

# Information note – COVID-19 situation update August 2020

This is a background document only and does not purport to be a comprehensive discussion of the issues involved. It does not represent the view of the Fair Work Commission on any issue.

This information note provides an update of the current rate of transmission of COVID-19 in Australia, with a particular focus on the current spikes in Victoria and New South Wales (NSW).

The Commonwealth Department of Health provides a daily update on COVID-19 cases from when the first case of COVID-19 was detected in Australia in late January 2020. The data show that:

- As at 5 August 2020, Australia has had a total of 19 444 cases of COVID-19, of which 10 935 people have recovered, and 247 people have died.
- 739 new cases have been recorded in the previous 24 hours, the majority of which are from Victoria (725 cases) and NSW (12 cases).<sup>1</sup>

Within the Commonwealth Department of Health, the COVID-19 National Incident Room Surveillance Team has been releasing regular Epidemiology reports since the week of 26 January to 1 February 2020, based on data extracted from the National Notifiable Diseases Surveillance System (NNDSS).<sup>2</sup> The latest of these reports covers the fortnightly reporting period ending 5 July 2020 and based on data available at that time found that ‘the national incidence of COVID-19 remained low, with very few cases reported by most jurisdictions’<sup>3</sup>. However, an average of 54 cases were reported per day over the fortnight, more than double the average number reported over the previous fortnight.<sup>4</sup> The majority of current cases over the reference fortnight were from Victoria (87 per cent), with most of these cases being locally acquired. The latest epidemiology report showed that the rate of infection in Victoria was 11.9 per 100 000 population compared with 3.55 per 100 000 population for Australia.<sup>5</sup>

The latest epidemiology report also noted that, for the reporting period ending 5 July:

‘...78% of cases were locally acquired, 16% were overseas acquired, and 6% were under investigation at time of reporting. During this reporting period the number and proportion of locally-acquired cases continued to increase, largely due to outbreaks in Victoria. Of all locally-acquired cases, the source of acquisition for 68% of cases was found to be a contact of a case or in a known cluster, 32% were unable to be linked to another case and less than 1% were unable to be linked to any case or cluster but had

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Health (2020), [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) current situation and case numbers](#), Commonwealth Government of Australia, 5 August.

<sup>2</sup> Department of Health (2020), [Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\) epidemiology reports. Australia, 2020](#), Commonwealth Government of Australia, 22 July.

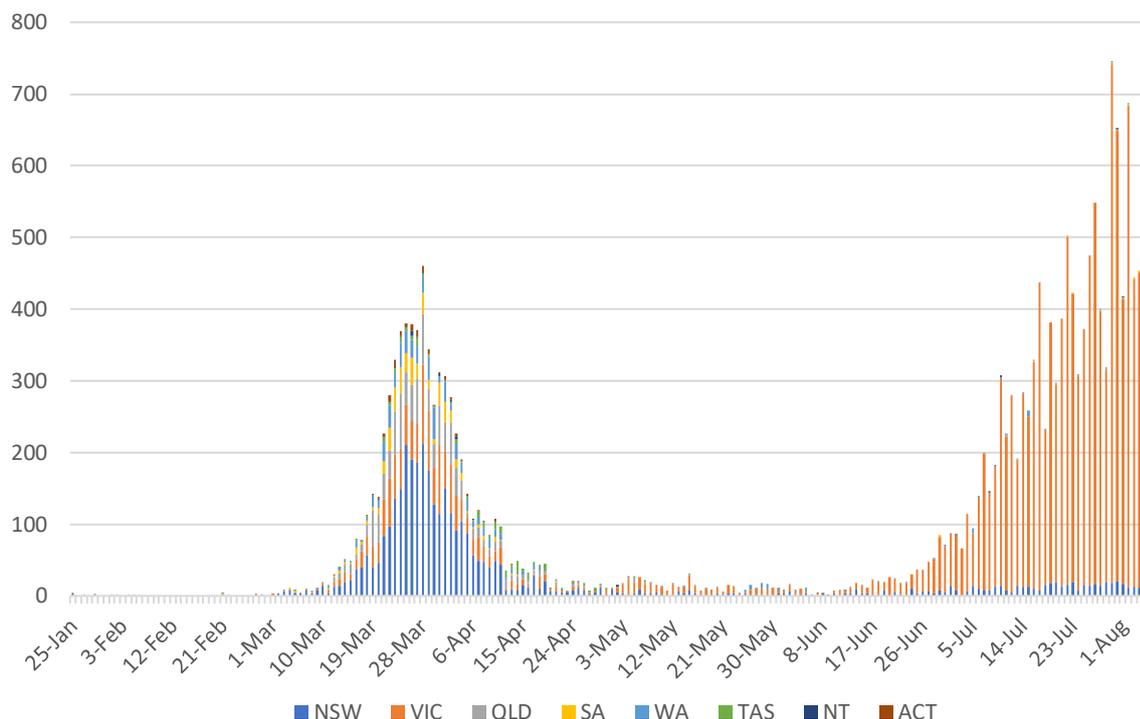
<sup>3</sup> COVID-19 National Incident Room Surveillance Team (2020), [COVID-19. Australia: Epidemiology Report 20: Reporting fortnight ending 5 July 2020](#), Communicable Diseases Intelligence Volume 44, 14 July, p.1.

<sup>4</sup> COVID-19 National Incident Room Surveillance Team (2020), [COVID-19. Australia: Epidemiology Report 20: Reporting fortnight ending 5 July 2020](#), Communicable Diseases Intelligence Volume 44, 14 July, p.1; COVID-19 National Incident Room Surveillance Team (2020), [COVID-19. Australia: Epidemiology Report 19: Reporting fortnight ending 21 June 2020](#), Communicable Diseases Intelligence Volume 44, 29 June.

<sup>5</sup> COVID-19 National Incident Room Surveillance Team (2020), [COVID-19. Australia: Epidemiology Report 20: Reporting fortnight ending 5 July 2020](#), Communicable Diseases Intelligence Volume 44, 14 July, p.9.

travelled interstate during their exposure period.<sup>6</sup>

**Chart 1: Net daily confirmed COVID-19 cases in Australia in states and territories**

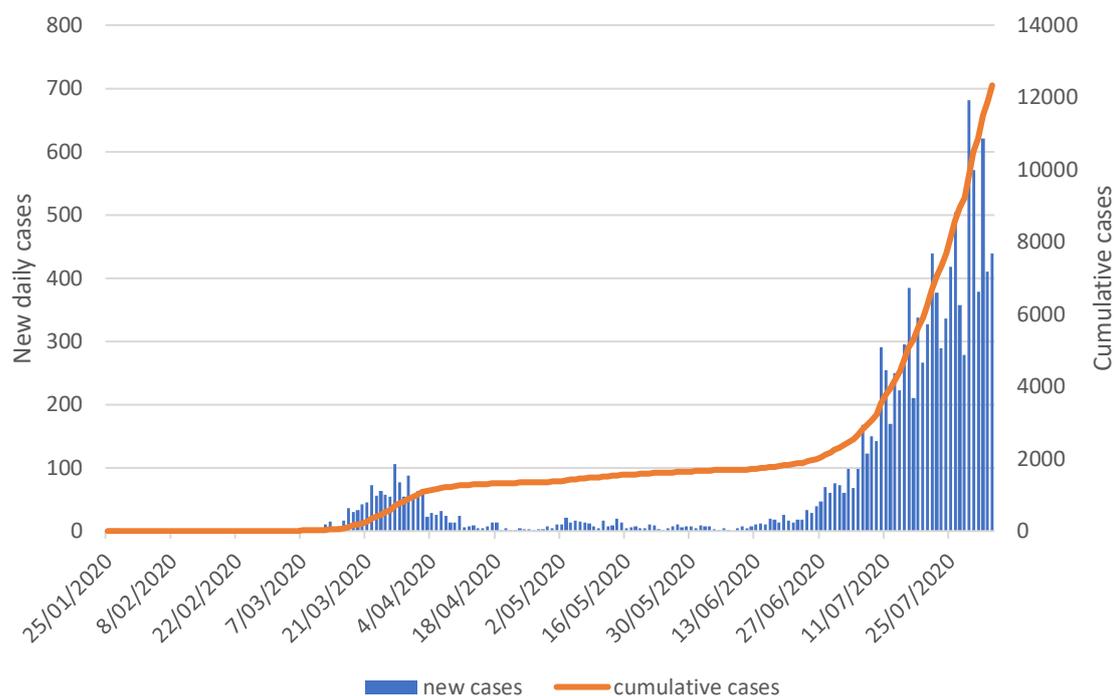


Note: The data are obtained from a variety of [state and commonwealth sources](#).

Source: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) in Australia](#), covid19data.com.au, 5 August 2020.

More recent data in Chart 1 shows the significant increase in new daily cases in Australia and that the majority are in Victoria, as well as a small but sustained level of new daily cases recorded in NSW from late June. Chart 2 highlights the much larger number of cases being recorded in Victoria in July and early August than at the early stages of the epidemic in March.

<sup>6</sup> COVID-19 National Incident Room Surveillance Team (2020), [COVID-19, Australia: Epidemiology Report 20: Reporting fortnight ending 5 July 2020](#), Communicable Diseases Intelligence Volume 44, 14 July, p.9.

**Chart 2: Daily and cumulative number of reported COVID-19 cases in Victoria**

Source: Victorian Department of Health and Human Service, [Coronavirus COVID-19 in Victoria](#), last updated 4 August 2020.

On 21 June, the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) released a statement on recent outbreaks of COVID-19 in Victoria, noting that due to the continued growth in confirmed cases overseas and the number of Australians still overseas who may return; as well as sporadic community transmission in Australia, that it remains probable that Australia will experience periodic outbreaks.<sup>7</sup>

On 20 June, the Victorian Government announced that it would not be easing restrictions as initially planned from 22 June because of the increase in cases. It also reimposed some restrictions, such as limiting the number of people you can have at your home to 5 persons and outdoor gatherings to 10 persons. Restaurants, pubs, auction halls, community halls, libraries, museums and places of worship were limited to a maximum of 20 people in any one space until 12 July and businesses including gyms, cinemas, theatres and TABs could remain open with a maximum of 20 people per space.<sup>8</sup>

The continued increase in daily cases (including community transmission) led to a number of areas in Melbourne return to stage 3 (Stay at Home) restrictions from 2 July. Further areas were added on 5 July, and this was extended to all of Metropolitan Melbourne and the Mitchell Shire would return to Stay at Home restrictions for 6 weeks from 9 July. Under stage 3 restrictions there are only 4 reasons to leave home: shopping for food and supplies; medical care and caregiving; exercise and recreation; and study and work (if it cannot be done from home). Businesses across these regions will also return to Stage 3 restrictions: restaurants and cafes will return to takeaway

<sup>7</sup> Department of Health (2020), [Australian Health Protection Principal Committee \(AHPPC\) statement on recent outbreaks of COVID-19 in Victoria](#). Commonwealth Government of Australia, 21 June.

<sup>8</sup> Department of Health and Human Services (2020), [Victoria's restriction levels](#), Victorian Government, updated 22 July.

and delivery services only; beauty and personal services will need to close; entertainment and cultural venues will need to close; and community sport will stop.<sup>9</sup>

On 19 July, the Victorian Government announced that, from 23 July, people living in metropolitan Melbourne or Mitchell Shire must wear a face covering if they leave their home.<sup>10</sup> On 30 July, it was announced that from 31 July, people living in the local government areas of Greater Geelong, the Surf Coast, Moorabool, Golden Plains, Colac-Otway and Borough of Queenscliffe will no longer be able to have visitors at home, or visit other peoples' homes. From 3 August, face coverings became mandatory for all of Victoria.<sup>11</sup>

At 6pm on 2 August, Victoria entered into a state of disaster and stage 4 restrictions were applied to Melbourne until 13 September. These include a curfew from 8pm and 5am, with the only reason to leave home during these hours being for work, medical care and caregiving. Outside of curfew hours, there are 4 reasons to leave home: exercise (limited to 1 hour a day and to a size of 2 people regardless of if you are in the same household or not); shopping for food and necessary supplies (limited to 1 person per households per day; care and health care; and work. Exercise and shopping for essentials must both be done within a 5km radius of home. Mitchell shire will remain at stage 3 restrictions and the rest of regional Victoria will also move to stage 3 restrictions from 6 August.<sup>12</sup>

On 3 August, further restrictions on businesses and workplaces were announced, commencing from 6 August. Those that can continue to operate are certain retail services (supermarkets, grocery stores, bottle shops, pharmacies, petrol stations, banks, news agencies and post offices) and those involved in the frontline health response. Other retail stores, some manufacturing and administration industries will have to cease onsite operation for 6 weeks. Retail stores not specifically allowed to operate are permitted to operate on a contactless 'click and collect' and delivery services basis. Other businesses in the meat industry, warehousing and distribution centres and construction will be subject to mandated reductions in onsite worker numbers. These workplaces will be required to implement additional safety requirements, including extra personal protective equipment, staggered shifts and breaks, health declarations and more support for sick workers to stay at home. From 6 August, employees working in permitted industries who cannot work from home will be required to have a new 'Worker Permit' when travelling to and from work. All open businesses and services will have until 11:59pm Friday 7 August to enact a COVIDSafe plan.<sup>13</sup>

Chart 3 shows the daily new cases and cumulative cases of COVID-19 recorded in NSW. It shows that although the numbers of cases are lower than the peak of the epidemic in March and April 2020, there have been signs of a gradual increase in new daily cases in June and July. In response, the NSW government announced that from 17 July group bookings at pubs are to be limited to a maximum of 10 people (down from 20) and a cap of 300 people inside a venue at any time was introduced. Further tightening of restrictions took effect from 24 July, with the 10 people group booking limit extended to restaurants, bars and cafés: a limit of 150 people for weddings and

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<sup>9</sup> Department of Health and Human Services (2020), [Victoria's restriction levels](#), Victorian Government, updated 6 August.

<sup>10</sup> Government of Victoria (2020), [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) restrictions Victoria](#), updated 5 August.

<sup>11</sup> Government of Victoria (2020), [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) restrictions Victoria](#), updated 5 August.

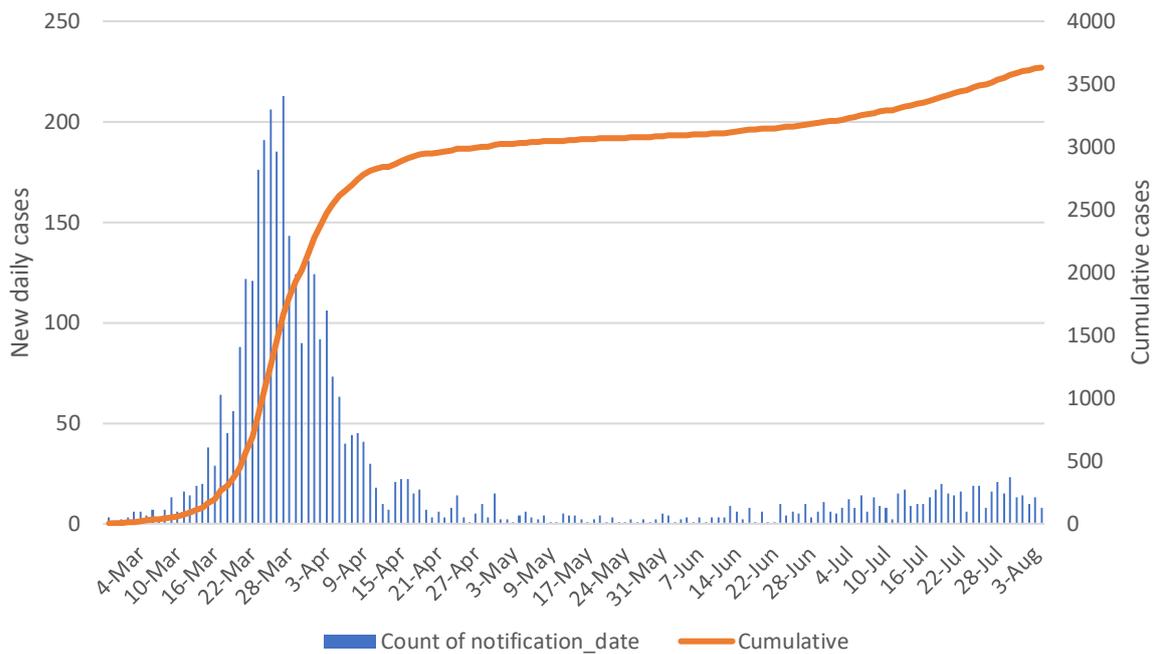
<sup>12</sup> Government of Victoria (2020), [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) restrictions Victoria](#), updated 5 August.

<sup>13</sup> Government of Victoria (2020), [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) restrictions Victoria](#), updated 5 August.

corporate events (subject to the 4 square metre rule); and a limit of 100 people for funerals and places of worship (subject to the 4 square metre rule) also imposed.<sup>14</sup>

From 22 July, people seeking to enter New South Wales from Victoria required an entry permit<sup>15</sup> and may only enter for essential travel, with some exceptions. Victorian residents living in metropolitan Melbourne or the Mitchell Shire are not eligible for entry permits.<sup>16</sup> On 5 August, it was announced that from 7 August New South Wales residents returning to Victoria must go into 14 days mandatory hotel quarantine at their own expense. Some entry permits may indicate requirements on them entering New South Wales (such as needing to self-isolate).

**Chart 3: Daily and cumulative number of reported COVID-19 cases in NSW**



Source: New South Wales Government, [NSW COVID-19 cases data](#), Data.NSW, last updated 5 August 2020.

<sup>14</sup> Government of New South Wales (2020), [COVID-19: What you can and can't do under the rules](#), updated 22 July.

<sup>15</sup> Government of New South Wales (2020), [Apply for a COVID-19 NSW border entry permit](#), accessed 5 August.

<sup>16</sup> Government of New South Wales (2020), [Your guide to border restrictions](#), updated 4 August.