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NSW CAUTION WELCOMED, BUT NOW TIME TO CANCEL NEW YEARS EVE FIREWORKS - AMA

The AMA today welcomes NSW Government's cautious approach to contain the spread of COVID-19 during the holiday season, but the Government needs to seriously consider cancelling the New Year's Eve fireworks display to discourage crowds and avoid any confusion in its public messaging.

Federal AMA President, Dr Omar Khorshid, and AMA NSW President, Dr Danielle McMullen today said the NSW Government must continue to aim for zero community transmission and maintain the overall level of restrictions now in place across Sydney and surrounding areas into the new year.

"The NSW outbreak could not have come at a worse time. Even if we can't hug, we can still celebrate Christmas via video call this year," Dr Khorshid said.

"We know that a decisive response where we go hard, and go early, remains the best strategy to tackle outbreaks like this one where there are gaps in information about the transmission of the virus and potential exposure sites are widespread.

"The NSW Government should consider cancelling the New Year's Eve fireworks display to discourage crowds and avoid any confusion in its public messaging.

"We all need to be extra vigilant during this holiday period to stop the spread of COVID-19, especially as at this time of year when people travel, attend events, and spend time in close proximity with family and friends.

"We must be prepared to tighten general restrictions even further if we continue to see evidence of the virus spreading in areas outside of the Northern Beaches."

Dr McMullen said NSW has made the tough but correct decision to essentially keep restrictions in place over the holiday period. To do otherwise would be a dangerous strategy with NSW still at risk of a severe outbreak.

"As a community we need to work together to have a safe start to 2021," Dr McMullen said.

"While a COVID-19 vaccine rollout appears likely to commence in March 2021, this will not be available to many members of the community until later in the year.

"We need to maintain physical distance, practice good hand hygiene, and continue to follow medical advice to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

"The NSW Government needs to mandate indoor mask use in areas of known community transmission like Sydney. This was accepted by the Victorian community and there is no reason why NSW should not follow this lead.

"Masks work, particularly when people cannot physically distance.

“The NSW experience also highlights the dangers of easing restrictions too far, particularly for high-risk activities that are known to contribute to the spread of COVID-19.

“Robust restrictions to encourage social distancing must remain our first line of defense against COVID19 – a strategy that had worked well for NSW until it decided to water these down.”

Protect yourself from COVID-19 this summer:

- stay home if you're sick;
- keep track of where you've been;
- wash your hands regularly;
- cough or sneeze into your elbow;
- clean surfaces that are touched regularly;
- maintain social distancing;
- avoid crowded areas such as shopping centres;
- if you can't socially distance, wear a face mask in public spaces;
- celebrate outdoors where possible, and
- avoid sharing food and utensils.

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