

IMPLEMENT COVID-19 ALERT SYSTEM

Time to catch up with trans-Tasman counterparts on preparedness

With Queensland reopening its border to people from Victoria and all of New South Wales next Tuesday, it is time for an Australian COVID-19 Alert system similar to the New Zealand model, AMA President, Dr Omar Khorshid, said today.

An alert system would provide greater information to the community about where COVID-19 is present, what precautions people should take, and the policy measures that will be taken to tackle the virus's spread according to each alert level.

Dr Khorshid said people in New Zealand have a clear picture of what is happening with the virus at any point in time and know in advance what will happen when infection numbers grow.

"It builds confidence in the community and helps businesses and people to plan ahead," Dr Khorshid said. "Australia needs to follow this lead to avoid future border closures and lockdowns when new outbreaks occur."

Australia has a COVID-19 Common Operating Picture that provides useful information about the status of the virus and the general preparedness of the health system. However, it is not targeted at the public and does not provide clear information on what policy measures will be enacted should infection numbers grow.

"While National Cabinet finalised a COVID-19 Framework for Reopening in November that outlined a plan to ease restrictions, it did not provide clear and consistent plans to guide what would happen in times when there was a resurgence in cases," Dr Khorshid said.

"It was also left up to the States and Territories to determine how to implement the framework according to their individual circumstances.

"A clear and transparent alert system could solve many of these problems, particularly with the adoption of consistent policy approaches that give all governments much greater confidence in each other.

"This is the only way to resolve the recent disputes we have seen, particularly in relation to borders and interstate travel. The recent outbreak in South Australia showed just how quickly States and Territories revert to border closures when we do not have a national approach to preventing and tackling outbreaks.

"Importantly, a clear and transparent COVID-19 alert system would provide the basis for decisive action when outbreaks occur, giving Australia the best chance of keeping the virus contained while supporting our economic recovery."

The call for a new COVID-19 alert system is a central part of the [AMA Federal Council COVID-19 Communique](#).

26 November 2020

CONTACT: Maria Hawthorne 0427 209 753 or media@ama.com.au