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Dear Premier

## **CONTROLLED BORDER ARRANGEMENTS**

On 16 August 2021, I wrote to you regarding the controlled border arrangements for Western Australia. At that time, New South Wales (NSW) was experiencing a significant and ongoing outbreak of the Delta variant strain of disease. After reviewing the controlled border arrangements issued under the *Emergency Management Act 2005*, I made a series of recommendations to provide for more stringent, but more graduated, measures.

My recommendations of 16 August 2021 included introducing a new requirement for travellers from 'high' and 'extreme' risk jurisdictions to provide proof that they had received at least one dose of a Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) approved COVID-19 vaccine prior to entry into Western Australia (WA). I noted, at that time, that both the Pfizer and AstraZeneca vaccines were readily available in all jurisdictions for eligible groups. Since this time, the Moderna vaccine has been approved by the TGA and this is also readily available in all jurisdictions. Other measures, including the requirement to provide proof of a negative COVID-19 PCR test in the 72 hours prior to departure and a mandatory requirement to use the G2G Now App on arrival in WA, were also recommended and introduced at that time.

While the vaccines will not prevent all vaccinated people becoming infected, with estimates of the reduction of infection rates of vaccinated people of between 44 and 79%, depending on the vaccine, and the reduction of subsequent spread of between 50 and 65%<sup>1,2</sup>, they do significantly reduce both transmission and spread, even after one dose and with the Delta variant. The vaccines are highly effective in preventing hospitalisation and deaths, even after one dose, with 92-96% effectiveness once fully

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<sup>1</sup> Elliott P, Haw D, Wang H, Eales O, Walters C, Ainslie K, Atchison C, Fronterre C, Diggle P, Page A, Trotter A. REACT-1 round 13 final report: exponential growth, high prevalence of SARS-CoV-2 and vaccine effectiveness associated with Delta variant in England during May to July 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Doherty Modelling Report (Revised 10th August 2021), Technical Appendix, pp. 23.  
[https://www.doherty.edu.au/uploads/content\\_doc/DohertyModelling\\_NationalPlan\\_and\\_Addendum\\_20210810.pdf](https://www.doherty.edu.au/uploads/content_doc/DohertyModelling_NationalPlan_and_Addendum_20210810.pdf)

vaccinated, which greatly assists in reducing the demand on the WA health system in the event of an outbreak

This recommendation was implemented from 17 August 2021 and all travellers from 'high' and 'extreme' risk jurisdictions have been required to provide proof of vaccination, where eligible, since that time. This has not presented any unforeseen issues and there have been limited imported cases, primarily interstate truck drivers, and no community cases of COVID-19 from travellers from 'high' and 'extreme' risk jurisdictions have been detected.

In recent weeks, several jurisdictions have announced their plans for the management of international travellers. To 19 October 2021, there have been 240,940,937 confirmed cases of COVID-19, including 4,903,911 deaths, reported to World Health Organization. As other jurisdictions open to international travellers, it is inevitable that the number of cases of COVID-19 in those jurisdictions will increase. In turn, this has the potential to lead to an increased risk of importation of a case of COVID-19 into WA and subsequent community spread.

As of 21 October 2021, 56.4% of the eligible population over 12 years of age in WA have received both doses of a COVID-19 vaccine. Current modelling shows that WA remains the most susceptible of all jurisdictions to a major outbreak, due to the increased numbers of people moving around in our society and the mixing between non-family groups. This susceptibility has continued to increase in recent modelling. This has been complicated by the emergence of the Delta variant, which has increased transmissibility by between 35 and 70%, particularly in household and workplace settings, has been implicated in the recent New South Wales, Victorian and Australian Capital Territory (ACT) outbreaks, and is now the dominant strain around the world. The safest and most effective way to reduce this risk is through vaccination.

While there are benefits from receiving one dose of the vaccine, as outlined above, the real effectiveness against infections comes from being fully vaccinated. For Pfizer vaccine, this effectiveness is 73% and is similar for AstraZeneca and Moderna vaccines.<sup>3,4</sup> For interstate jurisdictions where there is community spread of COVID-19, including from the 'low', 'medium', 'high' and 'extreme' risk jurisdictions, requiring incoming travellers to be fully vaccinated will further mitigate this risk by reducing their likelihood of infection and subsequent transmission. Full vaccination will also substantially reduce the risk of serious disease in these travellers. Victoria is opening its borders to NSW for fully vaccinated people and Queensland has advised that it will open its borders to fully vaccinated people when 80% of its population is fully vaccinated. This also aligns with the Australian Government's advice regarding international travellers.

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<sup>3</sup> Tartof SY, Slezak JM, Fischer H, Hong V, Ackerson BK, Ranasinghe ON, Frankland TB, Ogun OA, Zamparo JM, Gray S, Valluri SR. Effectiveness of mRNA BNT162b2 COVID-19 vaccine up to 6 months in a large integrated health system in the USA: a retrospective cohort study. *The Lancet*. 2021 Oct 4.

<sup>4</sup> Elliott P, Haw D, Wang H, Eales O, Walters C, Ainslie K, Atchison C, Fronterre C, Diggle P, Page A, Trotter A. REACT-1 round 13 final report: exponential growth, high prevalence of SARS-CoV-2 and vaccine effectiveness associated with Delta variant in England during May to July 2021.

While opening of the borders is not recommended at this stage, given WA's vaccination rates, requiring travellers to be fully vaccinated is a proportionate way of further reducing the risk of importation and spread. Given NSW, Victoria and ACT are either near to or at an 80% full vaccination rate for their over 16 years populations, the required vaccines are readily available, and travellers have had ample opportunity to access them, such changes can and should be introduced within a short timeframe. I also recommend for 'low' risk jurisdictions, such as Queensland, where there has not been a previous requirement for a first dose of vaccine prior to travel, that enough time be given for travellers to get both doses prior to travel. While Queensland has a lower full vaccination rate, the vaccines are still readily available.

As the benefits of this measure will greatly exceed any disadvantages, I recommend, as the Chief Health Officer, that on or after 27 October 2021, all travellers arriving in WA from 'medium', 'high' or 'extreme' risk jurisdictions must provide evidence that they have received both doses of an approved COVID-19 vaccine unless exempt for the reasons outlined below. It is further recommended that, on or after 15 November 2021, all travellers arriving into WA from 'low' risk jurisdictions must have received both doses of an approved COVID-19 vaccine unless exempt.

Where the person is not eligible to receive the vaccines, including where their specific age group is not yet eligible to receive the vaccines recommended by the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (any COVID-19 vaccine for those under 12 year) or there are recognised medical reasons for not receiving the vaccine, they should be exempted from this requirement. The recognised vaccines should include all TGA authorised COVID-19 vaccines – Pfizer, AstraZeneca and Moderna vaccines – and the Directions should allow for the Chief Health Officer or another authorised officer to accept another overseas approved vaccine as suitable where appropriate. Should people elect not to be vaccinated, they will be able to return to WA once a jurisdiction returns to a 'very low' risk category.

Yours sincerely



Dr Andy Robertson  
**CHIEF HEALTH OFFICER**

21 October 2021