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EASING OF INTERSTATE BORDER CONTROLS IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Dear Premier

The implementation of border controls at both international and state levels, along with public health, mass gathering and social distancing measures, remains a key factor in preventing COVID-19 outbreaks in Western Australia (WA).

Background

On 30 November 2020, I recommended that on or after the 4 December 2020, and subject to no further community outbreaks in Victoria or NSW, Victoria and NSW should be moved from the Low Risk category to the Very Low Risk category, as per Attachment 1. As with the other jurisdictions where there is no community spread for greater than 28 days, which include Queensland, Northern Territory, Australian Capital Territory and Tasmania, the current 'Controlled Borders for Western Australia Directions' should be applied. This would remove the requirement for home quarantine and day 11 testing. This is planned to come into force on 8 December 2020.

With regards to South Australia (SA), I recommended that the border arrangements as outlined under the 'South Australia Outbreak Response Directions' remain unchanged until 11 December 2020. After the 11 December 2020, subject to no further community outbreaks in SA, I recommended that South Australia should be moved from the Medium Risk category to the Low Risk category, as per Attachment 1. If approved by the WA Government, the following would occur in accordance with that risk rating:

- exemption requirements would be removed for travellers from South Australia;
- SA travellers arriving in Western Australia would be required to home quarantine and to be tested at Day 11; and
- persons who travelled from other jurisdictions, but had been in SA in the last 14 days, would have the same conditions apply to them.

With New Zealand travellers entering from other Australian jurisdictions, I recommended that they remain in the Low Risk category and be reviewed in 2 weeks. Given the risk of mixing with other international passengers and the lack of agreed arrangements to separate them from such groups, I recommended that those arriving from New Zealand directly or through a third country across international borders should continue to be managed in the same way as other international travellers.

Current Situation

The current WA interstate border arrangements are designed to manage the risk from COVID-19 outbreaks currently or previously occurring in South Australia, Victoria and NSW, and, to a lesser extent, from visitors from New Zealand coming through NSW and the Northern Territory under the Commonwealth's New Zealand travel 'bubble' arrangements.

The 'Controlled Border for Western Australia Directions' came into force on 14 November 2020. The 'South Australia Outbreak Response Directions' were introduced on 15 November 2020 in response to an initial outbreak of 4 related community cases in Adelaide, including one in a quarantine hotel worker. These Directions require that all arrivals from South Australia (SA) undertake home quarantine and arrival and day 11 testing.

While there is still no evidence of current COVID-19 spread in WA, with all recent cases involving international travel, the current situation in Victoria continues to demonstrate no community spread, with no new cases and 1 death in the last 38 days and no active cases being reported on 07 December 2020. Victoria reached 28 days with no community cases on 26 November 2020 as anticipated. Victoria has continued to ease its lock down and mass gathering arrangements and other States and Territories have now fully opened their borders to Victoria.

NSW, after having no community cases for 26 days, reported a case in a hotel quarantine worker on 02 December 2020. This worker was believed to have been infectious while working between 27-30 November. Whole Genome Sequencing confirmed that this was a United States strain, and subsequent contact tracing identified that the likely transmission was from a United Airlines crew member in self-quarantine at a Sydney quarantine hotel, who subsequently tested positive for the disease. Close personal, work and travel contacts were identified and quarantined. Testing of close contacts, targetted testing in the likely affected community and wastewater testing has been undertaken, but no further cases have been identified as of 07 December 2020, with now 6 days of no community cases. All other jurisdictions fully opened their borders to NSW by 01 December 2020 and no jurisdiction has placed further restrictions on NSW after the reporting of this case. As this appears to be a single case related to hotel quarantine exposure, with no recorded spread and no community cases 7-10 days after initial exposure, the risk of secondary cases from this case is assessed as very low in NSW. With no other community cases in NSW in the last 30 days, the risk of importation to, and subsequent community cases in, WA remains very low. On those grounds, the borders would be safe to open to NSW from 08 December 2020.

As of 07 December 2020, SA has reported a total of 33 cases in this outbreak, with no further cases since 27 November 2020, with 9 days of no community spread. SA has carried out extensive testing, contact-tracing and quarantining of contacts, with both 5- and 14-day rolling case averages below 1. Given the incubation period of the disease, SA is expected to move from being a Medium Risk to a Low Risk state 14 days after the last community case, which is anticipated to occur on 11 December 2020. Other jurisdictions have reviewed their quarantine arrangements with SA, with quarantine and/or reporting requirements imposed by a Queensland and other jurisdictions.

In New Zealand, there have been several small outbreaks over the last 3 months, but, since 18 November 2020, no community cases have been reported for 15 days. There is currently no COVID-19 disease in the other Australian jurisdictions not previously addressed, apart from international traveller cases in hotel quarantine, and all have had no community spread for at least 28 days.

The current border arrangements have been highly effective in reducing the numbers of potential cases who have travelled from NSW, Victoria and South Australia. There has, however, been significant physical, psychosocial and mental health impacts, as work, compassionate and family travel have all been adversely affected. These impacts are expected to be mitigated by further opening of the controlled borders. The impact on our quarantine hotels from New Zealand and interstate arrivals has reduced with the changes in Directions.

Proposed amendments to border controls

On this basis, I would recommend that on the 8 December 2020, and subject to no further community outbreaks in Victoria or NSW, Victoria and NSW should move from the Low Risk category to the Very Low Risk category, as per Attachment 1. As with the other jurisdictions where there is no community spread for greater than 28 days, which include Queensland, Northern Territory, Australian Capital Territory and Tasmania, the current 'Controlled Borders for Western Australia Directions' should be applied. This would remove the requirement for home quarantine and day 11 testing.

With regards to South Australia, it is recommended that the border arrangements, as outlined under the 'South Australia Outbreak Response Directions', are amended on or after 11 December 2020 to move South Australia from the Medium Risk category to the Low Risk category, as outlined above and per Attachment 1. These border controls should be reviewed no later than 14 days after their introduction, and can be tightened, extended or relaxed depending on the epidemiology and impacts of SA's control measures.

New Zealand travellers entering from other Australian jurisdictions should remain in the Low Risk category and be reviewed in 2 weeks. As outlined above, those arriving from New Zealand directly or through a third country across international borders should continue to be managed in the same way as other international travellers.

In summary, for the reasons outlined above, I am of the current view that the 'Controlled Border for Western Australia Directions' should be amended on 08 December to move Victoria and NSW into the Very Low Risk category. The 'South Australia Outbreak Response Directions' should be amended on or after 11 December to move South Australia into the Low Risk category with the implementation of the appropriate conditions outlined in Attachment 1. New Zealand should remain in the Low Risk category, but be reviewed in 2 weeks, when SA is next reviewed.

Given continuing changes in the epidemiology in other States and the situation in Western Australia, I am happy to re-consider the above advice should there be significant changes in the public health situation.

Yours sincerely



Dr Andy Robertson
CHIEF HEALTH OFFICER

07 December 2020

Trigger Points for Reviewing Border Controls

Risk of importation from affected jurisdiction (as at 7 December)	Trigger Point for Review	Proposed amendments to current conditions	Recommended review date and proposed action
High Risk	Greater than 20 new community cases per day, on 5-day and 14 day rolling average	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Hotel quarantine for travellers 2. Exemptions restricted to Commonwealth, State and specialist functions only 3. Testing at days 2 and 12. 	
Medium Risk	5 to 20 new community cases per day, on 5-day and 14 day rolling average	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Home quarantine for travellers 2. Testing at days 1 and 11. 3. Exemptions restricted to Commonwealth, State and specialist functions only 	2 weeks. If risk falls to a low risk, implement low risk conditions
Low Risk	Less than 5 new community cases per day, on 5-day and 14 day rolling average	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Home quarantine for travellers. 2. Testing at day 11. 3. General exemptions may be considered if community cases are still occurring 	4-6 weeks. If risk falls to a very low risk, implement very low risk conditions
Very Low Risk	No community cases, from either an unknown source or where the contacts of a case were not in quarantine, for 28 days	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No quarantine or testing required. 2. Declaration that visitor has been in a very low risk jurisdiction for last 14 days 3. Health screening. 	4 weeks. If all jurisdictions meet the very low risk criteria, implement the negligible risk conditions
Negligible Risk	No community cases, from either an unknown source or where the contacts of a case were not in quarantine, for 28 days in all jurisdictions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Open all interstate borders 	