



Government of **Western Australia**
Department of **Health**

Your Ref:
Our Ref:
Contact:

The Honourable Roger Cook MLA
Acting Premier of Western Australia
13 Floor, Dumas House
2 Havelock Street
WEST PERTH WA 6005

UPDATED ADVICE: RESTRICTIONS IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19 RISK IN PERTH AND PEEL REGIONS

Dear Acting Premier

I am writing to you to provide an update on the situation surrounding the community outbreak of COVID-19 triggered by a case in a backpacker that was notified on 23 December 2021, and provide additional advice regarding the level of restrictions that I feel are warranted following the expiry of the [Covid Restrictions \(Gatherings And Related Measures\) Directions \(No.2\)](#) at 6:00am on Tuesday 4 January 2022.

On 23 December 2021, I wrote to inform you of a notification of a community case of COVID-19 who had attended a number of high-risk events/venues during their infectious period. As a result, I recommended that for people in the Perth Metropolitan and Peel regions, mask wearing should be mandated in all indoor spaces except residential settings, nightclubs should close, no dancing should occur at other public venues (other than weddings), and major music events should be cancelled. Subsequent cases in the backpacker community lead me to provide updated advice on 24 December 2021, in which I recommended all hospitality venues allow seated service only, in addition to the existing restrictions. On 27 December 2021, I recommended that the restrictions be kept in place until 6:00am, Tuesday 4 January 2022.

Update on the 'Backpacker outbreak'

As of 8:00am today, the number of cases in the 'Backpacker outbreak' has risen to 18. Fourteen of these cases have occurred in close contacts of known cases; another two pairs of cases amongst members of the backpacker community have direct links to each other, but no direct link to the 14 others in the outbreak. This means that there may be undetected cases in the community. The contact tracing efforts have been comprehensive, and of the known close and casual contacts, 96% and 85%, respectively, have returned a negative test.

The number of exposures sites has risen as case numbers have increased. Most sites are still in the Perth Metropolitan and Peel regions, but there has also been an increase in the number of sites in the South-West region. To date, no community cases in the South-West have been reported.

The current COVID-19 risk environment

Apart from the risk posed by possible undetected Backpacker outbreak cases in the community, a number of other factors has increased the overall risk of COVID-19. First, a case has recently been detected in a security guard working in a state quarantine facility (SQF). The mandatory daily testing program for this worker group has meant that he was detected early and was not infectious in the community for very long. It is not known for certain which SARS CoV-2 strain he is infected with, but if it is determined to be the highly transmissible omicron strain, this will elevate the initially-assessed, relatively small risk to a higher level.

Second, in recent days, there has been an increasing number of cases detected in interstate arrivals from 'medium' and 'high' risk jurisdictions. The movement of Queensland and South Australia to the 'extreme' risk category on 31 December 2021 will ameliorate this risk, as the overall numbers of arrivals from these states will decrease and those that do arrive will be required to undertake quarantine in a more-secure SQF. However, those who arrived before that date will be in self quarantine for 14 days in less secure premises in community settings, hence posing a risk of onward transmission.

Third, there is increasing pressure being placed on the SQF program owing to the increased number of cases being accommodated within them, and an ever-increasing number of states/territories moving into the 'extreme' risk category, which necessitates arrivals from those jurisdictions to quarantine in SQFs. This has resulted in a higher occupancy rate and a concomitant inability to keep in place all of the risk mitigation strategies that have, hitherto, been in place.

In summary, although the bulk of the COVID-19 risk posed by the Backpacker outbreak has dissipated, the chance of undetected cases in the community associated with this outbreak remains. In addition, the general COVID-19 risk environment means there is increased risk of outbreaks occurring between now and the date of the planned reopening of Western Australia's (WA's) borders on 5 February 2022. Controlling this risk by diligent contact tracing and continuation of public health and social measures will allow additional time to increase the COVID-19 vaccination rate in the community, in particular, the rate of booster vaccinations, which is of key importance in protecting the community against the expected arrival of the omicron strain.

Recommendations

When the current restrictions expire at 6:00am on Tuesday 4 January 2022, I recommend an easing of current restrictions, and that these be replaced with a new set of public health and social measures for people in the Perth Metropolitan and Peel regions. I recommend:

1. Masks continue to be mandated to be worn in indoor public spaces except residential settings, until at least 6:00pm Friday 7 January 2022. These spaces include public transport, workplaces, hospitals, disability and aged care facilities, and other public venues.
2. Mask wearing outdoors, including at large outdoor gatherings that are not music events, be encouraged (not mandated) where physical distancing cannot be maintained.
3. Major music events be again allowed to take place, but for those with over 500 attendees, those attendees must show proof of vaccination and their identity as a condition of entry, and masks must be worn when not eating or drinking.
4. Nightclubs be reopened, but patrons be required to show proof of vaccination and their identity as a condition of entry and wear masks when not eating or drinking.
5. The current requirement for hospitality venues to have only seated service be rescinded, and be replaced with a requirement for licenced venues with a capacity of over 500, or which are able to operate after midnight, to ensure that patrons show proof of vaccination and their identity as a condition of entry, and that they wear masks when not eating or drinking.

It should be noted that if a person has been in the Perth Metropolitan or Peel Region on or after Thursday 16 December, and they are now elsewhere in WA, they should also adhere to the mask wearing recommendations as outlined above for 14 days after leaving the Perth Metropolitan or Peel regions.

The COVID-19 risk environment in WA is evolving and the public health advice needs to be responsive and adaptive. The Chief Health Officer will continue to monitor the pandemic and will re-consider the above advice should there be significant changes to the public health situation.

Yours sincerely



Dr Paul Armstrong
ACTING CHIEF HEALTH OFFICER

3 January 2022