

CORONAVIRUS — TESTING REGIMES — GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

216. Mrs J.M.C. STOJKOVSKI to the Minister for Health:

I refer to the government's response to the impact of COVID-19. Can the minister update the house on the work being undertaken to slow the spread of COVID-19 and any updates to the testing regime?

Mr R.H. COOK replied:

I thank the member for the question. We are making some great strides with our testing regimes and I am really pleased to make an announcement today. Our strategy on COVID-19 is based around three important things: we need to test, trace and isolate. Obviously, we have been doing some great work with tracing. Our contact tracing team has done an exceptional job and continues to identify the source of nearly every patient's COVID-19 infection. Isolation has been an important part of what we are doing, because we know that nearly all our COVID-19 infections have come from overseas travellers. The capacity to isolate them as they come into the state is an important element of making sure that we put downward pressure on the spread of the disease. The leadership provided by the Premier in relation to that has been key to making sure that, as a nation, we really do step up to the plate around our quarantine arrangements. That is why we have seen these low numbers in our overall testing regime and why we are now in a position to move to the next step.

Starting from tomorrow, we will be significantly expanding the cohort of patients who will be able to be tested in our COVID clinics. This is all around the three key themes of finding new cases, protecting our vulnerable populations and ensuring that we are tracking the movements of this virus as it makes its way through the community. This broadened regime will see members of the public being tested if they present with a fever and an acute respiratory infection—for example, shortness of breath, a cough or a sore throat—regardless of whether they have been overseas or in contact with a known case. Of course, we will continue with our regime for healthcare workers and WA police officers and anyone in a high-risk setting, such as aged-care facilities or remote communities, who will be tested if they have any one of the symptoms—that is, either a fever or an acute respiratory infection. It will give us the flexibility we need to test those in vulnerable settings and increase our line of sight of COVID across the state. We are doing everything we can to prepare our system and hospitals to care for those who need it. We also want to ensure that our frontline healthcare staff have the PPE and the protection that they need to care for their patients.

The ongoing laboratory testing that we are doing to make sure we can look after our healthcare workers is important, as is, as I said before, the opportunity to procure more PPE to protect them on the front line.

Today we released a heat map, which is a graphical representation of COVID-19 case data. The values are represented in colours to give viewers a quick impression of the location of cases in Western Australia. This map, which has been developed by the Department of Health, highlights confirmed cases of COVID-19 across the state. The map displays both regional and metropolitan activity by local government authority. Importantly, only Western Australian cases will be displayed on the maps. We will exclude the number of cases from cruise ships and other non-WA cases. Cruise ships continue to be a significant challenge to us in relation to the number of cases we are dealing with, but the Department of Health is up to the challenge to look after these souls. We wish them all the very best. We have a number of them in intensive care units now and, on behalf of the government and, I am sure, everyone in Parliament, we wish them all the very best for their speedy recovery on their COVID-19 journey.