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Transcript: AMA President, Dr Omar Khorshid, Nine, *Today with Allison Langdon*, Friday, 30 April 2021

Subject: COVID-19 restrictions in WA; Brisbane airport breach; vaccine hesitancy

ALLISON LANGDON: Well, a handful of restrictions will be eased tonight in WA as Premier, Mark McGowan, takes a small step away from the State's recent lockdown. President of the AMA, Dr Omar Khorshid, joins us in Perth. Always good to talk to you, Doctor. We're now talking 75 per cent capacity at the footy, restaurants and pubs. You can have 30 people in your home. Are you on board with that?

OMAR KHORSHID: Morning, Alli. Look, I think all West Australians are sighing with a little bit of relief that restrictions are easing, and there's a little frustration from some that it seems slow given we haven't had any community transmission, and hopefully all of those awaiting their test results are in quarantine. But, at the end of the day, we are on a pathway to normality, and I think that's what West Australians wanted to see.

ALLISON LANGDON: Do you think it's a bit slow?

OMAR KHORSHID: Look, I think we have seen this approach from the McGowan Government, it's very popular with the community, and it is working. It's only, you know, a couple of weeks of pain and it means zero community transmission, and that's what we are all after.

ALLISON LANGDON: I did note that masks will be mandatory for another week, you'll also have to wear them at the footy. Is that necessary when you're outdoors?

OMAR KHORSHID: The thing about the footy is we've actually got 45,000 people in a pretty small space. Although it's outdoors, you're still going to be going into indoor parts of the stadium, including the food and beverage locations, and the toilets, the corridors, the stairwells. So, it does makes sense, but of course, you won't need to wear a mask when consuming any food or drink during the game, which, to be honest, happens a fair bit at the footy.

ALLISON LANGDON: [Laughter] Look, you know, you look at the hotel outbreak you guys had, and it could have been a whole lot worse. We've seen similar ones in other states that have been brought under control pretty quickly. Is it that we have dodged a bullet? Or are we handling those outbreaks pretty well?

OMAR KHORSHID: It's little bit of both, Alli. We certainly haven't seen a large number of cases, so, our systems here in WA have not really been fully tested. But on the flipside, those small numbers of cases have not had the chance to spread to other people because of the very rapid responses. And I think although it's a different approach to what New South Wales is doing, it does appear to be WA's preferred method. It looks like it's going to be South Australia and Queensland's preferred method, and we have to say it's working.

ALLISON LANGDON: Well, speaking of Queensland, are you worried at all about this COVID breach at Brisbane Airport? I mean, we're less than two weeks into our New Zealand travel bubble. This is of course where a couple of passengers from Papua New Guinea were allowed from the red zone into the green zone.

OMAR KHORSHID: Yeah. Look, for sure it's disappointing to see breaches of those arrangements, and there is a very, very small risk. But it has been identified, the people involved have been tested, and if they turn out negative then there's really no risk. But, it is critical that, that all the locations that are looking after both red and green zones, that they separate those people properly and

take their responsibilities seriously, because as we've seen in Perth, it only takes one breach for our whole society to be impacted.

ALLISON LANGDON: So, what do you make then of this loophole that travellers from India can get to Australia via Doha?

OMAR KHORSHID: Loopholes are worrying but, at the end of the day, we still have quarantine - nobody is going to avoid quarantine. So Australians can be assured that there's - there shouldn't, if our quarantine continues to work appropriately, there shouldn't be any risk of a small number of people coming in through India to dramatically affect our system. We've a lot of people from India in our hotel quarantine system already, and I think we have heard from Peter Dutton that those loopholes will be closed. It's a tough decision though, and there's lots of Australians in India who have the right to come home. And it's that difficult balance between respecting those rights, but also protecting the Australian community here.

ALLISON LANGDON: We'll hopefully have some quarantine hubs up and ready by the middle of May, so when the ban is lifted we can bring as many home as possible. And just quickly before you go, news this morning that the over-70s aren't keen on the AstraZeneca jab?

OMAR KHORSHID: Look, there's no doubt that confidence in our vaccine program was dented a few weeks ago by the ATAGI decision, and we just need to work through that, to continue to reassure the community that this jab is very, very effective and very, very safe. It's a no-brainer decision for all Australians over the age of 70 to go to their GP right now and get that jab, if it's available to you. And of course, available to over-50s, starting very soon in some clinics, and of course right across our general practice network in a couple of weeks.

It's a simple decision, it's the best thing you can do for your health. And we've just got to keep saying that again and again until the message comes through.

ALLISON LANGDON: Yep. We're coming into winter; we don't want to see an outbreak here - get vaccinated. Doctor, thanks for joining us this morning.

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