

**Transcript: AMA President, Dr Omar Khorshid, interview on Nine's Today Show on Saturday 18 September 2021 at 8.10m**

**Subject: Doherty modelling, increased COVID vaccination supplies, home quarantine, strain on hospitals and staff, roadmap for easing of restrictions in Victoria**

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HOST: Well, updated modelling from the Doherty Institute says maintaining medium level restrictions would be wise until the country reaches its 80 per cent vaccination target. That is, if case numbers remain high.

Australian Medical Association President Dr Omar Khorshid joins us this morning from Perth. Thank you for coming on the show, sir. This would mean stay at home orders could be in place for areas of concern for some time. Is this the right and smart move?

DR OMAR KHORSHID: What this modelling has always said was that opening up would still come with some restrictions and the need to get testing, tracing, isolation and quarantine absolutely perfect. So, if you don't have the perfect TTIQ, which is the reality, then you are still looking at lockdowns, and the modelling says above 70 per cent you're still going to need stay at home orders if you're starting with thousands of cases. So that right now is the reality for Sydney, unless of course those cases can come down, in which case perhaps those stay at home orders won't be needed at the 70 per cent. What the modelling doesn't show, of course, is the impact on hospitals if there are increased cases out in the community. Because, of course, around 10 per cent of people get pretty sick, some need hospitals, some need ICU, and Sydney's hospitals are already under extraordinary pressure.

QUESTION: Okay. Australia's first Moderna doses touched down last night. Are you hopeful this will boost the rollout even further?

DR OMAR KHORSHID: There's actually a couple of bits of good news on the vaccine front. Yes, Moderna's arrived and that'll be available through community pharmacies. We're also seeing a really big increase in the amount of Pfizer vaccine available, in particular through the general practice network. And there's now all 4,500 GPs that were doing the AZ vaccine, they've now got access to Pfizer in increased numbers. So for those who've got appointments down the track, you can actually hopefully bring those forward, get your vaccines done earlier, so that we can, as a nation, hit that 80 per cent target as quickly as we can.

QUESTION: New South Wales will now trial home quarantine for fully vaccinated returning Aussies. What is the key to getting this right so we can get rid of the hotel quarantine that no one likes?

DR OMAR KHORSHID: Well, you've got to pick the right people, for a start, people who are likely to be compliant, people that have already been vaccinated. So that risk is already fairly low. And then of course making sure you've got all those processes in place, and some of it's practical stuff like a sign on the door saying: 'Hey, I'm in quarantine'. But also the technology available, and we understand New South Wales is using an app that's been developed out of South Australia, been used overseas. It's really important to make sure that those who are doing home quarantine are complying with the rules. We know most people do the right

thing, but not everyone does, and every system has to assume that you will need to check up on people, and we're confident that this trial will be successful. And hopefully it'll be an interim measure as we move out of this very strict requirement we're in at the moment into the new future, where maybe quarantine won't be required at all for people travelling between countries.

QUESTION: Yes, fingers crossed. You mentioned the strain on hospitals before. How are health workers coping? How close are we to this becoming a catastrophic situation in our health system?

DR OMAR KHORSHID: Well, we are confident that anyone who gets COVID is going to get looked after. But the bigger issue that we've been pointing out for some weeks now is that when the hospitals are full of COVID patients, when you've got, as we do in New South Wales, over 200 people in ICU, that's 200 other Australians who don't have access to that ICU, which is of course normally full of patients having operations and with other serious illnesses. So there's an extraordinary impact. Staff are demoralised, they are overworked, some of them of course are getting sick, and we need to be aware of that as we plan this opening up. And it may be for some states that their opening up has to be a little delayed in order to make sure that every Australian is going to have access to a hospital, and that we don't have hospitals, and in particular we're talking Sydney and Melbourne at the moment, but of course it could happen anywhere in the country, we don't have those hospitals buckling under the pressure and unable to look after you when you get sick.

QUESTION: Health workers are doing such an amazing job. Victoria will be presenting its roadmap out of lockdown tomorrow. What would you like to see?

DR OMAR KHORSHID: Well, we'd like to see the roadmap taking into account the new modelling from Doherty that's just become available last night, that's more realistic I guess, given that we've now got states with hundreds and hundreds of cases a day and heading towards the thousands in Victoria, unfortunately. So it's got to be realistic, it's got to be careful, it's got to test the outcome of each change before it moves to the next one. So a bit of a pause, if you do a relaxation, pause and see the effect before moving on to the next relaxation. And of course we want to see that it takes into account vulnerable communities, what is your vaccination rate in Indigenous communities, in rural and remote Victoria, etcetera. Because we're only as good as our vaccination rates in our most vulnerable communities and we can't have a situation where those communities are devastated by COVID.

HOST: Yeah, cautious baby steps out of lockdown. Doctor, thank you for your time this morning.

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