

Wednesday, 17 February 2021

STATEMENT FROM THE PREMIER

I'll cut straight to the chase, today is good news.

Because of the efforts of every Victorian – the sacrifices and the hard slog – we can be confident that slowly, and surely, we are driving the virus into the ground.

It hasn't been easy or straightforward. In fact, for those Victorians who are part of our health response, it's been bloody hard work.

3,400 close contacts identified and isolated. Thousands of hours of painstaking interviews.

212,000 tests processed. 850,000 text messages into communities.

An exacting, intricate and exhausting job against a more wicked enemy than we've known before.

I want to thank those Victorians who've made it possible – and I want to thank every Victorian for their patience.

Because of you, we've been able to track, trace and corner this mutant and more infectious strain of the virus.

It also means we're able to ease most of the restrictions, getting us back to our COVIDSafe Summer.

From 11:59pm tonight, we will largely return to the previous rules – while keeping a watchful eye on some of the riskier settings.

There'll no longer be four reasons to leave home. The five-kilometre restriction will no longer apply.

Restaurants and retail can reopen. Same too with community facilities, entertainment venues and all other public places – although some additional limits on crowd sizes will be in place.

Students will be able to head back to school. Workers will be able to get back to work.

For offices – both public and private – that means a return to 50 per cent on site.

At the same time, and as we've seen in recent days, this virus is very good at finding our weak spot. Getting us when we're relaxed and comfortable and with the people we love.

So for now, it's important we reduce the risk in some of our most vulnerable settings.

That means having no more than five visitors to your home per day. And limiting public gatherings with friends and family to 20.

I know that'll be hard. After the past 12 months, all any of us want to do is spend time with the people we love.

But by sticking to the rules and being conscious of who we see and how often we see them, we'll help keep our friends and families safe.

We can't fully relax the rules in our hospitals and aged care homes yet either – instead, we'll limit visits limit to one household per day and some specific exceptions.

Masks will continue to be a big part of our defence and will be required everywhere indoors except at home – at the supermarket, at the office, at the pub when you're getting up to pay.

For more information call the coronavirus hotline on 1800 675 398 or visit coronavirus.vic.gov.au.

Masks will also be required outside if you can't physically distance from others.

Those other defences – checking in when we're heading out, washing our hands, keeping our distance – will remain just as critical.

So too will the best protection there is: getting tested if you have any symptom, no matter how mild.

Because as much as far as we've come, as much as we've achieved, without the full-scale rollout of the vaccine – this virus isn't going away.

We have every reason to be proud – and every reason to stay safe.