



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

Your Ref:
Our Ref:
Contact:

Commissioner Chris Dawson
Commissioner of Police and State Emergency Coordinator

Via email: chris.dawson5@police.wa.gov.au

Dear Commissioner

MAINTENANCE OF INTERSTATE BORDERS IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

The implementation of border controls at both the international and state levels, along with public health, mass gathering and social distancing measures, continues to be highly effective in controlling the COVID-19 outbreak in Western Australia (WA). On 20 May 2020, I advised the Premier that, until community spread is eliminated in the two affected jurisdictions (New South Wales and Victoria), which would require at least a month to confirm (two 14-day incubation periods), opening of the interstate borders was not recommended. New South Wales has made good progress with only one small outbreak in the last 21 days. Victoria, however, has seen increasing community spread over the last 7 days. If the community spread had been controlled, relaxation of the interstate borders could then have been considered after the introduction and assessment of the impact of Phase 5.

The Australian Government's decision, on the advice of the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC), to ban all non-Australian passengers from 24 March, and the quarantine of all arrivals, remains extant and continues to have a significant positive impact on preventing the re-introduction of COVID-19 into Australia.

Western Australia's decision to require self-quarantine following interstate travel on 24 March 2020 (Self Quarantine following Interstate Travel Directions) and close the interstate border (Quarantine (Closing the Border) Directions) on 05 April 2020, along with the Closure and Restriction Directions, have remained highly effective in reducing interstate cases and eliminating community spread. Since 20 May, there have been 25 new cases, all directly related to travelers, including the Al Kuwait livestock vessel.

With the current source and level of cases, the restrictions on activities can continue to be eased off in a controlled and measured way, as outlined by AHPPC in their advice to National Cabinet. The implementation of Phase 2 on 18 May 2020 has not been associated with an increase in local cases. Initial review of the impacts of the introduction of Phase 3 on the 06 June 2020 has not identified any new community cases. Health surveillance, including enhanced testing, will continue to be undertaken to ensure that there are no outbreaks or community spread. This graduated response

is designed to be sustainable and to minimise spread, if it were to occur, and enable rapid response to any outbreaks. If effective, there will be no requirement to close hospitality, community or sports sectors again in response to isolated outbreaks.

With continued COVID-19 outbreaks and community spread in two jurisdictions, primarily in Victoria, the risk of introduction across an interstate border remains and, at least from Victoria, has increased. The current quarantine restrictions ensure that such cases are isolated and unable to spread the disease further within the WA community. Closure remains an effective mechanism in reducing the introduction of disease in several jurisdictions, including South Australia, Tasmania, Queensland and Northern Territory. While several of these jurisdictions have promulgated dates with regards to lifting their borders, it is anticipated that these dates may be re-evaluated over the coming days as the outbreaks in Victoria evolve.

Proposals to open the borders to jurisdictions with no community spread, such as South Australia and the Northern Territory, if legally viable, could be considered on public health grounds, as the risk of re-introduction from these jurisdictions remains very low. This would, however, place increased reliance by WA on the effectiveness of their border controls, particularly for travelers passing through those jurisdictions to WA. Given the different approaches these jurisdictions have taken to implementing the border controls, and that they may be lifted at different times to the WA borders, consideration of the risk posed would require further assessment.

As Western Australia increases the size of mass gatherings in the hospitality, community and sports sectors in Phases 4 & 5, the re-introduction of COVID-19 back into the community from interstate travelers could lead to substantial outbreaks that may require either delay in easing of further restrictions or re-introduction of social distancing and mass gathering measures. Until community spread is eliminated in the affected jurisdictions, which will require at least a month to confirm (two 14-day incubation periods), or reduced to such low levels as to pose a minimal risk, such as in New South Wales, where rapid containment measures have prevented further spread, opening of the interstate borders is not recommended. If the community spread is controlled, relaxation of the interstate borders could be considered after the introduction and assessment of the impact of Phase 5.

Yours sincerely



Dr Andrew Robertson
CHIEF HEALTH OFFICER

24 June 2020