




Speech By
Hon. Yvette D'Ath

MEMBER FOR REDCLIFFE

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Coronavirus, Vaccine; Hospitals, Emergency Departments

 **Hon. YM D'ATH** (Redcliffe—ALP) (Minister for Health and Ambulance Services) (9.56 am): The Palaszczuk government's strong public health response to COVID has helped to keep communities throughout Queensland safe and supported our plan for economic recovery. As the Premier said, Queensland's vaccination rollout continues to gather pace. In total, Queensland now has 17 vaccination hubs delivering doses of both the Pfizer and AstraZeneca vaccines. More vaccination hubs will come online from next week. The number of vaccinations administered in Queensland now stands at 13,989.

I am also pleased to announce that from today a dedicated van for COVID-19 testing will be deployed across Far North Queensland to help prevent the spread of the virus among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Cairns based Tropical Public Health Services is launching its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Nations COVID-19 outreach van to support testing and community engagement. The mobile testing van is staffed by three nurses, an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander liaison officer and an administration officer. It will be supported by a senior medical officer, a public health nurse and a senior public health officer. The team will be able to test symptomatic people and provide up-to-date information about how individuals and communities can protect themselves from COVID-19. The van will be visiting a range of sites in the region, including the communities of Yarrabah and Mossman Gorge, and starting today in Shang Park, Mooroolbool.

With the unprecedented demand for emergency department services we have seen recently in parts of Queensland, some of Queensland's public hospitals have been placed on code yellow. When a code yellow is put in place, it allows hospitals to distribute resources to meet the high demand they are experiencing. The declaration of a code yellow is not something the community needs to be alarmed about.

In the last week, a number of Metro North hospitals experienced brief periods on code yellow. Cairns Hospital was placed on code yellow yesterday amid unprecedented demand: 263 people were treated in the Cairns Hospital emergency department on Wednesday, just short of the record daily total of 286.

A spike in trauma injury presentations along with increased category 5 presentations, which is the lowest category, are amongst the drivers of this new record number of presentations. Many of these category 5 presentations are avoidable, both in Cairns and in other parts of the state. The latest hospital performance data for the September to December 2020 quarter shows a 46 per cent increase in category 5 presentations—a 46 per cent increase. Many of these cases can be more effectively managed in non-emergency settings.

As part of our work with our GPs on these challenges, yesterday I joined with the Chief Health Officer; the Chair of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, Dr Bruce Willett; and the President of AMA Queensland, Dr Chris Perry, to film a video congratulating our general practitioners for all the work they have done over the past year. A core part of our message to GPs was to encourage

their patients to call upon their GP when seeking medical care for minor conditions including coughs and colds rather than heading to the hospital. Too often we are finding that people are turning to their local emergency department for medical care that could be provided by our excellent local general practitioners.

I also remind Queenslanders that they can call 13HEALTH to provide advice as to whether they should present at a hospital or their GP. In addition, in response to the increased demand for acute services, a further \$25 million has been approved for measures to help reduce the impact on emergency departments. This includes additional bed capacity in the private sector.

As at 9.30 this morning, I am advised that Cairns Hospital is the only hospital with a code yellow due to bed capacity. Our hospitals and hospital staff will continue to work hard to provide the best health care for the people of Queensland.