



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 Hunt

I am writing to recommend the declaration of a human biosecurity emergency under section 475 of the *Biosecurity Act 2015* (the Act).

The ongoing management of the virus outbreak is based on the expert medical advice of the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee with proportionate steps escalated as necessary to contain and slow the spread of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) caused by the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 throughout China.

On 21 January 2020, I determined 'human coronavirus with pandemic potential' to be a listed human disease under section 42 of the Act in response to the identification and spread of COVID-19.

On 30 January 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) determined the COVID-19 outbreak to be a Public Health Emergency of International Concern, reflecting the international spread of the disease to several regions of the world and limited evidence of human to human transmission outside of mainland China. Additionally, in recognition of the significant further international spread including increasing case numbers and increasing number of deaths as a result of COVID-19, the WHO declared a pandemic on 11 March 2020.

I believe, on the basis of international and national evidence, that COVID-19 poses a severe and immediate threat to human health on a nationally significant scale. Globally, as at 16 March 2020, there are 163,716 cases in 149 countries. There is now some evidence of community transmission of COVID-19 within Australia, with 298 cases being reported within Australia (as at 6am 16 March 2020), including 5 deaths. 40 of these cases, including 3 deaths, have no history of overseas travel. The global case fatality rate for COVID-19 is currently estimated at as high as 3.8%, with the risk of death reported to increase with age.

We have a time-limited opportunity to interrupt the transmission of the disease and reduce the number of cases and deaths within Australia, and the subsequent burden on the Australian health system. Based on this information I am formally

recommending to you that the declaration of a human biosecurity emergency is necessary to support the containment the human biosecurity threat of COVID-19.

The declaration of a human biosecurity emergency will provide you with the power to set requirements and give directions as necessary to manage the risk of COVID-19. The declaration of an emergency now provides powers to give effect to requirements and directions over the coming days. Without limiting these powers, it is prudent to consider giving legal effect to recommendations to self-isolate for 14 days on arrival in Australia, banning mass gatherings (of 500 people or more), and restrictions on visitation to aged care facilities and remote communities. It is important to reduce the spread of the disease and in particular protect our vulnerable communities, while ensuring that our capacity to test and treat, not only COVID-19 patients but all Australians requiring health care, is sustainable.

s47C, s47E(d)

I note with concern that 10 cases, including one death, in Australia are associated with the Diamond Princess repatriation. Worldwide there are a number of cruise vessels that have experienced significant onboard transmission, and that have seeded onshore transmission, resulting in the identification of hundreds of additional COVID-19 cases.^{s47C}

s47C, s47E(d)

I am satisfied that the declaration of a human biosecurity emergency is necessary to enable powers to give effect to the clinical recommendations of the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee. I, in my capacity as Director of Human Biosecurity, recommend that the initial period of the emergency declaration be for three months to ensure the human biosecurity emergency declaration is in effect for an appropriate length of time to manage the immediate and medium term response requirements.

Yours sincerely



Professor Brendan Murphy
Chief Medical Officer and Director of Human Biosecurity

16 March 2020