

CABINET-IN-CONFIDENCE



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

Your Ref:
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Contact:

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PHASE 4 AND THE PROPOSED CANCELLATION OF PERTH ROYAL SHOW

Dear Premier

On 05 August 2020, the Acting Chief Health Officer, Dr Paul Armstrong, wrote to you recommending that the introduction of Phase 5 of the WA COVID-19 roadmap be delayed for a further 2 weeks until 29 August 2020. This was the third recommended extension of Phase 4 from the original proposed date of 18 July 2020.

The implementation of border controls and public health, mass gathering, and physical distancing measures continues to be highly effective in controlling the COVID-19 outbreak in Western Australia (WA). While there is no evidence of current COVID-19 spread in WA, Victoria and New South Wales (NSW) continue to experience outbreaks of disease, with small numbers of related cases in other jurisdictions. The outbreak in Victoria remains particularly concerning, with very stringent restrictions imposed across that state from 06 August 2020. While there has been some significant reduction in case numbers in Victoria in recent days, they remain high and it is anticipated that it may take two months or longer to get the outbreaks fully under control. It is noted that other States and Territories have introduced or strengthened their border measures and re-imposed tighter restrictions in response.

The re-introduction of COVID-19 back into the WA community from interstate travellers could lead to substantial outbreaks that will require either delay in easing of restrictions further or re-introduction of social distancing and mass gathering measures. Continuing to keep WA in Phase 4, where there are still limits on mass gatherings, mixing and physical distancing measures, will assist in reducing the numbers of people exposed and requiring public health and clinical interventions should an outbreak occur. Given the outbreaks on the east coast and the ongoing spread of the disease internationally, and the likely prolonged timeframe before these outbreaks are completely under control, it is not anticipated that current public health advice on proceeding to Phase 5 will change in the next 1-2 months. Consequently, I recommend that Phase 4 be extended for a further 2 months while the broader Australian control measures continue to be undertaken to reach the national goal of no community spread.

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With regards to the Perth Royal Show (the Show), the Royal Agricultural Society of WA had discussions with WA Police and the Department of Health in the lead up to their Council meeting of 24 June 2020, when they announced that they would be proceeding with the Perth Royal Show. This was predicated on the move to Phase 4 on the 27 June 2020 and the anticipated move to Phase 5 on 18 July 2020. This was supported by the WA Government of 04 July 2020.

The final decision to proceed with the Show relied materially on the move to Phase 5, which would remove the physical distancing requirements and the related capacity limits. From a public health perspective, the Show poses unique challenges, both from the number of attendees, usually between 300 to 400 thousand visitors over the course of the Show, and the mixing of people, particularly in areas of little social distancing, including the sideshow areas, pavilions and shared rides. In the event of a COVID-19 outbreak, such settings would facilitate viral transmission by allowing large numbers of people to gather and mix, with close proximity crowding, particularly in indoor venues, such as pavilions. Indoor settings, with limited natural ventilation and air exchange, can result in viral particles remaining in a closed space for longer periods of time. In addition, the Show is expected to have high frequency contact surfaces, where infectious respiratory droplets are more likely to settle and contaminate other visitors. While efforts to decontaminate these surfaces will assist, such efforts are highly unlikely to be sufficient to mitigate this risk. This could result in high transmission of the COVID-19 virus. Given the expected set-up, there are also temporal risks, where a person may visit multiple venues, resulting in multiple transmission events. This represents a significant risk to the ability to respond to an outbreak and, therefore, the spread of disease. Finally, given the numbers involved, the likely paucity of good contact data, and the likely interactions at the venue, contact tracing beyond the immediate family and groups of friends will be extremely difficult.

If Phase 4 were to continue, as proposed, the required physical distancing, mass gathering, and hygiene measures would be very difficult to comply with, and, as discussed with WA Police, practically impossible to enforce. I note that other jurisdictions, including Queensland and South Australia, have cancelled their Shows based on their risk assessments. Based on the public health grounds outlined above, and the anticipated extension of Phase 4, I recommend that the 2020 Perth Royal Show be cancelled.

Yours sincerely



Dr Andrew Robertson
CHIEF HEALTH OFFICER

17 August 2020