Information note − COVID-19 situation update 28 September 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 situation 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 27 September 2020, Australia has had a total of 27 040 cases of COVID-19, of which 24 504 people have recovered, and 872 people have died.

- 24 new cases have been recorded in the previous 24 hours, the majority of which are from Victoria (16 cases) and Western Australia (7 cases).[1]

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).[2] The latest of these reports covers the fortnightly reporting period ending 13 September 2020 and, based on data available at that time, found that the number of new cases reported nationally decreased from 1948 in the previous fortnight (7 August to 30 August) to 764, a 61 per cent decrease.[3] There were 55 cases reported on average per day over the period, a decrease from 125 per day in the previous reporting period.[4] This decrease in cases was likely associated with the enhanced public health measures currently in place in Victoria where 640 (84 per cent) of cases were reported. The majority of these cases were locally acquired (97 per cent) while the remainder were still under investigation (3 per cent). Of the remaining cases in Australia, 65 per cent were locally acquired.[5] The latest epidemiology data regarding infection rates for the fortnight ending 13 September showed that, among locally-acquired cases, the rate of infection in Victoria dropped from 27.5 per 100 000 population in the last fortnight to 9.7 per 100 000 population. This compares to an infection rate of 0.8 cases per 100 000 population in all other jurisdictions.[6]

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[1] Department of Health (2020), *Coronavirus (COVID-19) current situation and case numbers*, Commonwealth Government of Australia, 28 September.

[2] Department of Health (2020), *Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) epidemiology reports, Australia, 2020*, Commonwealth Government of Australia, 22 July.

[3] COVID-19 National Incident Room Surveillance Team (2020), *COVID-19, Australia: Epidemiology Report 25: Reporting fortnight ending 13 September 2020*, Communicable Diseases Intelligence Volume 44, 23 September, p. 1.

[4] COVID-19 National Incident Room Surveillance Team (2020), *COVID-19, Australia: Epidemiology Report 25: Reporting fortnight ending 13 September 2020*, Communicable Diseases Intelligence Volume 44, 23 September, p. 1.

[5] COVID-19 National Incident Room Surveillance Team (2020), COVID-19, Australia: Epidemiology Report 25: Reporting fortnight ending 13 September 2020, Communicable Diseases Intelligence Volume 44, 23 September, p. 1.

[6] COVID-19 National Incident Room Surveillance Team (2020), *COVID-19, Australia: Epidemiology Report 25: Reporting fortnight ending 13 September 2020*, Communicable Diseases Intelligence Volume 44, 23 September, p. 6.

The latest epidemiology report also noted, for the reporting period to 13 September, that:

'…85% of all cases were reported as locally acquired. The source of acquisition for 7% (56/764) of these cases could not be identified, which is lower than the previous reporting period (14%; 261/1,948). In total, 3% (22/764) of cases reported this fortnight remain under investigation and less than 5% (40/764) were reported as overseas acquired.'.[7]

The report noted that despite the continued decline in case numbers from Victoria, that there is still a degree of ongoing community transmission, including interconnected clusters in New South Wales and Queensland.[8]

Chart 1: New daily confirmed COVID-19 cases in Australia in states and territories
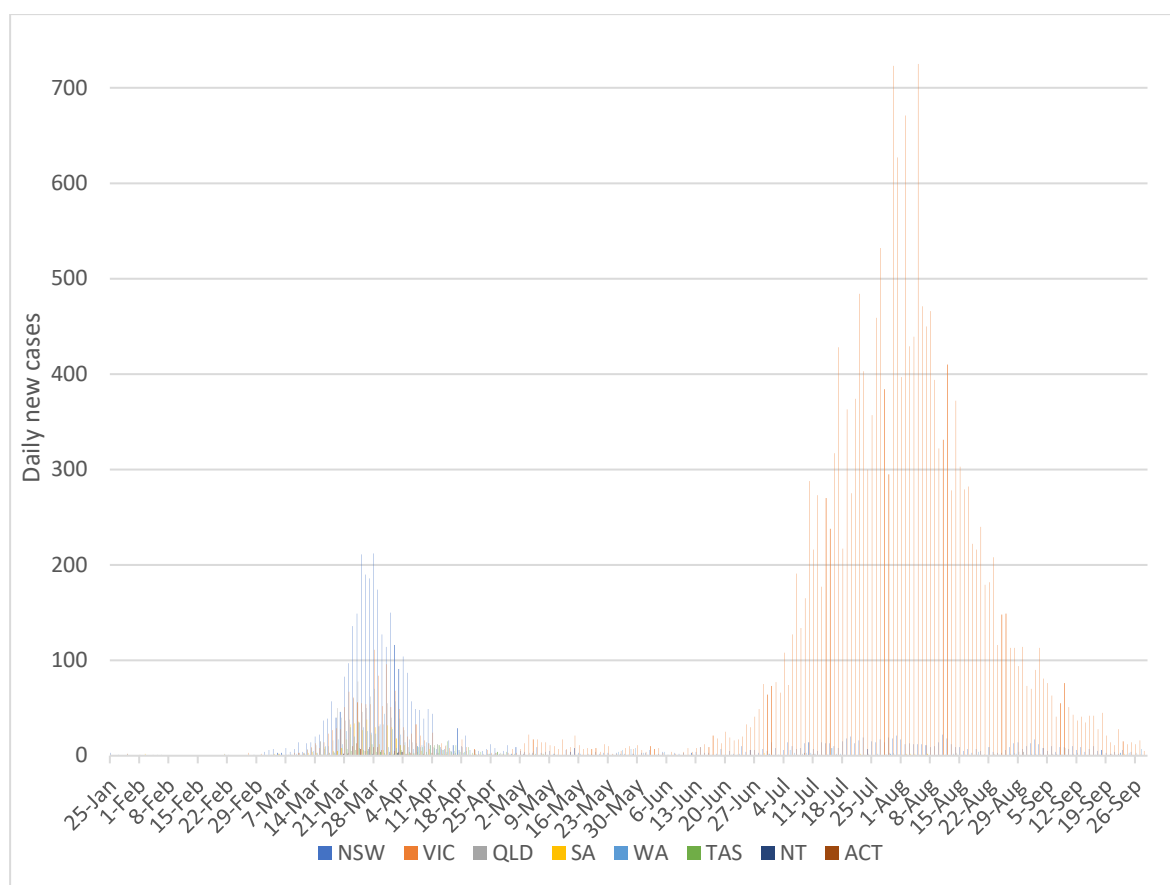
Note: The data are obtained from a variety of state and commonwealth sources. Chart shows new daily cases as announced (not net added to total) except for Victoria, which shows official case notification data (due to many duplicate cases announced).

Source: *Coronavirus (COVID-19) in Australia*, covid19data.com.au, 28 September 2020.

More recent data in Chart 1 show the significant increase in new daily cases in Australia in July and August, which are mainly due to Victoria, as well as a small but sustained level of new daily cases recorded in New South Wales from late June. It also shows the decline in numbers in September,

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[7] COVID-19 National Incident Room Surveillance Team (2020), *COVID-19, Australia: Epidemiology Report 25: Reporting fortnight ending 13 September 2020*, Communicable Diseases Intelligence Volume 44, 23 September, p. 4.

[8] COVID-19 National Incident Room Surveillance Team (2020), *COVID-19, Australia: Epidemiology Report 25: Reporting fortnight ending 13 September 2020*, Communicable Diseases Intelligence Volume 44, 23 September, p. 4.

largely due to continued decline in new cases in Victoria, which is likely associated with the restrictions currently in place.[9] Chart 2 highlights the much larger number of cases being recorded in Victoria since July than at the early stages of the epidemic in March. It also shows that cases in Victoria appear to have peaked in early August, steadily falling since then.

Chart 2: Daily and cumulative number of reported COVID-19 cases in Victoria
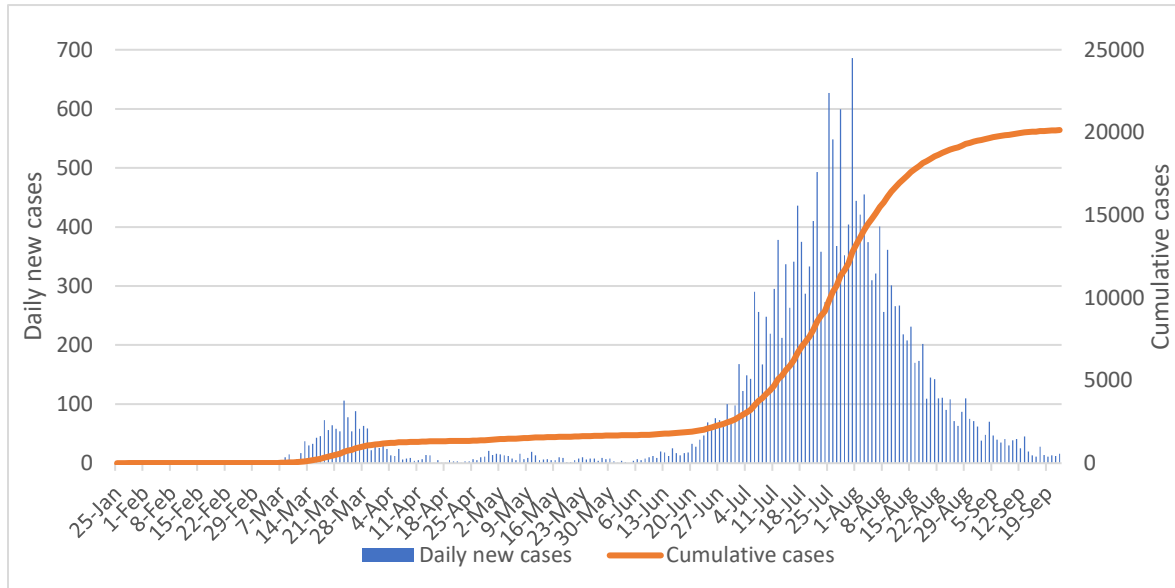
Note: Chart shows new daily cases as announced (not net added to total) except for Victoria, which shows official case notification data (due to many duplicate cases announced).

Source: Victorian Department of Health and Human Service, *Victorian coronavirus (COVID-19) data*, last updated 27 September 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.[10]

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.[11]

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[9] COVID-19 National Incident Room Surveillance Team (2020), *COVID-19, Australia: Epidemiology Report 25: Reporting fortnight ending 13 September 2020*, Communicable Diseases Intelligence Volume 44, 23 September, p. 1.

[10] 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.

[11] Department of Health and Human Services (2020), *Victoria's restriction levels*, Victorian Government, updated 17 August.

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 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 also returned to Stage 3 restrictions: restaurants and cafes will return to takeaway 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.[12]

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.[13] 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.[14]

At 6pm on 2 August, Victoria entered into a state of disaster and stage 4 restrictions were applied to Melbourne, initially until 13 September. These included 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, the 4 reasons to leave home are to: 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 remained at stage 3 restrictions and the rest of regional Victoria moved to stage 3 restrictions from 6 August.[15]

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 were to cease onsite operation 6 weeks. Retail stores not specifically allowed to operate were 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.[16]

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[12] Department of Health and Human Services (2020), *Victoria's restriction levels*, Victorian Government, updated 21 August.

[13] Government of Victoria (2020), *Coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions Victoria*, updated 14 August.

[14] Government of Victoria (2020), *Coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions Victoria*, updated 14 August.

[15] Government of Victoria (2020), *Coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions Victoria*, updated 14 August.

[16] Government of Victoria (2020), *Coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions Victoria*, updated 14 August.

On 6 September, the Victorian Government announced a roadmap for reopening, with separate roadmaps for metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria. Each roadmap has 4 steps towards reaching a 'COVID normal' and progressing through each step will largely be triggered by the later of planned dates and when the number of new cases reaches established thresholds. Metropolitan Melbourne moved to the Second Step of the roadmap on 14 September, allowing 'single social bubbles' and increased daily exercise from 1 hour to 2 hours, with the curfew commencing from 9pm.[17]

Regional Victoria moved to the Third Step of the roadmap on 17 September which included: no restrictions on reasons to leave home or the distance that can be travelled; public gatherings with up to 10 people; 'household bubbles' with visitors allowed with one nominated household (up to 5 visitors at a time); childcare and early educators open; staggered return to onsite learning; no time limit for outdoor exercise and recreation; restaurants and cafes open with a group limit of 10 people and density limits; retail open; travel within Victoria allowed (except to or through metropolitan Melbourne); and accommodation open with capacity limits.[18]

The ability to move to next steps is largely based on the average number of cases over a 14-day period. In order for metropolitan Melbourne to move to the Third Step of the roadmap, the 14-day average had to be between 30 to 50 cases.[19] The latest data, shown in Chart 3, show that the state-wide 14-day average was 20.9 on 28 September. As a result, on 27 September the Victorian Government announced that Metropolitan Melbourne would move to the Second Step towards reopening from 28 September. Based on public health advice some further easing of restrictions beyond those initially planned in the roadmap to recovery were announced, such as the removal of the curfew, expanded workforce limits in some industries (such as supermarkets, food distribution, abattoirs and manufacturing) and weddings allowed with up to 5 people.[20] Further, it was announced that future progression through the Third and Last Steps will no longer be defined by dates in the roadmap, but instead by trigger points that are solely based on case number targets.[21]

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[17] Government of Victoria (2020), *Coronavirus (COVID–19) roadmap to reopening: Mapping Victoria's path toward COVID Normal*, updated 28 September.

[18] Government of Victoria (2020), *Coronavirus (COVID–19) updates: Restrictions in regional Victoria: Third Step of the roadmap*, updated 28 September.

[19] Government of Victoria (2020), *Coronavirus (COVID–19) roadmap to reopening: Mapping Victoria's path toward COVID Normal*, updated 28 September.

[20] Government of Victoria (2020), *Coronavirus (COVID–19) roadmap to reopening: Mapping Victoria's path toward COVID Normal*, updated 28 September.

[21] Government of Victoria (2020), *Statement from the Premier*, media release, 27 September.

Victoria state-wide moving average of cases (14 days)
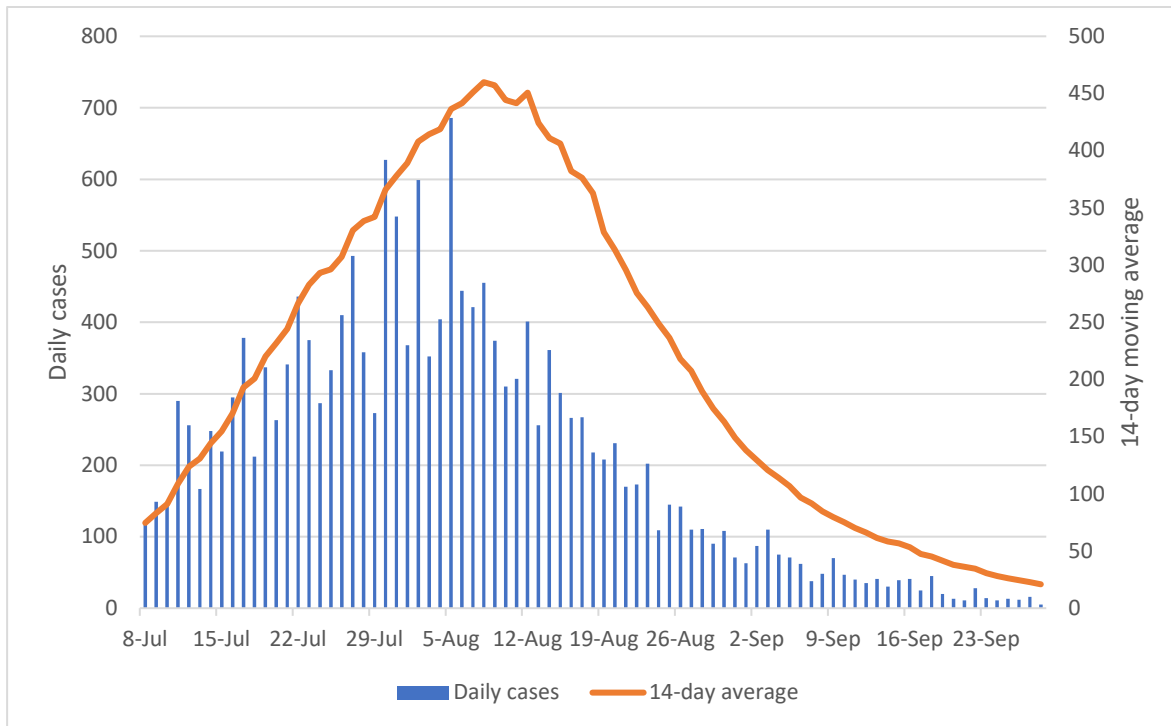
Note: Calculated using official case notification data (truest reflection of daily cases).

Source: *Coronavirus (COVID-19) in Australia*, covid19data.com.au, 28 September 2020.

Chart 4 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 was a gradual increase in new daily cases in June and July. In response, the NSW government announced that from 17 July there would be restrictions to group bookings at pubs 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 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.[22] From 1 August, a limit of 20 people applied to gym and recreation classes such as yoga, tai chi and Pilates. Community sporting activities that involve more than 20 participants must have a COVID-19 Safety Plan and the maximum number of participants must not exceed 500.[23]

From 22 July, people seeking to enter New South Wales from Victoria required an entry permit[24] 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.[25] 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

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[22] Government of New South Wales (2020), *COVID-19: What you can and can't do under the rules*, updated 11 August.

[23] Government of New South Wales (2020), *COVID-19: What you can and can't do under the rules*, updated 11 August.

[24] Government of New South Wales (2020), *Apply for a COVID-19 NSW border entry permit*, accessed 28 August.

[25] Government of New South Wales (2020), *Your guide to border restrictions*, updated 27 August.

requirements on them entering New South Wales (such as needing to self-isolate). Chart 4 shows signs of decreasing daily cases numbers from mid-August, an increase in early September and then a return to declining case numbers throughout the rest of September. In line with declining case numbers the New South Wales government further eased restrictions, including: allowing more than one parent to attend community sporting activities from 26 September[26]; theatres, cinemas and concert halls allowed an increased capacity to 50 percent from 28 September[27]; and increasing the limit on sporting crowds at stadiums from 25 per cent to 40 per cent capacity (to a maximum of 40 000) from 1 October.[28]

Chart 4: Daily and cumulative number of reported COVID-19 cases in NSW
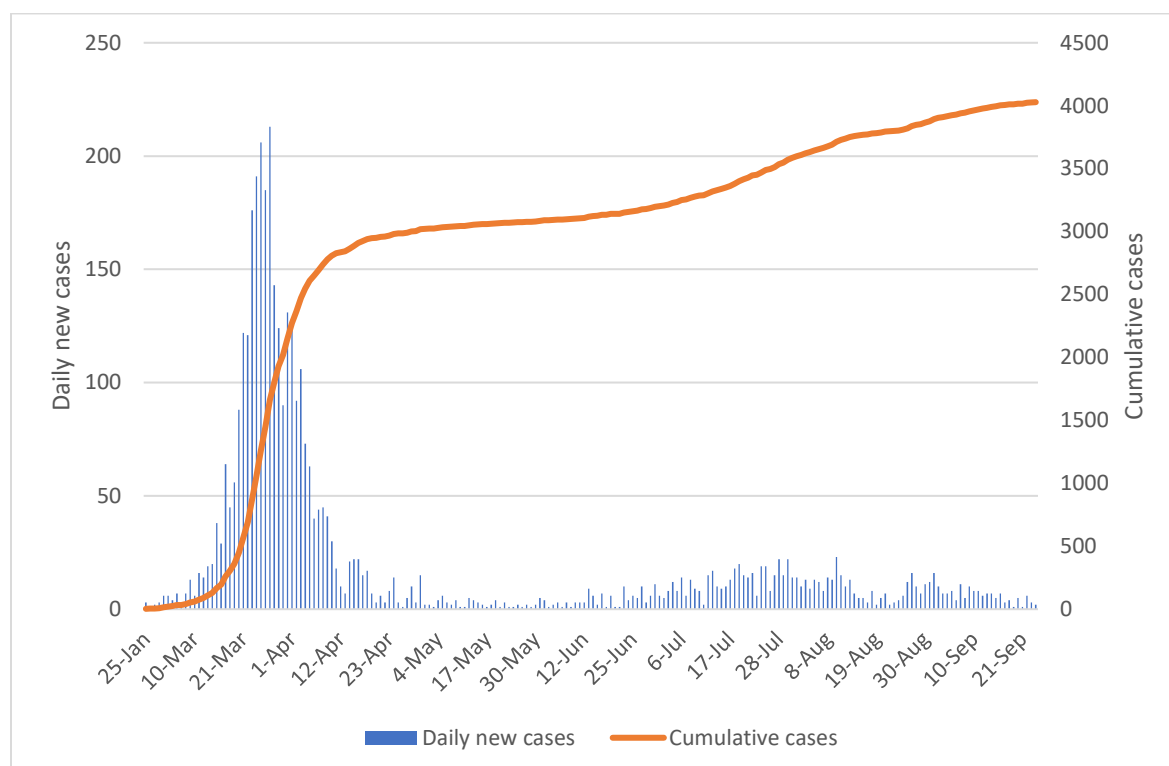
Note: Case counts reported by NSW Health for a particular notification date may vary over time due to ongoing investigations and the outcome of cases under review, thus this dataset and any historical data contained within is subject to change on a daily basis.

Source: New South Wales Government, *NSW COVID-19 cases data*, Data.NSW, last updated 24 September 2020

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[26] Government of New South Wales (2020), *School, sport and music restrictions relaxed*, 24 September.

[27] Government of New South Wales (2020), Capacity increase for entertainment venues, 25 September.

[28] Government of New South Wales (2020), *Stadiums and economy to benefit from increased capacity*, 17 September.