

2020

**THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**CHIEF HEALTH OFFICER REPORT ON THE STATUS OF THE PUBLIC HEALTH
EMERGENCY DUE TO COVID-19**

15 JUNE 2020

**Presented by
Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA
Minister for Health
18 June 2020**

Minister for Health

Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA

CHIEF HEALTH OFFICER REPORT ON THE STATUS OF THE PUBLIC HEALTH
EMERGENCY DUE TO COVID-19 – 15 JUNE 2020

Dear Minister

Please find herein my report to you, as Minister for Health, in relation to the declaration of a public health emergency in the ACT due to COVID-19.

Section 119 (4B) of the *Public Health Act 1997* provides that if the “COVID-19 declaration has been extended or further extended under subsection (4), the chief health officer must advise the Minister at least every 30 days about—

(a) the status of the emergency; and

(b) whether the chief health officer considers the declaration is still justified.”

Minister, my advice is that COVID-19 continues to pose a public health risk to the ACT community. My recommendation to you, as of 15 June 2020, is that the public health emergency declaration remain in place in the ACT until 7 July 2020.

This position is consistent with other Australian jurisdictions which currently have in place a public health emergency declaration or similar and are continuing to focus on the suppression of COVID-19 while gradually easing restrictions.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kerry Coleman', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Dr Kerry Coleman

Chief Health Officer

15 June 2020

CHIEF HEALTH OFFICER REPORT ON THE STATUS OF THE PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY DUE TO COVID-19 – 15 JUNE 2020

Declaration of a public health emergency in the ACT

A public health emergency declaration is in force in the ACT due to the public health risk of COVID-19 to the ACT community. This declaration currently remains in place until 7 July 2020, subject to ongoing review. It enables the Chief Health Officer to take the necessary actions to reduce threats to public health, including issuing public health directions which aim to limit the spread of COVID-19 in our community.

The ACT's public health response has been guided by the advice of the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee and National Cabinet. National and Territory restrictions have included the closure of Australia's border to non-residents, mandatory 14-day quarantine of persons returning from overseas travel, restrictions on domestic travel, restrictions on public gatherings and closure of non-essential businesses and services.

Australia and the ACT: Current status

Australia has been successful in reducing the effective reproduction rate of COVID-19. Efforts to suppress the virus are continuing in all jurisdictions with the aim of avoiding a resurgence in cases. The combination of measures implemented have been effective in flattening the curve to date. These restrictions assisted the ACT in becoming the first Australian jurisdiction to achieve zero active cases. However, some jurisdictions are still experiencing new cases each day, as well as new outbreaks. This highlights the need to continue to plan for the possibility of a resurgence of cases and clusters, particularly in vulnerable populations and settings such as residential aged care facilities and hospitals. Australia also continues to receive flights of repatriated citizens from overseas, some of whom may have been exposed to COVID-19 whilst abroad.

In Australia, as of 15 June 2020, there have been over 7,300 COVID-19 cases and 102 deaths as a result of the disease. Large numbers of cases and fatalities continue to be reported in many regions of the world, indicating that the COVID-19 pandemic is far from over.

COVID-19 confirmed cases

	Global situation ¹	Australia ²	ACT ³
Total confirmed	7,690,708	7,320	108
Total recovered	Not reported	6,838	104
Total deaths	427,630	102	3

1. https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20200614-covid-19-sitrep-146.pdf?sfvrsn=5b89bdad_4 [access date 15 June 2020, data from 10:00 CEST, 14 June 2020]
2. https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert?utm_source=health.gov.au&utm_medium=redirect&utm_campaign=digital_transformation&utm_content=health-topics/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov [access date 15 June 2020, data from 14 June 2020]
3. <https://www.covid19.act.gov.au/> [access date 15 June 2020, data from 09:00am 15 June 2020]

The ACT community's response

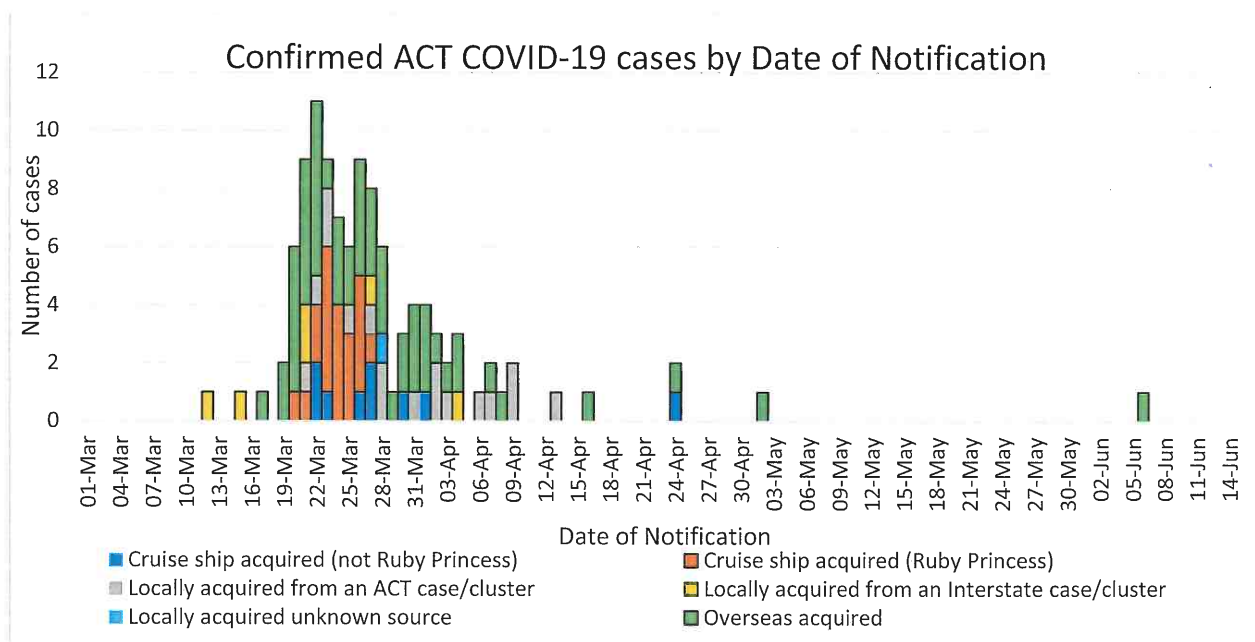
The Canberra community has played a vital role in slowing the spread of COVID-19 by following the health advice and complying with public health directions. This has meant staying at home as much as possible during the pandemic, avoiding non-essential travel, practicing good hand and respiratory hygiene, physical distancing, seeking testing as appropriate, and self-isolating if a suspected or confirmed case, or a close contact of someone with COVID-19.

It is important that we remain vigilant and maintain these behaviours to continue suppression of the virus in the weeks and months ahead.

ACT summary report

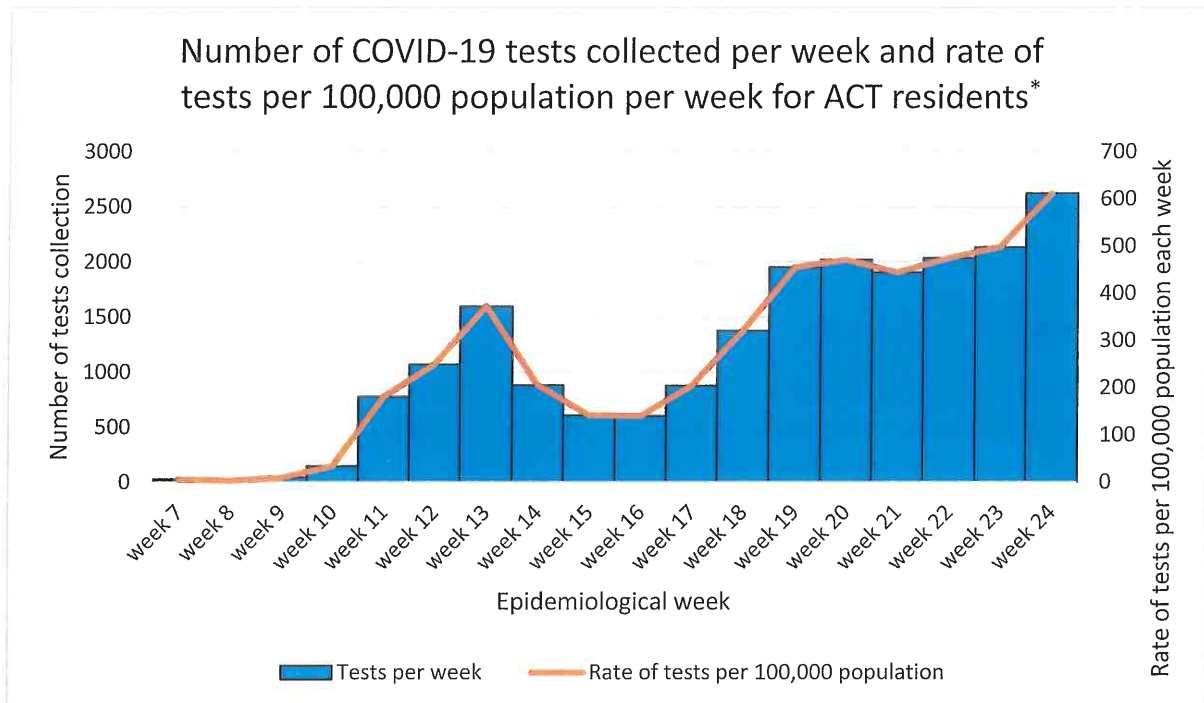
As of 15 June 2020, the ACT has recorded 108 cases of COVID-19; 104 of these cases have recovered from the disease and there have been three deaths. The case fatality rate in the ACT is 2.8 per cent. There is currently one active case in the ACT. Prior to this case being notified on 8 June 2020, the ACT had not had a new case of COVID-19 for 34 days. All cases in the ACT have been linked with a known source of exposure, apart from one case for which an identified source of exposure was not able to be ascertained. The majority of the ACT's COVID-19 cases have been overseas travellers, including passengers on cruise ships. A total of 16 cases were admitted to hospital and six patients to the Intensive Care Unit.

There continues to be no evidence of community transmission of COVID-19 in the ACT. Despite the ACT's favourable position, we are still seeing new active cases across Australia, including in neighbouring NSW (albeit low), and there remains a risk of further cases and potentially outbreaks in the ACT, particularly as travel and other restrictions are eased.



Surveillance and monitoring

The ACT is continuing a program of enhanced testing for COVID-19. The testing criteria includes any person with symptoms that could be related to COVID-19. As at 15 June 2020, the ACT had conducted over 23,570 tests (positive and negative). Multiple testing sites are available to the public including a drive through testing clinic at EPIC and Canberra's main testing site at the Weston walk-in centre. We remain confident that the risk of undetected COVID-19 cases in the ACT is very low; however, we are maintaining rigorous surveillance and monitoring of the situation and closely watching for any changes as restrictions are eased.



- * Testing data based on ACT Pathology tests only which represents approximately 85% of all COVID-19 testing conducted in the ACT.

Easing of restrictions

In May 2020, the ACT commenced easing restrictions informed by the nationally-agreed *3 Step Framework for a COVIDSafe Australia*, approved by National Cabinet. As these public health control measures are gradually eased, our public health experts are monitoring and assessing the impact of each step.

Easing restrictions does carry higher levels of risk of resurgence of COVID-19. Procedures are in place to identify cases early to mitigate the risk of community transmission. The impact of easing restrictions on COVID-19 case numbers, as well as the impact of changes made in other jurisdictions, is being closely monitored to guide future decisions on easing restrictions.

The decision to progress to Stage 2.2 easing of restrictions (as per the ACT's Recovery Plan) was announced on 12 May 2020. In view of the ACT's positive situation, the Chief Health Officer recommended that a further easing of restrictions (in relation to gathering sizes) than what was originally proposed for Stage 2.2, could take place. While this presents some higher risks, the ACT is in a good position to be able to quickly identify and minimise risks as new cases are identified.

Conclusion

As we move into the next phase of the epidemic in the ACT, we continue to focus on enhanced surveillance in the community and continued outbreak planning for at-risk populations including aged care facilities, residential facilities, health care workers and hospitals.

We are continuing our monitoring for evidence of community transmission as public health control measures are further relaxed and assessing the effects of each change in restrictions. The experience of some other countries around the world has shown that there can be risk of outbreaks or a resurgence of cases, as restrictions are lifted. Our focus is therefore on the early detection of cases, and readiness to thoroughly investigate any clusters or outbreaks.

Travellers returning from overseas are continuing to be screened on arrival and quarantined for 14 days. The community's continued adherence to the health advice and public health directions remains critical.

Recommendation

As Chief Health Officer, I advise the Minister for Health that as of 15 June 2020 the public health emergency declaration should remain in place in the ACT until 7 July 2020. While the ACT currently has only one active case, we are in the process of easing the public health control measures which have assisted in slowing and reversing the growth of COVID-19 cases in the ACT.

All Australian jurisdictions are maintaining their public health emergency status at this time and continuing to focus on suppression of COVID-19 as restrictions are carefully eased.