

Transcript of Premier's media conference held on 27 March 2020

*Speakers: Daniel Andrews (DA)
Unidentified journalists (Q)*

5 DA: Ok, how are we all? Everybody right to go?

Thanks for being here. First and foremost, I can update you that there are 574 cases of the Coronavirus across Victoria, 54 more than yesterday. Sadly, 3 people have lost their lives as you know. 22 remain in hospital and 3 of those 22 are in intensive care.

10 Now I haven't got long today, I just want to give you an update. I'll be out again tomorrow to talk about some of the logistics of the decisions the National Cabinet made this morning and the announcements that the Prime Minister has just made public.

Each of us has a part to play. Each of us has a role to play in flattening the curve, stopping the spread of this virus and ultimately saving lives. Making sure that our health system doesn't become completely overrun and overwhelmed. We've all got a part to play in that.

15 That means that today, beautiful autumn day, the weekend, first weekend that would have, would ordinarily have been part of the school holiday period, will be unlike any autumn weekend we've ever had before.

20 So off the top, and I'm going to say this to you so many times in coming weeks and months, but let's be really clear about this, if you can stay home, you must stay home. You cannot be going out to the shopping centre unless you need to go shopping for the things you need when you need them. You cannot be down at the skate park. You cannot be at a beach. I really hope we don't see again the sorts of scenes we saw in Bondi last weekend. That is simply putting lives at risk. People will die if Victorians act in that way. So it's going to be a very different weekend, very different school holidays because each of us have to step up, play our part, do the right thing, do the decent thing. Our doctors, our nurses, all the team are working so hard. The best way to say thank you to them is for every Victorian family to do the right thing as well. If you can stay home, you must stay home. I can't make it any simpler than that.

30 Now, in terms of decisions taken today, one of our biggest challenges, one of the highest risk groups are those who are travelling back to Australia or, in our case, back to Melbourne having been overseas. It almost doesn't matter what country they're coming from. This is running so wildly rampant in a number of other countries that if you've been in international airports, if you're coming back from anywhere really, you are an unacceptable risk if we just let you go about your business.

35 You've got to quarantine and we are now going to have a situation from midnight tomorrow night, but you won't be quarantining at home on some honesty basis, you will be quarantined with appropriate support at a hotel whether it be here in the CBD, in the suburbs, or in regional areas, and we'll try and make those arrangements as convenient as we can.

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Now I know this will raise many, many questions. There are some I can answer today, and I'll try to do that, but I'll give you a fuller briefing tomorrow morning and take you through all the different planning, the different steps that we have taken. We've been working on this for quite some time. There's always been, I think, there's always been a resource that we could
5 draw down on for one purpose or another, but all of our accommodation hotels are basically empty. This is not just about an appropriate health response. It's also back to those points I made a week ago about working for Victoria and re-purposing people who have perhaps had their hours cut or in fact lost their job to do Coronavirus work. To work for all of us.

So, we've got 5,000 rooms basically on standby now. We will do the work to flex up, to step
10 up to that challenge. We've got about 1,300, between 1,300 and 2,000 people arriving back in Melbourne each day. Those numbers perhaps will drop off in coming days, but we have sufficient capacity and we've done the work early to be able to accommodate those people. They will be housed, they will be fed, they will be transported. There'll be no cost to them, but this is the best way to ensure absolute compliance.

Police, private security, all of our health team will be able to monitor compliance in a much
15 easier way, in a static location, one hotel or a series of hotels, as the case may be. That'll mean, and this is the really important message, that will mean that more of those police that we have, those 500 police that are doing that work in terms of Coronavirus enforcement, they'll be able to get to even more homes where people are supposed to be quarantining.

Those who've arrived prior to midnight tomorrow night. So if you're doing the wrong thing, you
20 will be caught. This has got to the point now where if we're going to contain this, if we're going to keep as flat a trajectory as possible. It's a big step to take away someone's liberty, in effect to make them go to a certain place and stay there for 2 weeks, but this is life and death. There's too much at stake to do otherwise.

National Cabinet has made this decision. I'll give you a fuller update tomorrow about all the
25 different logistical elements of it. It's no small task. I'm very grateful to the Prime Minister for him agreeing to let this be a true partnership between Victoria Police, our health officials, as well as the Australian Defence Force. I think that will work very well. Also just finally, there's also an agreement for an ADF Victoria partnership on compliance for all of those Victorians
30 that are at home quarantining because they've arrived already.

This is a massive task in so many different ways, but everyone's working hard, everyone has a clear plan. On Sunday, we took big steps. We took further steps in stage 2 on Tuesday
35 night. This today, the compulsory quarantine at a big accommodation hotel or a smaller one depending on the arrangements we'll announce. It's a big step and those continued next big steps are exactly what we need if we're going to contain this virus, save lives and make sure that our health system doesn't get overrun. The alternative is exactly what we need to avoid.

Q: [inaudible]...is this stage 3?

DA: No, no, this is stage 2 still. These are logical, it's a big step though. I'm not, no-one's
40 downplaying the fact that this is a really big step. It is. It should be seen for what it is, a perfectly appropriate, but very significant response to the challenge that we face. Beyond

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that, beyond that, as I said on Wednesday, there will be a stage 3. That's not today. There will be a further stage and when that stage happens, when we make that decision, I hope there's a National Cabinet, and I'm sure it will be, because we now all of us understand that the curves are all different. What Queensland's facing, what New South Wales is facing, what Victoria's facing is fundamentally different to the Northern Territory and the appropriate response is to deal with the challenge your facing, not to be pursuing a national average. We're all on, we all have fundamentally agreed on that point. Stage 3 will come. It is not here yet. When it is, I'll take you through from, you know, from (a) to (z), all of what that actually means and that proportionate response, that localised response, is exactly the way that we should be going.

Q: [inaudible]...will the police... [inaudible] allow ADF personnel... [inaudible]

DA: No, they won't be exercising any statutory power. They will be working to assist those who beyond any doubt in Victoria have the powers necessary to get this job done. I'm very grateful for their support. It won't just be people out there in public settings, although you will see many more ADF personnel out and about than would normally be the case, but there's also a whole team of experts when it comes to logistics, planning, the important execution of really complex tasks. ADF have got an amazing skillset. We saw that, I'm really pleased to say we saw that on absolute display for all Victorians to see during the summer's bushfires, and it's great to be able to have a further partnership with the ADF to get tough work done, complex work done. If we all work together in a partnership, we always do better.

Q: Just going back to stage 3...

DA: Yes?

Q: When can we expect stage 3? A lot of people are like, oh, we are entering stage 3 on Saturday...

DA: Well, look, the thing is to not speculate. The thing is to perhaps wait till I stand in front of the podium like this and tell you that we've gone to stage 3, then I'll be able to answer all of your questions. Well I'll certainly try to. There'll be questions thrown up by any sort of announcement like that. We will get to a point where we have to do more. We've said that all week and each day we've taken another logical, gradual step. Now I know this is deeply frustrating. A lot of people, not just people in public life or in my role as Premier, but each of us as partners, parents, friends, I've got lots of people saying to me, when will we take another step, when will this be over? I understand that and it is deeply frustrating not to be able to give people the answers to those sorts of questions.

Q: I guess my question is more along the lines of, you know, if we see more community transmissions for example, double from yesterday...

DA: It's from 9 to 16, yeah, look, I think the point you're making Simone is absolutely spot on. There will be different measures. There'll be different things that will guide us and will determine when we take the next step. At the same time though, putting in place really hard and fast rules that won't necessarily allow you to be as flexible as you need to be, that

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wouldn't make any sense either. I think that one of the great strengths of having a National Cabinet process is that we can make decisions not on our own, but we can make decisions so that, I think it's in everyone's interests if what happens in Queensland or parts of Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria, if that can be as co-ordinated as possible, that'll deliver a
5 better public health outcome, it will be clearer and easier for people to understand what it is that remains open and what will add to the closed list, if you like. I just think that's a much, much better way to go. It's a long way of saying, because it's not simple. If I could just give you a date I would. It is, it is frustrating I can't tell you exactly when. There will be stage 3. I've tried to be as clear as I can be. If I'm planning for it, you have a right to know about that.
10 That's why I've been very clear. There will be a stage 3. Exactly when and it's exact nature, and how long it will run for, and what we expect that it will do, to case numbers to the curve, that is not for today. I'll go through all of those things when we get to that point.

Q: The police are concerned that like yesterday, the union came out and said there is a lot of red tape in enforcing the Chief Health Officer's...

15 DA: Well no, I don't think...

Q: ... and they are calling for a state of disaster...

DA: Well, firstly, I want to thank Victoria Police for the work that they're doing. The Solicitor General has confirmed for me there's no need for the state of disaster at this point. That time will come though. That time will come, but as far as enforcement goes, just as ADF will work
20 with our officials, members of Victoria Police also work with our health team as well. We want these decisions to be based on the best advice and I just again, I don't know whether this will make it into your bulletins tonight, but I want to thank every member of Victoria Police, every member of our Emergency Services family, our nurses, our doctors, our ambos, the cooks and cleaners at our hospitals, everyone. Those people, they're public servants, they're not
25 necessarily a nurse or a doctor, but they're on a phone doing that contact tracing, it's so important. The whole team are working hard and I'm deeply grateful to all of, I'm also grateful, can I say, to every Victorian who is doing the right thing, who isn't going to the beach, who's staying at home, only going shopping for what they need when they need it, not going out and buying shoes, for instance, or pretending that you can go down to a great big department
30 store as if it was an ordinary Friday, it's not. We all have to play our part. We all have to stay at home. That's what will make the biggest difference. We are, in essence, going to take that decision out of the hands of a number of people who are coming from overseas and they will be going to a hotel. That'll be a massive logistical task, but one that will help to keep us all safe.

35 Q: You said earlier that the decision to move to stage 3...

DA: Yes?

Q: ... you hoped that that would be made by National Cabinet...

DA: Very confident it will be. I'm very confident it will be.

Q: Where are the hotels, by the way?

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DA: Well, there are a number of different hotels and I'll be able to give you some further updates tomorrow. We've been speaking with the Australian Hotels Association. They have a particular grouping within their body that deals with significant accommodation hotels. They are essentially empty. So not only is this first rate health policy, trying to mitigate the risk,
5 trying to deal and manage the risk that we all face from those who are coming from parts of the world that have been swamped, which is essentially, we have to assume that they've come in contact with the virus, that's why you have the 14 day precautionary quarantine. Let's not do that at home. Let's not make that almost impossible to enforce. Let's put them in hotels. Look after them, absolutely we will, but make it so much easier to make sure that
10 everyone's doing the right thing.

Now just on this point, I want people to understand, if you're travelling through Melbourne, and this will be the same across the whole nation, this won't just be for Victorians. If you're flying to Melbourne and then you're heading to Adelaide, you will be quarantined here, and I've been very clear with other Premiers, that's the way I want it and other Premiers have agreed. We
15 can't be having people basically moving all across the country from one airport through all their major transport to another terminal, to another airport. All that will do is spread this virus. So we will finish up with some Victorians that'll be quarantined elsewhere and some people from other parts of Australia quarantined in Victoria. On cost, on cost, I think it's very difficult, it's very difficult to make an assessment about the cost in lives and dollars if we don't get this
20 right.

Q: Is it the State or is it the...quarantine...

DA: No, it's State. No, oh sorry, we're not going to ask people to pay. They'll be put up at a hotel. They'll be fed, they'll be taken care of and it'll be at no cost to them. As you saw last week, I made announcements about \$500 million, actually a bit more than that. Around the Working
25 for Victoria Fund, we think that there'll be a bunch of hotel workers and other workers who've had their hours cut, they'll be able to come back into the system to do this important work. We think that just makes sense. Good health policy. Looking after those who need more work as well and it just makes sense. It'll also mean, and be in no doubt about this, it'll also mean those 500 dedicated members of Victoria Police will be more likely to knock on your door if
30 you're supposed to be quarantining at home. Don't do the wrong thing. It is a gamble, but I don't think it's worth taking, not with people's health and certainly not with the \$20,000 fine that you'll be up for if you are doing the wrong thing.

Again, thank you to every Victorian who is doing the right thing. Deeply grateful, deeply, but we all need to stay home. If you can stay home, you must stay home. These are not an
35 ordinary, it's not an ordinary weekend coming up. It's not an ordinary school holidays that we're in at the moment. Nothing about this is ordinary at all. I can take a couple more quickly and then I do have to get off to another teleconference. I'm sorry.

Q: There are a lot of people right now at St Kilda Beach. Should be police be going there now...

DA: Well, I'll leave that to members of Victoria Police and Police Command to work out what the
40 best operational response is. No-one should be at the beach and if I have to take action to

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prevent people from going to the beach, I will. I hope it doesn't get to that. People should not be at, you don't need to be at the beach. If you choose to be at the beach, then that is a choice that may cost someone their life and not just people, as important as it is, 90 year olds or people that are very frail, it's wrong to assume that this will only affect those who are very, very old. That is simply wrong. There are people in their 40s who are dying in other parts of the world.

So I assume that, or maybe I won't assume anything. If I can get one further message out, and if you could help me to get this message out, particularly to younger people, don't assume that this won't affect you, don't assume that this won't affect the parent or someone that you love. There are people who are otherwise healthy, no pre-existing conditions, and young, people who would have every reason to think that they had decades to live that have died because of this virus.

Q: Premier, you've seen people come in who haven't been subjected to these measures, and we've got some big clusters from the US. What do you say to them and others who aren't abiding?

DA: Well, like, there's been a bit of focus on postcodes and the affluence or otherwise of different people. Look, I'd say we're all in this together and whilst we've got heat maps at the moment that show you where some of these clusters are, if we don't all play our part, then it'll be everywhere and we will all finish up paying a really big price for that in life as well as the economic damage that it'll do and the cost of people not doing the right thing. Anyone who is not following the rules is being selfish, but it's more than just behaving badly, you will be killing people. I can't be clearer than that. Do the right thing for yourself. Do the right thing for those who are vulnerable. Do the right thing for people who are otherwise healthy, who, if the rest of the world's experience is any guide, and I'd say it is, will die because of this virus. It is so serious and important that people just do the right thing. No-one has to go to the beach. I've closed the pubs because no-one has to go to the pubs. If I have to close the beaches, I will, be in no doubt about that.

Q: Premier, on the hotels - are you going to provide extra PPE for hotel workers?

DA: Yes, it'll all be done.

Q: Do we have enough because there's quite a concern amongst [inaudible] service workers, hospital staff...

DA: Sure

Q: [inaudible]

DA: Just be very clear about this. These are people that do not have symptoms. If you had symptoms, you're not going into quarantine in a hotel, there'd be another setting for you. You would be put with people who are sick, not with people who are having to isolate.

Q: [inaudible]

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5 DA: No, no, there is, and that's why there'll be all the infection control protocols that would need to occur in any other setting. So that'll be, in some instances a PPE issue, now in other instances, it'll simply be regular hand washing, coughing into the crook of your arm, keeping your distance where you can, regular cleaning of rooms, all of those things. I'm confident that we can get that job done to the highest standard.

Q: Looking at [inaudible] as a possible...

10 DA: I've seen some people speculating about that. We are looking at all manner of different settings. For instance, the old Peter MacCallum Hospital is being re-purposed, or at least parts of it are. We've got an old private hospital down in Geelong, Baxter House, which is being re-commissioned and being turned back into a public hospital. The list goes on and on. There'll be ...

Q: [inaudible]

DA: Well, it makes sense to look at...

Q: [inaudible]

15 DA: Simon, it makes sense to look at all the different options, whether it's the Convention Centre, Jeff's Shed, the Exhibition Buildings. There's many different settings. Many, many different settings. I'd certainly hope that we can be successful. We can all play our part and we don't need a space as big as that to care for anybody because we've flattened the curve because we've all stayed at home. That's the message. Today and every day. Stay at home. If you don't need to go out, don't go out. That's the most important thing anyone can do as well as wash your hands and keep your distance. Just follow the rules. It's the right thing to do, it's the smart thing to do and it's what I'm asking you to do.

20 Q: Will those travellers...

Other: Last one.

25 Q: ... who quarantine in hotels rooms – will they be tested?

DA: Ah no. We have a very, we are doing more tests than just about anywhere else in the world, but there is a very strict criteria. The case criteria, those who we are testing is well proven and properly supported by all of the Chief Medical Officers. AHPPC have revised that over time, but that is the case criteria. That's really important. There's no, there are limits. Even with, money's not one of them, right, I just want to clear about that, but there are limits to how many tests can be run in labs. There's not an infinite supply of laboratory technicians and time, right. These things do take time so you've got to be focusing your testing where it will help you to stop the spread of the virus most and that is exactly what we're doing. Anyone who develops symptoms of course would be tested and then will be treated appropriately, but the reason they're in quarantine is because we can't eliminate, we can't be certain, we have no asymptomatic tests for instance, that those people haven't brought the virus back with them when they've come back from whatever country that they were in.

35 Q: [inaudible]

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Other: Last one

Q: ...wage subsidy scheme like we've seen in the UK?

5 DA: What I'd say is that the Commonwealth government developed their first package. I've supported that at the time. They developed their second package announced last week and I've been very complimentary about that as well. We've announced our own, it's a week tomorrow since we announced our payments, and I'll be updating you about that tomorrow and Monday when I speak to you again. The Prime Minister and the Treasurer, I spoke to Josh Frydenberg again last night. They're not making any secret that they will do more. The exact nature of that and the timing of that, it's appropriate that I leave that to them, but I just say to every single Victorian, we're working closely with the Federal government. The last thing we want to do is duplicate effort. We don't want to be wasting money during this time. We want to be targeted. We want to get the job done, supporting businesses, supporting families, supporting the vulnerable, supporting our health system to provide the best care and save lives, but all the support in the world from government, all the rules written by governments, don't matter much if people don't use common sense and common decency.

10 Do the right thing, stay at home, and you'll hear me say that many, many times because it's the most important part of this whole puzzle. Stay at home. Only do the things you have to do and that will mean you playing your part saving lives. I really have to go to a teleconference. Thank you all. I'll see you again tomorrow and if you've got any specific follow-ups, just talk to Steph. Thanks.

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