

Question on Notice

No. 5

Asked on 4 February 2020

MR D PEGG asked the Minister for Health and Minister for Ambulance Services (HON DR S MILES) –

QUESTION

Will the Minister advise as to what efforts have been made to counter the threat of the Novel Coronavirus?

ANSWER

Since 25 January 2020, when the first case of COVID-19 (novel coronavirus) was confirmed in Australia, significant effort has been undertaken including standing-up the State Health Emergency Coordination Centre (SHECC). SHECC continues to operate around the clock under the leadership of the Chief Health Officer, and is working very closely with hospitals, Queensland Ambulance Service and other government agencies to escalate our response.

On Wednesday 29 January, I signed an order under the *Public Health Act 2005* declaring the novel coronavirus a public health emergency in all of Queensland. The public health emergency enables authorities to require confirmed or suspected coronavirus cases to either move or stay in a certain place for a period of time, which is a key strategy to prevent the potential spread of novel coronavirus.

On 4 February 2020, amendments were made to the *Public Health Act 2005* to allow for the extension of the declaration of a public health emergency from 7 days to 90 days. This will allow the public, emergency officers and others involved in responding to this public health emergency to have certainty that emergency powers will continue until the risks to public health from novel coronavirus are significantly reduced.

Border control measures and travel advice have been in place nationally since 1 February 2020, with the Australian Government Department of Health launching a Coronavirus Health Information Line (1800 020 080) for members of the public who are seeking information on the novel coronavirus.

Queensland Health clinical and public health officers are working with the Australian Border Force to assist with screening and assessing all incoming passengers on flights from mainland China for symptoms and provide them with information on self-quarantine.

Within Queensland, Environmental Health Officers from our public health units have now commenced issuing notices under the *Public Health Act 2005* to persons required to self-quarantine.

The Queensland Government, through the Department of Communities, Disability Services and Seniors and Queensland Health, is partnering with the Australian Red Cross to ensure people have access to support during their period of self-quarantine. This service includes a regular telephone call to check-in on the persons wellbeing and

to identify any practical support needs they may require assistance with. For example, organising the delivery of items such as groceries, access to educational materials and replacement of medications.

The Queensland Police Service is also visiting individuals who are in self-quarantine to ensure that affected people understand their obligations and are taking them seriously.

Queensland's Health Contact Centre (13 HEALTH) continues to provide phone support to the community by contacting individuals in self-quarantine and responding to general public enquiries.

All of the above Queensland Government services are able to be delivered in Mandarin and other languages if required.

Queensland Health, through Forensic and Scientific Services and Pathology Queensland, is now able to perform up to 900 novel coronavirus tests a day, with the ability to increase if the need arises, after capacity at the central pathology laboratory based at the Herston campus came online. By the end of February, the pathology laboratory at Townsville Hospital will also be able to test for the novel coronavirus.

Queensland public hospitals are well prepared to respond to novel coronavirus and a comprehensive stocktake of medications, equipment and other resources has been undertaken. Orders have been placed for additional equipment that may be required.

Fever clinics have been set up at Gold Coast University Hospital and the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital to further support assessment of people who may have been infected with the novel coronavirus. All hospitals across the state are ready to open fever clinics at short notice if needed.

The Queensland Government is working with local Chinese organisations and community leaders to promote the latest advice from Queensland Health to the broader community, particularly those with limited English. The Palaszczuk Government will continue to support Queenslanders of Chinese heritage in providing health information and investigating instances of racial vilification. We are all Queenslanders, regardless of our cultural heritage, and we will continue to support each other at these times.

Queensland Health has developed a novel coronavirus specific web page to provide up-to-date and accurate information for the public:

<https://www.health.qld.gov.au/clinical-practice/guidelines-procedures/diseases-infection/diseases/coronavirus>.

Information on novel coronavirus, resources for display, advice on self-quarantine and frequently asked questions are available in English and in Mandarin on the Queensland Health website.

The community can trust that the situation is under control – we've dealt with health emergencies that have threatened Queensland in the past, and Queenslanders can rest assured we are taking every necessary precaution to keep them safe.