




Speech By
Hon. Dr Steven Miles
MEMBER FOR MURRUMBA

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Coronavirus, Update

 **Hon. SJ MILES** (Murrumba—ALP) (Minister for Health and Minister for Ambulance Services) (10.18 am): In Queensland this morning we now have 94 confirmed cases of COVID-19. Nationally more than 414 cases have been confirmed and there have been five deaths. Globally there are more than 197,000 cases, with 7,905 lives lost across 153 countries and regions. Since January we have listened to the experts and we have been preparing for it.

The latest advice from the national cabinet is that non-essential indoor gatherings of more than 100 people should be cancelled. This is effective immediately. This will affect the number of patrons allowed in cinemas, entertainment venues, pubs, clubs and large restaurants. It will not affect airports, public transport, medical facilities, emergency services, aged care, prisons, courts, supermarkets, offices, schools, universities or construction sites. There will be more information to come about which operations this will affect and what precautions are appropriate for the exceptions.

We know this virus affects older loved ones much worse than the general population, and that is why aged-care homes will only allow residents two visitors at a time. The department of foreign affairs is advising that all Australian travellers now return home. Anyone returning from overseas must now quarantine in their homes for 14 days. To those at home right now following this advice, I want to say thank you. You are protecting your community from this virus. You are stopping the spread and saving vulnerable people's lives.

To people who are anxious about this outbreak, I understand. I want you to know that Queensland is well prepared. We entered this emergency with a very substantial stockpile of equipment, medicines and personal protective equipment including masks, and we have continued to source more throughout. We have continued to rapidly expand our testing capabilities. In fact, Queensland was the first state to expand the test criteria for travellers returning from China to all returning travellers with symptoms.

Queensland has been leading the other states in ensuring its testing criteria has been targeted to those in the community who need it most. Queensland's laboratory testing is among the best in the world, and we are continuing to lead the way. We have testing collection hubs right around the state. Queensland Health is uniquely placed as a public pathology provider. It has two distinct analytical test platforms and assays. This ensures that we are well prepared and well placed for all possible novel coronavirus outbreak scenarios as demand increases for worldwide stocks.

I am pleased to advise the House today that we will double the number of public laboratories able to test for COVID-19. Currently, samples collected throughout the state are transported to either Brisbane or Townsville. Queensland Health will expand testing for COVID-19 to Pathology Queensland laboratories at the Toowoomba Hospital, the Rockhampton Hospital and the Sunshine Coast University Hospital.

The additional instruments will dramatically improve turnaround time. They will allow us to do more tests faster. This will support us not just as we continue to respond to COVID-19 but for the upcoming influenza season. We use the gold standard of viral testing, known as polymerase chain reaction testing. This is a three-phase test which involves the extraction, purification, amplification and detection of virus DNA. The three new state-of-the-art Hologic Panther Fusion instruments cost almost \$300,000 each, but they are worth it.

We are working to increase large-scale capability on a third test platform for COVID-19 using this new fleet. Queensland's two largest private pathology providers—QML and Sullivan Nicolaides Pathology—have also recently developed testing capability and are supporting most of the private sector demand. In fact, between us we have already tested 24,018 Queenslanders. Roughly 30 per cent of all tests done in Australia were done in Queensland.

As always, please get your information from Queensland Health or a healthcare provider. Right now panic and fear are more dangerous than the virus itself. In Queensland right now, to get the virus you have to have been overseas or come into contact with someone who has it. To get scared you only have to open Facebook. There is a lot of misinformation out there, but Queenslanders can be assured that our health service is doing everything to support their staff and patients.