




Speech By
Hon. Shannon Fentiman

MEMBER FOR WATERFORD

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Coronavirus, Update; Prince Charles Hospital, Patient Safety

 **Hon. SM FENTIMAN** (Waterford—ALP) (Minister for Health, Mental Health and Ambulance Services and Minister for Women) (9.52 am): Queensland is experiencing an increase in cases of COVID-19. As of last night, there are 221 hospital beds across the state occupied by people with the virus. The majority of these are elderly people aged 65 years or over. Thankfully, there are only two people currently in intensive care with COVID-19. Crucially, most of the people in hospital have not received a booster dose this year. I am advised that, based on previous COVID waves, we are expected to see the peak of this wave in the next two weeks.

As the Chief Health Officer has said, COVID-19 is now an ongoing part of our reality, much like other acute respiratory illnesses such as influenza and RSV. Previous COVID-19 preventive measures were exceptional and were taken in response to a public health emergency and the exceptionally high numbers we saw during the global pandemic. For comparison, over the 30-day period from 11 December 2022 to 9 January 2023 there were, on average, 450 beds taken up by COVID patients every day.

As the Chief Health Officer has advised, we are not at that level of impact on our health system or the community. However, whilst we have reverted to normal infection control measures in healthcare settings, individual hospitals will determine when and where masks are required within their facilities based on the local situation—and they are best placed to make those decisions. Last month Hervey Bay hospital introduced a mask mandate for a period of 11 days to deal with increased COVID presentations. North West also introduced a mandate for a short period. Staff at the Sarina Hospital are currently required to wear masks and Metro North is continuing to encourage staff and visitors to wear masks. Children's Health Queensland is currently considering whether to introduce a mask mandate. Queensland Health continues to monitor COVID-19 as part of its broader surveillance of acute respiratory illnesses, and Queenslanders should take health measures appropriate to their individual needs.

We know that vaccination remains our best protection against COVID-19 and other infectious diseases, particularly for those over 65 years. The rise in COVID hospitalisations over recent weeks is a timely reminder for all of us to remain up to date with our boosters. All adults can get a COVID booster if it has been six months or longer since your last one. This is particularly important for those over 65 years, with ATAGI recommending everyone in this cohort should receive an extra dose.

I would also like to update the House on matters relating to the Prince Charles Hospital transplant unit. I again offer my sincere condolences to the families involved. The deaths of these transplant recipients are a tragedy. Whilst it is not appropriate to comment in the House on the details of the individual cases, I do want to provide an update. As the Chief Health Officer indicated yesterday, it is unknown the source of these fungal infections, but these are not all the same fungus and it appears unlikely that they have come from the same source. Dr Gerrard advises that fungal infections are known

to occur in transplant patients because their immunity is so suppressed. Metro North Hospital and Health Service has been in contact with the families of the patients who have died, and I want to place on the record my willingness to meet with both families if they would like. I will also be writing to the Leader of the Opposition offering him a briefing on the matter from the chief executive of Metro North.

Patient care remains our No. 1 priority. I want transplant patients to know that the service is safe. I have asked Metro North and the Department of Health to review the communications with patients and families with respect to this matter and to put in place processes to improve communication. Clearly, the way that family members were informed of this matter was not acceptable. Patients deserve timely and comprehensive information and I am committed to ensuring they receive it.