condition that you are satisfied that:

- a) the listed human disease (COVID-19) is continuing to pose a severe and immediate threat or is continuing to cause harm to human health on a nationally significant scale; and
- b) the extension is necessary to prevent or control the entry into, or the emergence, establishment or spread of COVID-19 in Australian territory or a part of Australian territory.

For your consideration in supporting this extension, I have provided relevant public health advice addressing these matters.

Public health advice supporting the extension of the human biosecurity emergency period and Determinations made under subsection 477(1)

- **Global case numbers continue to rise**

The number of new cases of COVID-19 recorded globally continues to rise at an alarming rate. Variants of SARS-CoV-2 have emerged internationally, and new variants will continue to emerge, affecting the risk profile presented by travellers from different countries and regions. As at 18 August 2021, a total of 208,493,338 cases of COVID-19 have been reported globally, including 4,380,593 deaths. The five countries reporting the highest numbers of new cases in the last seven days are the United States of America, Iran, India, the United Kingdom and Brazil.

- **Australia's transition from post vaccination settings continues**

Australia needs to remain on high alert and to continue with the option of use of the emergency powers in the Act to protect people from severe disease at the current stage of the vaccination program. As at 18 August, 49.50 per cent of the Australian population aged 16 years and over had received a first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. More than 27 per cent of Australians aged 16 years and over are now fully vaccinated.

- **Active cases nationally**

As at 1200 hrs, 18 August 2021, there have been 40,774 cases of COVID-19 reported in Australia, including 970 deaths. There are currently 8,450 active cases, the majority in New South Wales (NSW) but with recent cases also including Victoria (VIC), Queensland (QLD) and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT).

Of particular concern is the NSW Delta variant outbreak. The first case associated with the cluster was reported on 16 June 2021. The outbreak is currently uncontained, with hundreds of new cases being reported each day over the last week, dozens of which have been in the community for all or part of their infectious period, and with many cases having an unknown or unidentified epidemiological link to a source. The escalating situation in western NSW and significant risk to aboriginal communities is also concerning.

Since 16 June 2021, there have been 9,280 cases in NSW. There are currently 460 COVID-19 cases admitted to hospital, with 77 people in intensive care. A total of 59 of 61 deaths reported in 2021 in Australia have been linked to the Sydney Metropolitan outbreak. Prior to this NSW outbreak, Australia had not reported a death since February 2021.

There have also been numerous interstate cases linked to the Sydney Metropolitan cluster (including in VIC, Western Australia (WA), QLD and most recently in the ACT). This outbreak has demonstrated how contagious the Delta variant is, and the potentially severe implications it can have for life and liberty in Australia.

- **Leakage from overseas acquired cases**

All international arrivals are required to quarantine for 14 days at a designated hotel, unless an exemption applies. As at 18 August 2021, Australia has had 423,014 international air arrivals since 28 March 2020. Since hotel quarantine measures were

implemented on 28 March 2020, approximately 1.0% of international arrivals have tested positive for COVID-19. Despite Australia's quarantine system being largely safe and low risk, each new case identified in quarantine increases the risk of leakage into the Australian community through transmission to quarantine workers or other quarantined returnees and subsequently into the Australian community more broadly. This quarantine 'leakage' presents a significant risk to the largely unvaccinated Australian community.

The NSW outbreak was linked with a person who likely acquired their infection undertaking work responsibilities as an international airport transport driver, although the source of the infection is still under investigation. Queensland has also recently seen COVID-19 transmitted within hotel quarantine facilities.

- In the Amora Hotel Brisbane outbreak, a locally acquired case was a returned overseas traveller who had completed hotel quarantine in Brisbane. Genomic sequencing confirmed the case acquired their infection from a traveller who had returned from South Africa and was quarantining on the same floor in an opposite room. At 18 August, a total of 9 cases have been genomically linked to this cluster.
- In the Indooroopilly cluster (a total of 144 cases as of 18 August), has been linked to returned travellers with the Delta variant. The epidemiological link is still being investigated but is thought to be within the family of the first case.

47C, 47E(d)

. Extending the human biosecurity emergency period will allow the Government to continue to use the emergency powers under the Act to respond appropriately to situational changes around the globe. 47C, 47E(d)

On the basis of current international and domestic evidence, I consider that COVID-19 is continuing to pose a severe and immediate threat to human health on a nationally significant scale. 47C, 47E(d)

Provided the human biosecurity emergency period is extended until 17 December 2021, the Determinations made under section 477 of the Act will continue to have effect for the duration of that period, or until such a time that they are no longer deemed appropriate for managing the threat posed by COVID-19 and are revoked.

1. Biosecurity (Human Biosecurity Emergency) (Human Coronavirus with Pandemic Potential) (Emergency Requirements – Incoming International Flights) Determination 2021

- In January 2021, additional requirements were put in place to give effect to the Safe Air Travel recommendations of AHPPC in relation to pre-departure testing and mask wearing for international flights. Passengers and air crew on international flights must wear a mask for the duration of the flight, with limited exemptions, and at Australian international airports. Passengers travelling to Australia must provide a negative Reverse Transcription Polymerase Chain Reaction COVID-19 test result prior to their first departing flight.

47C, 47E(d)

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BY THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

2. Biosecurity (Human Biosecurity Emergency) (Human Coronavirus with Pandemic Potential) (Emergency Requirements for Cruise Ships) Determination 2020

- This Determination protects Australia's health system capacity from the particular challenges and risk profile of cruise vessels, which have previously been vehicles for the entry and spread of COVID-19 in the Australian community.

- 47C, 47E(d)

3. Biosecurity (Human Biosecurity Emergency) (Human Coronavirus with Pandemic Potential) (Overseas Travel Ban Emergency Requirements) Determination 2020

- The Overseas Travel Ban Determination prevents Australians and permanent residents from travelling overseas unless an exemption applies.
- Under this Determination, Australians are unable to travel overseas without an exemption. 47C, 47E(d)

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4. **Biosecurity (Human Biosecurity Emergency) (Human Coronavirus with Pandemic Potential) (Emergency Requirements – Retail Outlets at International Airports) Determination 2020**

- This Determination prevents arriving international passengers, who may be infected with COVID-19 and who have not yet completed quarantine, from passing that infection on to retail workers who may then infect their families and the broader community.
- Designated retail outlets still cannot trade in international airports unless an exemption applies. The 'exceptional circumstance' exemption under the Determination gives the designated airports opportunity to seek an exemption from the Secretary of the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications 47C, 47E(d)

47C,
47E(d)

In my capacity as Director of Human Biosecurity, I recommend that extending the declaration of the human biosecurity emergency period in relation to COVID-19 by a further three months to 17 December 2021 is necessary. 47C, 47E(d)

I am satisfied this time period is suitable and appropriate to manage the medium- and longer-term response requirements for COVID-19.

Yours sincerely



Professor Paul Kelly
Chief Medical Officer
Director of Human Biosecurity

20 August 2021