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**WORKING FROM HOME MUST REMAIN CENTRAL TO COVID-19  
 RESPONSE**

*Significant risk in mass return to workplaces, AMA warns*

AMA President, Dr Omar Khorshid, has urged a cautious approach to returning Australians to the workplace, with the Adelaide COVID-19 cluster showing we are still not out of the woods with the global pandemic.

Ten major employers have signed up to a City of Melbourne CEO pledge to return at least 70 per cent of their workforce back to the CBD as soon as public health restrictions are eased, but Dr Khorshid says it is too soon for a mass return to workplaces and public transport.

“While infection numbers generally give us cause for optimism, the South Australian outbreak this week shows that the virus is still in the community,” Dr Khorshid said.

“The only way to keep these numbers low is to continue to follow the habits that have proven so effective in getting Australia to such an enviable position.

“Efforts by government to significantly ease restrictions, combined with the relaxation of work-from-home directives, will significantly increase the rate of contact and movement in the community and make Australia less resilient in times when outbreaks occur.”

The US Centres for Disease Control recently updated its COVID-19 advice, putting greater emphasis on airborne transmission of COVID-19, particularly in enclosed and poorly ventilated areas.

In these circumstances, an infectious person can spread COVID-19 to people who are more than 1.5m away and even to those people who pass through that space soon after the infectious person has left.

Dr Khorshid said workplaces were known to be one of the main places where COVID-19 can spread.

“Encouraging people to return to the workplace will put an added strain on our public transport systems, where social distancing is not possible,” he said.

“Working from home minimises the possibility of workplace transmission, reduces the geographic spread of the virus and makes our public transport systems safer.

“This helps to protect workers in essential industries, as well as those who are not in a position to work from home.”

If it is not practical for people to work from home, employers must look at measures to minimise the risk of COVID-19 infections, including:

- Supporting employees to stay at home when they are unwell and encouraging them to get tested for COVID-19;
- Social distancing measures and strict attention to workplace hygiene;
- Modifying workplace layouts, systems, and processes;
- Increasing ventilation in enclosed spaces;
- Having flexible rosters that allow people to avoid peak-hour travel and limit the number of people in the workplace at any one time;

- Encouraging mask use when employees are using public transport and lifts;
- Monitoring local infection numbers to inform the application of workplace policies.

The AMA's communique on COVID-19 and the measures required to tackle the virus and support economic recovery is at <https://ama.com.au/article/ama-federal-council-covid-19-communique>

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