



The Hon. Scott Morrison MP
Prime Minister

TRANSCRIPT
PRESS CONFERENCE
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EO&E...

PRIME MINISTER: ...all members of that National Cabinet have reaffirmed our commitment to just how important the National Cabinet is to ensure that all governments are working closely together to put in place various arrangements and supports to ensure the Australian people can come through this together over the very difficult months ahead. I want to thank all members of the National Cabinet for coming together this evening and to work through the many issues that have been raised, particularly over the course of the day so I can stand here tonight with the Chief Medical Officer and provide some clarity as to a number of issues that has arisen over the course of the day.

So the National Cabinet, I want to assure Australians, is working and will continue to work and all of its members are very committed to its processes and its decisions. Secondly, the measures I'm going to take you through tonight relate to two particular areas. The first one is in relation to places of gathering, of social gathering, and I want to take you through some new rules. Stage one of those rules which premiers and chief ministers will go into further detail tomorrow as they move to legislate and regulate the changes we're putting in place. The second in relation to schools and I want to reinforce, as the Chief Medical Officer I'm sure will, that there has been no change to the advice, the health advice, in relation to schools. I said earlier today, and as the Chief Medical Officer has been stressing also at all of our presentations, social distancing, keeping the healthy distance, healthy physical distance between individuals as you're practising here tonight, wherever that is, is our biggest weapon in fighting this virus, saving lives. And we need all Australians to be following the health advice when it comes to keeping a healthy distance and observing the limits that relate to gatherings, whether they be outdoor or they be indoor. This is incredibly important. The failure of our public to do that will put people at risk and make it extremely difficult for governments to be able to take actions that can control the flow and spread of this virus. Governments must do their bit and we are, but we need Australians to do their bit. On the weekend, what we saw was a disregard of those social distancing practices as people turned up to the beach in large numbers, crammed venues in our major cities. As I flagged this morning, this sent a very clear message to premiers, chief ministers and myself that the social distancing practices are not being observed as well as they should be.

Now, I want to thank all of those Australians who are doing the right thing, those Australians who are engaging in the self isolation, particularly when they've come back from overseas. I want to thank them for doing that. But what I am seeking and all the premiers and chief ministers are seeking is that Australians will do better than they have been on this and to hold each other to account. I might just ask if we don't do flashes, if that's OK, because it's a bit distracting. Thank you.

So what's important is that we now need to take action because we can't have the confidence as a group of leaders that the social distancing guidelines and rules that we've put in place won't be followed to the level of compliance that we require to flatten the curve and to slow the spread and to save lives. So the premiers and chief ministers together with myself tonight agreed that there is a need to move to more widespread restrictions on these gatherings in indoor spaces and I want to run through them with you. I want to stress that this is stage one of this response. Premiers and chief ministers are also very clear that they want these rules to apply state-wide, territory-wide, in each of their jurisdictions. They are stage one, and they will be reviewed on a monthly basis. But as I have stressed and the Chief Medical Officer has stressed and others have also, that once you start putting these sorts of arrangements in place, we should have the expectation that they will remain in place for at least six months. If the health situation changes and enables us to reconsider those arrangements, then that can be reconsidered. But I wouldn't want anyone to get the impression that these arrangements are things that will be in place for a couple of weeks or a month and then will be discarded and everything will be OK. These are very significant measures and they are done, regrettably, because it will mean for many people that the places at which they go to work, they will be unable to do that in the way they were before. And it makes it even more important, the measures I announced earlier today, to provide support to those individuals who may be affected by these changes. This is what I mean. When we all don't do the right thing, then it has real implications for others.

Stage one would see that in enclosed spaces for gatherings in the following facilities to be closed as of midday tomorrow: registered and licenced clubs, licenced premises in hotels and pubs. So that is in the licenced area, not in the accommodation area, but in the venues that sit within those hotels where their licenced gatherings and gatherings that will also be excluded- that will also be closed. Off licence parts of those premises for bottle shops, that particularly applies in places like Tasmania and in Queensland, I understand, they will be excluded from these arrangements. They work like any other retail premises. They are not a place of people gathering in an off licence bottle shop. Entertainment venues and cinemas, casinos and nightclubs. Restaurants and cafes will be restricted to take away only. Indoor sporting venues. Places of worship. Enclosed spaces for funerals and things of that nature will have to follow the strict four square meter rule which will be enforced. Home deliveries, takeaways, all of these things will continue as I know many of these catering businesses are already adjusting their business models in anticipation of things that they believe would potentially take place. The fact that we're having to do that at this point, I've gone into the reasons why and I am deeply regretful that those workers and those business owners who will be impacted by this decision will suffer the economic hardship that undoubtedly they will now have to face. That is a very, very regretful decision, but a necessary one in the view of the premiers and chief ministers and myself to ensure that we can control the spread of this virus.

This should highlight to all Australians how serious this is and how hard we all have to work together to get this right. In remote communities, there will be specific rules that will be defined by the chief ministers, premiers in those communities and they'll be worked through tomorrow morning. The premiers and chief ministers together myself will be considering stage two potential restrictions in this area. But what we first want to see is we want to see the public respond to these very serious measures. We're dealing with the principal places of social gathering where we saw people coming together on the weekend. If we don't get on top of that, then we look at a much more difficult health scenario into the future.

Now on the issue of schools, children should go to school tomorrow. There is no change to the medical expert advice in relation from the AHPPC panel, the medical expert panel from the states and territories in their advice to the National Cabinet in relation to the health advice. That said, I also want to thank all the teachers and all those working in our schools who've been doing that under a lot of pressure. The principals and deputy principals, the teachers, the teachers aides, all of those have been working in the school communities under a lot of stress and strain as this debate has raged on. The health advice has been clear and they've remained open and this is important because - I want to stress this - I don't want to see our children lose an entire year of their education. That's what we're talking about here. This is very serious. If you're a four year old child at pre-school, you don't get your four years old year back. You only get it once. Early childhood education is incredibly important, as is all the years of school education. And we want to ensure keeping Australia running means ensuring we can keep up to the mark with our children's education as best as we can and where there's health advice which says you can get to school and you can be taught then it's important that we do that for as long as possible, except where health circumstances would change that arrangement.

What we will be doing, though, is allowing parents to the end of this year's school term to be able to keep their children home where they choose to. But for all of those parents who wish to send their children to school for an education at the school, those schools will remain open. In addition, schools will seek to provide learning at home in a distance learning framework. But you cannot be assured that that will come in place immediately. That will take some arrangements from those schools, particularly the public schools, in many independent and Catholic schools, they may choose to move to those models, as some already have. But what's important here is if you're a parent and you want your child to go to school up until the end of this term, then the schools should remain open and must remain open is the instruction until the end of that term. Now, Victoria has already taken the decision to end the term over the course of this week, their term was due to end on Friday anyway and they've brought that forward to Tuesday, which is actually a pupil free day for the teachers. And I understand they'll also be working on how they will be able to deliver potential distance learning models in the future. The premiers and chief ministers all have the same view that schools should reopen on the other side of the term break, subject to the health advice at that time. Parents who make the decision for their children to remain at home must take responsibility for those children. Those children are staying at home. It's not an excuse for them to go down the shopping centre or to go and congregate somewhere else or potentially put themselves in contact with the vulnerable and elderly population. If you choose to keep your child at home, you are responsible for the conduct and behaviour of your children. That is always the case for any parent. But particularly in this case, it is important that they observe the strict social distancing arrangements that have been advised to the public. This term break will be like none other. This won't be a holiday as it's normally known for the break in term. There won't be trips interstate. There won't be those holiday normal type arrangements. There won't be congregating up at the trampoline venue or whatever it happens to be. That won't be happening. It won't be a holiday as anyone has ever known it. And it's important that I think families and households understand that, because over the course of the term break, we need to ensure that we continue to follow the very strict rules around social distancing. This is a critical time, an absolutely critical time. The decisions that parents make, that we all make, over the course of the next few weeks in particular, could very seriously determine the trajectory that Australia continues to go on in relation to the coronavirus. So I would seek and implore Australians to follow this advice. You will be saving lives and you'll be saving livelihoods. Already as a result of the measures we have been forced into taking this evening, there are many livelihoods that will be impacted as a result.

So they are the measures that we've arrived at tonight. It was an important discussion to have and we've been able to come to an agreement between all of the states and territories as to how we proceed on those issues. We will meet again on Tuesday night. There are many other issues we have to discuss. The tenancies legislation is a key issue that comes up on Tuesday night and there are many other matters that are before us. We are going to keep working together. We are absolutely committed to this process of the National Cabinet. It is a key tool for helping Australia work through the difficult challenges that we have. So with that, I'm going to pass over to the Chief Medical Officer and he's going to make some comments on these things. I'm happy to take a few questions.

PROFESSOR BRENDAN MURPHY, CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER: Thanks, Prime Minister. If Australia is going to get through the challenge of this pandemic over the coming months, we have to live differently. We've been making that point very clear over the last week. But it's also clear that some people haven't got it. And I'm particularly talking to young people who may think they're immune to the effects of this virus. And it's true, most young people don't get significant disease. But as a young person, you don't want to be responsible for the severe and possibly fatal disease of an older, vulnerable Australian. We have to stop the rapid spread of this virus. There has been very significant increase in cases over the last few days. Still a lot of imported cases, but definitely some community transmission. As the Prime Minister has said, people have not been getting the messages and we have had to take, we've recommended unanimously, that these fairly dramatic and drastic recommendations be put in place because we have to stop those situations where viruses pass readily. We've had some events in Australia where 35 people have picked up the virus from one particular function. We cannot allow this sort of spread to happen. We have to all, in every aspect of our life, practise social distancing, good hygiene. These measures have to become our routine. We are going to live differently if we're going to get through this virus without serious impacts on the vulnerable in our community and serious impacts on the health system. We can do it. These measures are sustainable for as long as we need to. We can still get on with living, but we have to live very, very differently. I can't emphasise that enough.

I do want to say again that many of the cases that we have seen in the last few days have been from international travellers. We've seen some irresponsible behaviour from people who were told to quarantine and have not and they have spread the virus. We now have to be absolutely rigid. If you come back from anywhere, a cruise ship or a plane and you come back to this country, you go home and you quarantine for two weeks, no exceptions. You are putting your fellow Australians at risk if you break that rule. So please, every one of us has to do our bit. We have to save our vulnerable Australians from what could be and we've seen this in other countries, fairly devastating impacts if we get a widespread pandemic in this country. We can control, we can contain and we can, as the Prime Minister said, bend and flatten the curve. But every single Australian has to play their role in doing this. Thanks, Prime Minister. Thank you.

JOURNALIST: With the shutdown of nonessential gatherings, we're going to see people flood the supermarkets. Panic buying is going to increase. What are you going to say to those people? How can you stop that?

PRIME MINISTER: There is no need for that. There is no need for that. What we are doing is closing down gatherings even in pubs and clubs and things of that nature. We are not putting in place lockdowns that put people and confine them to their home. That is not a measure that has been contemplated at this point and so there is no reason for anyone to do that. There is also no reason for anyone to rush to any of those venues tomorrow before midday. That would be highly irresponsible. And I would just simply ask Australians to get a hold of themselves if they were thinking of doing something of that nature.

JOURNALIST: Right now, shopping centres for example...

PRIME MINISTER: No, shopping centres are not closed. I have not said that tonight. I'll go through the list again - closure of pubs, registered and licenced clubs, excluding bottle shops attached to these venues, the off licence component, hotels in their licenced premises and their venues that are at their hotels but excluding the accommodation, gyms and indoor sporting venues, cinemas, entertainment venues, casinos, nightclubs, restaurants and cafes which will be restricted to take away and or home delivery as any other venue can, religious gatherings, churches and places of worship and for funerals or things of that nature in enclosed spaces, it must be within the four square metre rule to apply to those venues . The point we are making is this - if people move into those shopping centres tomorrow, they would not be observing the distance principles and social distancing principles that we're imploring Australians to follow. And so I would ask them, there is no need for them to do that. There is no need to go and hoard, buy or do any of those things. That is not necessary. And Australians should exercise some restraint when it comes to that, because as we've just made very clear, that when that doesn't occur, then more dramatic measures have to be introduced. So I would just simply ask Australians to be calm and exercise some sensible judgement.

JOURNALIST: There seems to have been a critical conflict here between the advice that's going to the Victorian government with regards to schools. Victoria, which has one in one in four students in Australia, and the advice that's coming to you and I'd like you both to answer it. How can you explain the conflict between the advice that you're giving to the nation tonight and the clear view from Victoria that schools should close from Tuesday?

PRIME MINISTER: The position that I've outlined to you tonight has been agreed by all Premiers and Chief Ministers as part of the National Cabinet and it is based on the consensus advice provided by the medical expert panel, which the Chief Medical Officer convenes.

Brendan.

PROFESSOR BRENDAN MURPHY, CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER: So the AHPPC had a long discussion about schools today. We reaffirmed our position that the risk to children of coronavirus is extremely low. We've had hardly any cases in children, in primary school children and the international experience is that it is a very, very low risk of symptomatic infection. We don't know whether children may be transmitters, there isn't good evidence on, and there haven't been evidence of published cases where there's been significant transmission in a school. There are some people who believe that closing schools may contribute to social distancing. Our view, the consensus view of all of the Chief Health Officers that we signed up to today, was that at this time schools should stay open. We are talking about measures for the long term, for several months, and that's why we made that decision.

JOURNALIST: Just a bit of clarity on schools. So, for example, the ACT government said today they were shutting all schools from Tuesday indefinitely and putting in long distance learning. Is it now no longer the case as a consequence of tonight's meeting? And realistically, what chance do you think Victoria will reopen it's schools at the end of the school holidays? When they said they're going to, quote, review, unquote, the situation.

PRIME MINISTER: Well, I'll deal with the second point first. And the Premier has reaffirmed his commitment this evening that is the intention of the Victorian government to reopen schools subject to

the health advice at that time. And that's the same for all schools. I mean, this is a matter that's being reviewed on a regular basis, as I think has been evidenced. In relation to the ACT schools, they'll be following the same practise that I've outlined today, and that is where schools do choose to move to some distance learning arrangement, they will also keep the schools open for parents who wish to send their children to those schools. Now, for many parents, for those who may be both parents who are working, those that might be essential occupations, particularly nurses and doctors and police and paramedics and things like this. This is very important, but even more important is we want our children to continue to get an education. There are many things that we're going to have to sacrifice because of this coronavirus. One of the things Premiers, Chief Ministers and I are very keen to try and avoid is having to sacrifice the education of our children.

Michelle?

JOURNALIST: So this, just to be absolutely clear on this, the guarantee from all the leaders tonight was that the schools would reopen after the holidays...

PRIME MINISTER: Subject to the health advice.

JOURNALIST: Subject to the national health advice, not their own health officer?

PRIME MINISTER: What we have continued to commit to tonight as a National Cabinet is to work together on all of these issues. And that means receiving the advice from the AHPPC and to seek to address and resolve these issues amongst the National Cabinet. And that's what we did tonight. So we could stand before you this evening and provide that advice on the issues that were as a matter of discussion today. And I think that's very helpful and I thank them for the ability to come to those conclusions this evening.

JOURNALIST: You mentioned stage two of this shutdown. What is it and what triggers it?

PRIME MINISTER: Well stage two has not been defined and it has not yet even been defined if it will be necessary. Stage one... see, what we're doing here is we're dealing with the principal places of social gathering. Okay. We don't now have any confidence that people would refrain from gathering in those ways, in those places, pubs and clubs and nightclubs, and Dr. Murphy has made it pretty clear that that is principally amongst the younger community. We have no confidence that that will be followed. So unfortunately, because guidelines can't be followed then for public health reasons, we now need to take a further action which shuts those gatherings down. Now, they are the principal places of social gathering which are our greatest risk. They have been identified over the course of today by the medical expert panel. They are been considered by Premiers and Chief Ministers and myself tonight. And that is the list of venues and gatherings that will not be able to take place from midday tomorrow. The states, the territories, the Commonwealth, the National Cabinet reserves its position to take any such further matters into consideration as it needs to. So we will just continue to deal with this in a sensible and calm way through a disciplined process of the National Cabinet, working together and seeking to provide as clear advice as we can. But the key point is this - please cooperate with the health advice. Where that health advice is complied with, then it means that we can take measures which have less impact on the everyday functioning of the community and people's jobs and livelihoods.

Yes, over the back- you've already had a question, yep?

JOURNALIST: Professor, the AHPPC met earlier this afternoon. What are these stage one measures were discussed and agreed upon them or were they only brought up after two states came out and said they were going to basically do those anyway and further on that, given that this is in response to people not practising social distancing, the Government's information campaign explaining what social distancing is only launched this weekend. How can you... by your own concession, this is going to be for months, based on something that a lot of people didn't know about until this weekend?

PROFESSOR BRENDAN MURPHY, CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER: So the National Cabinet tasked us on Friday night to consider these measures and that was planned for this afternoon. The announcements of various governments had nothing to do with that. We did what we were asked to and we considered that as previously scheduled. I agree that social distancing is a concept that people have to get to terms with and the communications have been going out. We've made the message very clear in the media last week and we made it very clear that people needed to keep their distance. We've been talking about keeping a metre and a half distance for a lot more than the last week. So the other thing that's happened over the weekend, obviously, has been the significant rise in cases. And so there is a greater urgency to make measures now that we might have considered a bit later had the rise in cases not occurred.

PRIME MINISTER: Andrew, I'm sorry, you've had several questions... Andrew, I'm sorry, Andrew. I know, but you don't run the press conference, Okay? So I'm going to go to other questions of members of the group. Katharine hasn't had a question. I'm happy to return to you, but let's just keep it civil.

Katherine?

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister I think it's clear but again, just for perfect clarity. New South Wales and schools, they are the same as the ACT. Schools will be open for the remainder of the term yes?

PRIME MINISTER: Correct.

JOURNALIST: And also, again, I think it's clear but I'm checking, because things have moved a bit today. So businesses like hairdressers, beauticians...

PRIME MINISTER: They remain open.

JOURNALIST: All of that remains open?

PRIME MINISTER: The only ones that can't remain open and provide those services are the ones that I've listed to you this evening. Only those ones. Only those ones. I'll come back to you now, Andrew.

JOURNALIST: Dr. Murphy, a couple of weeks ago, you were at the same podium, although admittedly a bit closer to the Prime Minister, it could have been, actually, Greg Hunt, but you said this, that the children were super spreaders. There is an inconsistency, it seems to me, between having kids at school potentially exposing themselves as super spreaders to older teachers, with the statement of the Prime Minister whereby he does not want children who are kept at home wandering through Westfield shopping centres. There is a clear inconsistency. Can you answer that? Are they super spreaders or not?

PROFESSOR BRENDAN MURPHY, CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER: We don't know whether children spread this virus. There is no data on that. I've never said that they are super spreaders. I've said that for influenza

they are, they can be super spreaders. There is no data internationally anywhere in the world that shows that major spreading of this virus has occurred with children. We're not ruling that out. That is possible. But we think the risks and benefits are on the other side. I agree with you. And we have been asked again by the National Cabinet to consider next week which members of the workforce, both schools, health care, aged care, who are vulnerable because of their age and comorbidities, should not be required to go to work. That is a very important issue. We need to protect the workforce in every scenario.

PRIME MINISTER: One last one, and then we'll call it a night.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, tonight you were asked about whether the health system could keep up with the impacts because of this virus. You said it was up to Australians. What did you mean by that?

PRIME MINISTER: I mean if they practise the social distancing, if they follow the medical advice, then that will assist the country, slow the rate of transmission of this virus through the Australian community. When we slow the rate of transmission through the Australian community, that will put less pressure on the health system. This is why I stress to you it is so important that these measures are effectively followed and where they aren't being effectively followed, then states and territory leaders and myself will have to take further decisions.

But look, I appreciate today has been a long day and I understand and there'll be many more days where there will be issues that need to be clarified and there'll be many questions and there'll be anxieties, there'll be frustrations. And we will address them and we'll come and we'll discuss these issues with you and we will communicate as clearly as we can. The leaders will continue to meet. We are meeting every couple of days. This has never happened before. Premiers and Chief Ministers have never met on this schedule in any of your working lives in this building, I suspect. So it is quite different. It means we're going to have some challenging days and there are going to be some issues that there won't be clear answers to because of the nature of this virus. The medical uncertainties alone present many challenges. But I would ask people just to exercise calm, to just work with us, work with each other. And if we do that, then we will be maximising our opportunities to ensure all Australians get through this as in the best possible position we can be and we bounce back strongly.

Thank you for staying back this evening. Thank you.

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