

Media Statement

22 Mar 2020

Prime Minister

E&OE

Australian governments are focused on working together to slow the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) to save lives.

Every extra bit of time allows us to better prepare our health system and put measures in place to protect Australian lives.

We will be living with this virus for at least six months, so social distancing measures to slow this virus down must be sustainable for at least that long to protect Australian lives, allow Australia to keep functioning and keep Australians in jobs.

The Prime Minister, state and territory Premiers and Chief Ministers met on 22 March 2020 as the National Cabinet. They agreed to further actions to support social distancing measures already put in place and protect the Australian community from the spread of coronavirus.

Practicing good hygiene and keeping a healthy physical distance between individuals is our most powerful weapon in fighting this virus and saving lives. The failure of some businesses and members of the public to do this puts people's lives at risk.

We need every Australian to do their bit to save the lives of other Australians.

Leaders thank those members of the public who are adhering to social distancing measures. However, leaders expressed their disappointment at some members of the community who are disregarding social distancing measures and, by doing so, putting the lives of older and vulnerable Australians at risk.

If we want to slow the spread, everyone must implement appropriate social distancing in accordance with state and territory laws.

Places of social gathering

National Cabinet agreed to move to more widespread restrictions on social gatherings.

Premiers and Chief Ministers agreed to implement, through state and territory laws, new Stage 1 restrictions on social gatherings, to be reviewed on a monthly basis.

Australians should expect these measures to be in place for at least 6 months.

The following facilities will be restricted from opening from midday local time 23 March 2020:

- Pubs, registered and licenced clubs (excluding bottle shops attached to these venues), hotels (excluding accommodation)
- Gyms and indoor sporting venues
- Cinemas, entertainment venues, casinos, and night clubs
- Restaurants and cafes will be restricted to takeaway and/or home delivery
- Religious gatherings, places of worship or funerals (in enclosed spaces and other than very small groups and where the 1 person per 4 square metre rule applies).

Isolated remote community hubs are not included in these restrictions.

Other facilities are not impacted, but will be considered under stage 2 restrictions, if necessary.

These measures also apply to outdoor spaces associated with the above venues.

Leaders noted that these enhanced measures build on existing measures to slow the virus and save lives:

- No non-essential gatherings of more than 500 people outside or more than 100 people inside.
- All non-essential indoor gatherings of less than 100 people must have no more than one person per 4sqm. All Australians should expect their local businesses to be following this rule.
- Where possible, keep 1.5 metres between yourself and others
- Avoid non-essential travel
- Restrictions on entering aged care homes to protect older Australians

Leaders acknowledged that these new restrictions will change the way we live and expressed deep regret for those business owners and employees who will be impacted. The goal is to reduce the spread of the virus, to flatten the curve and to save the lives of fellow Australians.

State Premiers and Chief Ministers agreed they would give effect to these restrictions through their own legislative processes and make announcements accordingly.

Premiers and Chief Ministers will consider further Stage 2 restrictions if social distancing measures are not adhered to.

Statement on schools

All leaders agreed that children should go to school tomorrow. Leaders agreed that we cannot see children lose an entire year of their education as a result of school closures caused by COVID-19.

Leaders committed to the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) advice that says that it is safe to keep schools open.

Leaders also thanked all teachers and school staff for their support.

State Premiers and Chief Ministers agreed that schools will remain open through to the end of the current school terms to support students whose parents choose to send their children to school. Victoria's school break will commence on Tuesday 24 March 2020.

All Leaders have committed to re-open schools at the end of the school break, subject to the advice of the Australian Health Principal Protection Committee.

If parents choose to keep their children home from school, parents must be responsible for the conduct of the children and to ensure they adhere to the social distancing arrangements in place. Parents must be aware that while the majority of adults who contract COVID-19 have mild forms of the virus, the elderly or those with co-morbidities can have more significant symptoms.

Schools will be encouraged to provide access to online and distance learning.