

## Transcript

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Item: **PRESS CONFERENCE WITH VIC POLICE CHIEF COMMISSIONER GRAHAM ASHTON.**

**INTERVIEWEES: GRAHAM ASHTON, CHIEF COMMISSIONER, VICTORIA POLICE**

Audience:	Male 16+	Female 16+	All people
	N/A	N/A	N/A

GRAHAM ASHTON: Thanks. This is just a short stand-up just to let you know what's happening in terms of update on-

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: [Interrupts] Chief, can you just face me? Because I'm [indistinct]- thank you so.

GRAHAM ASHTON: This is just an update in relation to what police are doing in regards to spot checks, Operation Sentinel, as we've called our operation in relation to this. It's by way of providing community updates, and also trying to make sure the community understand that message of stay home if you do not need to go out, because it's very important at the moment that we're very strong in that messaging to make sure we can keep as many people safe as we can. Certainly, we've been building up the number of people who are doing these checks on a daily basis. And today we've got- on today's day shift, around 380 police that are out doing spot checks today. We're trying to build that number every day in relation to what we're doing. We've been getting a lot of calls to the Police Assistance Line in relation to

people wanting to report both people who they believe are not self-isolating but also people that- businesses they think are open when they shouldn't be as well. And we've had a few calls in relation to gatherings of people that people are concerned about. So, we've been sort of looking to respond to all of those calls. To date, so far we've had- about 88 visits today- as of today, and we've been doing a lot more today with the extra numbers out from today. But of those 88, we've had 70 people home and doing what they were supposed to be doing as far as isolating themselves. Seven people were not home. We're doing follow ups as to where those people are. We had a couple of people who had provided the wrong details to Border Force as to where they were supposed to be going to when they returned from overseas, so obviously following those up as well. And we're doing a couple of- a couple of people we're still chasing up in relation to where they are in fact self-isolating, because they're not isolating at their home premises, so we're doing some follow ups on that as well. So, that work is continuing. So, we can see certainly since earlier in the week we're getting certainly a lot more people now doing the right thing and staying at home and self-isolating as they're supposed to do having returned from overseas.

Last night I did receive additional instructions from the Chief Health Officer in relation to people who are testing positive in the community. So, at the moment we'll be looking to build over the next couple of days our response to be able to make sure we're responding to calls regarding people who have tested positive, and should be at home and isolating but have not travelled.

So, this is a new cohort of people the police will be required to be trying to make sure we check on as well. So, we're continuing to do that work. So, I'm praising the community that have been isolating effectively and doing the right thing. But again, the Premier's language has been very strong on this. It's important that you do stay home if you do not need to go out. Lives will depend on everyone doing the right thing, and particularly at the moment, it's an important time when we live in such a world where the individual comes first. At the moment, community must come first. At the moment we must be doing the right thing by each other first to make sure that everyone is safe and everyone is well.

Within Victoria Police ourselves, we've got a little under 400 police members that are either taking carer's leave or are isolating at home as a result of a potential for contact with people. And they're doing their 14 days and we are making sure that we can try and get them tested as soon as we can and hopefully get them back to work as soon as we can. And we still have two police that have tested positive at the moment, one from the eastern suburbs and one from the southern suburbs of Melbourne. They are obviously receiving their treatment and staying in isolation themselves, and we're trying to make sure that we're looking after their welfare as well.

At this point, I will just sort of open for questions that you might have in relation to that or any other aspects of what police are doing.

- QUESTION: Do you know how many people [inaudible]...
- GRAHAM ASHTON: There was two that were on our list that we've been to so far that haven't given the right details to Border Force. When we've checked at Border Force, apparently, it's not completely unusual for people to give us the wrong address where they're going, but we're certainly following up on that. And Border Force will be notified when we do find those people, who they are and the fact that they've given us the wrong address.
- QUESTION: People that aren't [indistinct], should they be fined [indistinct]?
- GRAHAM ASHTON: We haven't fined anyone yet because people that we have found that haven't been complying haven't quite understood it, haven't got it, deeply apologetic and they're doing the right thing now. So, we've applied the common sense principle to that. If we get someone that is absolutely flouting it, absolutely we'll be processing the paperwork. The way the process works, it's Health that actually authorises the prosecution. So, we've put all the information together and the prosecution is authorised through the Department of Health. But we would certainly go down that track if we find that someone is absolutely flouting it.
- QUESTION: [Inaudible question]
- GRAHAM ASHTON: Well, we don't know where we're heading into with this in a way. It's all going to depend on community behaviour over the next few weeks. If the community

are doing the right thing and staying home, you'll see this curve flatten. If they don't need to go out and they don't go out, you'll see this curve flatten. Our hospitals will be able to cope with the necessary influx. If people aren't doing it, then the whole system is going to be severely stretched, and we will need to look at other measures at that time. So, obviously at the moment government will be considering whether a state of disaster needs to be declared. There are very significant powers under the state of disaster, but you don't pull that lever until you really have to. And so, government are certainly weighing that up at the moment. And I'm sure if they feel based on the advice they need to, then they will. It's an option that's certainly available to them. It might be down the track that we need certain laws in place to try and further restrict movement, and that sort of thing that's hard to predict at this stage, what would become necessary when. But if it becomes necessary, I'm sure government will pull that trigger.

QUESTION: [Inaudible question]

GRAHAM ASHTON: Again, [indistinct] a speculator. It's a speculative piece because it depends what the community behaviour's like. But ostensibly, it's going to essentially be around restricting movement and making sure that people do confine themselves appropriately.

QUESTION: What do you think about the proposals to re-employ PSOs to more essential areas?

- GRAHAM ASHTON: Yeah, we're doing playing around that at the moment. And that's certainly something that is likely. We certainly had a big drop off in public transport usage. And obviously with these lockdown provisions being to the extent that they are at the moment, with the current stage that they're at. So, there is an opportunity there for us to use PSOs more extensively. We're doing planning around that. We've been talking to the Minister about that as well. So, it's a bit of watch this space on that one because that's something we probably will be talking about in the near future.
- QUESTION: And how many would you be looking at?
- GRAHAM ASHTON: That's some planning we're just looking at the moment. We do need still to provide a presence around public transport, so we need to make sure we're still doing that. But there just aren't the numbers travelling at the moment that would require us to use the amount that we're using at the moment. That will free up some capacity.
- QUESTION: That would just be to- for lockdown restrictions and that sort of work?
- GRAHAM ASHTON: I won't foreshadow what we'd be saying about that yet because that planning is still being done at the central level.
- QUESTION: Has the state government contacted you about staying on as Chief Commissioner?

- GRAHAM ASHTON: Look, at this stage my retirement's in June, and government are very busy at the moment managing this thing, so I haven't really gotten to the formalities of that at this state. So that'll be a matter I'm sure government will consider at the right time.
- QUESTION: And would you, if you were asked?
- GRAHAM ASHTON: Look, we've got a lot of good experienced police in Victoria Police. But certainly, if the conversation come up, I'd certainly- I don't know, I'd have to obviously give it consideration.
- QUESTION: [Inaudible]... are you confident that your people have enough of those?
- GRAHAM ASHTON: It's been a real challenge; absolutely. Firstly, getting enough PPE has been a real challenge because everyone in the world is after this stuff right now. Health is obviously the biggest priority in terms of our medical professionals having the coverage they need, because they're very much hands on with seriously ill COVID patients. So we've had the challenges to get it. We have been getting it, and I think we're fairly well placed there. The challenge we've got now is getting it to the stations in time for the amount that's being used at stations. So that's a real challenge for us. We're trying to put a different model in place today that we hope will see over the next 24 hours that will start to really improve. If it doesn't, we'll change it again and we'll get it right, because now it's critical equipment. We know the troops need it. People are working 24/7 on it. It'll be hundreds of sites we've got to get this to.

As soon as they arrive, they're going off the shelf because the amount of work that's being done. So it's just a critical supply line. We haven't had to sustain before in this number, so it's proving a great challenge to everyone. But I think the plans that we've put in place today, I'm hoping we'll see the fruition for that the next 24 hours. We've had the opportunity also to meet with the TPA (\*) on it and they've had some useful suggestions about that as well. So we've been able to sort of incorporate their ideas into this different approach that we've tried to adopt today. So look, we know we need to make sure that we keep the equipment up there because they can't be working with the communities if they don't have the right equipment; that severely limits their capabilities. So we need to make sure that we do have enough out there, and we're certainly conscious of it. And it's a 24/7 piece to try and get it right at the moment.

QUESTION:

There's been a lot of, I guess, public narrative around domestic violence, and that's maybe increasing with everyone at home. Is that something that you're seeing and do we need to put out messaging about that?

GRAHAM ASHTON:

Yeah, look, it's always important to put that messaging about family violence because it is always an issue in the community. We're still responding to family violence. Certainly, it averages out still to one every seven minutes for us. It's the main work that Victoria Police do is still family violence. It's a constant and it's happening 24/7 in our community. So for us, we're going to make sure that we keep that service delivery up. But we know that's an area that will rise in this

current emergency because people are home together, family units are home together spending more time together. That tension that that creates will produce more family violence that we will need to respond to, as well as all the support agencies that work in this sector as well who are very numerous. That will all be [indistinct] system under pressure. But at the moment, we're not seeing that rise yet. But it's something that will come, I think, as people settle in to a longer period in isolation and we have to be ready for that.

QUESTION:

This weekend, the weather- the temperature is rising, people are likely to head to the beach. Will you be patrolling beaches and breaking up groups?

GRAHAM ASHTON:

We'll certainly be patrolling beaches. We've had some discussions today with Lifesaving Victoria about that as well, about what the safety requirements [indistinct] they'll have on the have on the beaches. We'll be doing patrols around beaches. We'll also be doing aerial patrols around beaches, both with our Air Wing, but also we'll be endeavouring to use some drone technology at beaches to try and make sure that we're monitoring group activity there. We do not want to see what happened last weekend in New South Wales. We absolutely do not want to see large groups of people sitting, cheek to jowl, on the beach, on their mats blowing up their blow up things and get down on- that's just ridiculous. Going to the beach is a nice thing to do on a hot day. We're not in that situation at the moment. We're in a state of emergency. Use your common sense. If you do not need to go out, don't go out, don't go to the beach. At the same time, people

have their beach on their exercise route and they're running along and that sort of stuff. People have to use their common sense in that regard. But we don't want to see large groups flocking to the beach and creating a risk of transmission of this disease over the weekend. But we'll be monitoring it. We've got some meetings set up on Saturday to review how it's going, what the numbers are like. And if we need to step in, then we will.

QUESTION:

You had some pretty sage advice on radio this morning. It was quite blunt, and straightforward. Do you stand by that statement of don't be a d\*\*\*head?

GRAHAM ASHTON:

Oh okay. There was a fella from a bank that I think falsely - or I was told falsely - said that he had this virus. And I just said he was a d\*\*\*head. And he was a d\*\*\*head, clearly. Of course, I stand by that advice. Yeah, it is- I think I said this morning: it's not a crime to be a d\*\*\*head, but it's a time for common sense. So how about people apply their common sense in that situation. There's an obligation on all of us in the community to do the right thing now and by each other. And that's respecting each other, understanding what everyone's going through, and doing the right thing by your family and doing the right thing by your next door neighbour, and everyone in your community. Now's the time to be doing that, not acting like an idiot. And not behaving irresponsibly.

QUESTION:

Do you think you'll need to expand your 500 strong COVID specific taskforce?

GRAHAM ASHTON:

Yeah, well this instruction we got last night is in relation to people testing positive. That's a whole new one for us. So we don't- we can only go by infection rates then as to how that's increasing. And if we need to increase the number, we will. If it gets stretched beyond them, our PSOs for example and our ability to respond, then we'll have to do the planning around that. Through Emergency Management Victoria, we have access to additional workforce. If we had to, we could talk to Australian Defence Force. We haven't had to do that yet, but that would be an end game as well if we needed to do that. So we'll just keep ramping up what has been- just continuing to increase as we need to. At the moment, the rates of infection in Victoria, according to the numbers that I'm seeing, are increasing every day by sort of 50 to 60 range, seems to be what's happening on a daily basis there. So if that continues, that'll continue to be a challenge for us to making sure that we can get to a decent proportion of those people to make sure that we've got a good sense that people are doing the right thing.

Fortunately to date, people seem to be now complying much better. They seem to be heeding the Premier's strong words on this, which is very encouraging. And so at the moment, I'm starting to see the better encouraging signs about community behaviour, which is terrific. It means they're heeding the words, the strong words that the Premier's been putting out there. And if you look around here now, very low numbers of people moving about to what you would see normally. And you know, we've been going and visiting parks, we've been going, visiting sites where people ordinarily gather, going to places like the Tan,

other places, just observing how many people are out there. And the numbers are dropping because people are staying home, which is good.

QUESTION:

And there are some reports [indistinct] unfortunately attacks against healthcare workers that are out there [indistinct] and things like that [indistinct] message to people that would be so low to attack healthcare workers right now?

GRAHAM ASHTON:

Yeah. Well, how low is that? Look, there was a time in our community when health workers were untouchable. Your ambos could go out to all sorts of events, no one would go near them. Unfortunately, we don't see that today. The effects of drug addiction, effects of alcohol, the effects of mental health mean that assaults on emergency workers, particularly ambos continue to grow. It's a really poor sign when that things happening in our community. We know what causes it. We know it's drugs, we know it's alcohol, we know it's mental health. Nonetheless, nothing excuses that sort of behaviour; nothing excuses it. The amount of people you see that go to court, that say: oh, I was on drugs. I'm not responsible. You had a free choice to take drugs, you had a free choice to consume alcohol. You're making these decisions to consume these things. In my view, you are responsible for your actions. Any attack on emergency workers, be it an ambo, a firey, police officer, is unacceptable and needs to be treated with the utmost seriousness. And we discourage, obviously, anyone thinking of engaging in that behaviour. They're



there to help you. They're there to help the community. Do the right thing by them, show the respect that they need.

Okay. Thanks, everyone. Cheers.

\* \* END \* \*

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