



The Hon. Scott Morrison MP
Prime Minister

MEDIA STATEMENT

Wednesday 5 January 2022

NATIONAL CABINET STATEMENT

National Cabinet met today to discuss our response to COVID-19 and the Omicron variant, new approaches to test, trace isolate and quarantine including the use of rapid antigen tests (RATs) and the vaccine rollout and booster programme.

The Chief Medical Officer Professor Paul Kelly provided an update on the spread of the Omicron variant. Omicron case numbers continue to increase in Australia and globally. Omicron continues to show greater infectivity than the Delta variant, but with less severity.

Since the beginning of the pandemic there have been 612,106 confirmed cases in Australia and, sadly, 2,289 people have died. More than 56 million tests have been undertaken, with 1,643,841 million tests reported in the past 7 days.

Globally there have been over 294.9 million cases and sadly over 5.4 million deaths, with 2.6 million new cases and 7,169 deaths reported in the last 24 hours. The COVID-19 pandemic continues to surge in many countries around the world.

National Cabinet received a detailed update on Australia's COVID-19 vaccination program from Lieutenant General John Frewen, Coordinator General of Operation COVID Shield.

Australia's COVID-19 vaccine roll out continues to expand. To date 43 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines have been administered in Australia, including 212,497 in the previous 24 hours.

In the previous 7 days, more than 754,500 vaccines have been administered in Australia. More than 94.5 per cent of the Australian population aged 16 years and over have now had a first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, including 98.7 per cent of Australians aged 50 years of age and over and more than 99 per cent of Australians aged 70 years of age and over.

More than 91.6 per cent of Australians aged 16 years and over are now fully vaccinated including more than 96.8 per cent of Australians aged 50 years of age and over and more than 99 per cent of Australians aged 70 years of age and over.

Over 2.7 million booster doses have been administered. Australia has sufficient supplies of boosters, with nearly 18 million mRNA vaccines in stock in Australia. Yesterday, over 176,000 boosters were administered across Australia. Following the widening of eligibility for boosters on 4 January to those who had their second dose at least four months earlier, over 33.8 per cent of those eligible for

boosters have had a booster and 28.6 per cent of Australians aged 70 years of age and over have had a booster in the last 8 weeks since the booster program commenced.

National Cabinet will meet again on Thursday 13 January 2022.

Rapid Antigen Tests

National Cabinet noted that COVID-19 tests are free and available at state testing clinics for people who have symptoms or are a close contact.

National Cabinet agreed that up to 10 Rapid Antigen Tests over three months (a maximum of 5 in a month) will be made available free through pharmacies to people holding the following cards:

- Pension Concession Card
- Commonwealth Seniors Health Care Card
- Department of Veterans' Affairs Gold, White or Orange Card
- Health Care Card
- Low Income Health Card

These free tests will become available in the next two weeks. However, anyone with COVID-19 symptoms and close contacts should attend a state clinic for free testing and not go to a pharmacy to receive a free test. Costs for providing these tests will be shared 50:50 between the Commonwealth and the States and Territories consistent with COVID shared funding agreements.

National Cabinet noted the Commonwealth will provide 10 million RATs to states and territories (a combination of predominantly Point of Care Tests and self tests) to assist with testing and laboratory capacity. National Cabinet agreed to fund these in line with the existing National Partnership Agreement on the COVID-19 Response.

National Cabinet received a briefing from Joe Buffone, Director-General of Emergency Management Australia, on behalf of the National Coordination Mechanism (NCM). Supply chain issues continue to be one of the main disruptors of broad access to RATs. National Cabinet noted that the Commonwealth is working through the NCM to finalise anti-hoarding measures with the Pharmacy Guild of Australia and other major retailers that stock RATs to limit the number of RATs available for sale to each individual.

National Cabinet noted the Commonwealth will prohibit price gouging of and the non-commercial export of RATs, similar to actions taken earlier in the pandemic relating to essential goods such as masks, other PPE and hand sanitiser. As was the case previously, price gouging will be defined as supplying or offering to supply essential goods at a price that is more than 120% of the initial purchase price (a 20% markup) and penalties for not complying with this direction will range up to five years imprisonment or \$66,000.

Changes to testing requirements

National Cabinet agreed changes to testing requirements for all states except for Western Australia including:

- Removing the requirement for truck drivers to have rolling seven days tests.
- Testing will not be required before patients present to hospital.

- Confirmation PCR test will not be required after a positive RAT. Individual states and territories will provide further information on how a positive RAT will be recorded. Anyone who tests positive is encouraged to contact their GP for support as required.
- Testing before interstate travel will no longer be required except for Queensland, Tasmania and Western Australia, with Queensland and Tasmania to review these requirements in the coming weeks. State testing clinics will not be able to be used for interstate travel purposes.
- A second post arrival test for international travelers will not be required except for Queensland, who will review this requirement when they reach 90 per cent double vaccination rate.

Workplace Health and Safety

National Cabinet noted the impact on business of current state workplace Health and Safety laws that could imply requiring employees to return a negative RAT test in order to present to work. National Cabinet agreed the Commonwealth Attorney General will convene a meeting of relevant ministers from all jurisdictions to consider workplace health and safety requirements with a view to removing any potential obligation to impose testing requirements in workplaces on employees

National Return to School Framework

National Cabinet tasked the First Secretaries Group (FSG) led by Mr Phil Gaetjens, Secretary of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet to develop a national framework to enable students to return to school on day one of term one, and for schools to stay open with consistent requirements across all jurisdictions to be in place prior to the first day of the first term of school. The FSG will report back to National Cabinet at the next meeting.

[ENDS]

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