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**Transcript:** AMA President, Dr Omar Khorshid, ABC, 7:30 with Leigh Sales, Wednesday, 31 March 2021

**Subject:** Great Brisbane COVID-19 outbreak

**LEIGH SALES:** Greater Brisbane residents could face an extended COVID lockdown with eight new community cases confirmed overnight. Dr Omar Khorshid is the President of the Australian Medical Association.

[Excerpt]

**LEIGH SALES:** Dr Khorshid, thanks very much for joining us this evening. Queenslanders were told by their Chief Health Officer last week that we know how to manage this now, our systems are operating brilliantly, we won't need to use lockdowns again. This week, back to lockdowns. Why can't Queensland manage around eight cases a day in a population of 2.5 million people without resorting to a mass lockdown?

**OMAR KHORSHID:** Look, I think what we've seen there is yet another little case of complacency. And if there's one message we must have received during this pandemic is that we cannot be complacent against COVID. The need for lockdowns is something that there is differences of opinion around the various states. We've certainly seen them being highly effective. But on the flipside, the public question whether they're necessary when you don't see much transmission going on in the community.

I think they're doing the right thing now, until they get on top of it. But they do need to step up all of the public health activities, the contact tracing, et cetera, to ensure they know exactly how big this outbreak is and then they can look at relaxing the lockdown.

**LEIGH SALES:** The two separate Queensland clusters have both spread from unvaccinated health workers. Why is the vaccine rollout so slow? And whose fault is that?

**OMAR KHORSHID:** The vaccine rollout into our hospital and quarantine sector is the responsibility of the states but of course they get their vaccine from the Federal Government, who gets it when it's been imported from overseas. So, there've been a number of players involved and each of those have contributed to the timing of this rollout.

When the transmission occurred to the doctor, in this particular case, Queensland had vaccinated around half of its front-line healthcare workers. They're now getting towards 90 per cent. And that shows that they could perhaps have done a little better than only 50 per cent two weeks ago, but at least they've got the message now and as of tomorrow, we understand, that any healthcare worker exposed to COVID in the workplace will have at least had their first vaccine.

**LEIGH SALES:** Canadian authorities have stopped the AstraZeneca vaccine from being administered to people under 55. What are the concerns there? And is that anything that Australia needs to be worried about?

**OMAR KHORSHID:** So, the reports from Europe about extremely rare but serious cases of thrombosis have been quite a concern for Australia on two levels. That there's, of course, the concern around the safety of the vaccine, but also, when other countries bring in rapid changes to their arrangements, banning the vaccine or pausing it, or pausing it in a certain group, it does undermine Australians' confidence.

But what we can say is a few things. Number 1, our regulator has looked at all these cases in Europe. They understand what's going on there. They've got a good sense of how common it is. They don't know whether these have been caused by the vaccine, but they're so rare that the regulator has said this vaccine is safe for all Australians at the moment. And until that advice changes, we've just got to move forward and get as many of our people, particularly our vulnerable people, vaccinated as quickly as we can.

**LEIGH SALES:** Dr Khorshid, thank you very much.

**OMAR KHORSHID:** Cheers Leigh.

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