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Transcript: AMA President, Dr Omar Khorshid, speaking on Sunrise, Wednesday, 20 July 2022

Subject: COVID and mask mandates.

KARL STEFANOVIC: There's a sense of deja vu this morning, with the nation's top doctor joining the growing chorus of leaders calling for Aussies to mask up and work from home.

President of the Australian Medical Association, Dr Omar Khorshid, joins us now. Doctor, the Chief Health Officer stopped short of mandating the move. It feels like there's a growing momentum towards that, but do we need that to go that far?

OMAR KHORSHID: Morning, Karl. What we have is yet another COVID crisis before us, with over 5000 of our hospital beds taken up by people with COVID. Thousands upon thousands of healthcare workers are unable to attend work because they've got COVID or they've been exposed enough to it. They can't go to work. And what that means is that people who need hospitals simply cannot access the care they need. So we've got a choice as a community. We can either do the right thing and try and protect those hospitals, keep those resources available for the Australians who need it, or we can ignore it until our chief health officers have got no choice but to bring back mandates. So we all need to take a little bit of the bitter pill, do the right thing. That means going and getting your vaccines, even though they're not the complete solution. They're certainly part of it. It means if you have got the slightest cold or flu symptoms, actually test yourself to report those results to the Government in the way you're supposed to and not to be out and about if you've got cold and flu symptoms. In WA, the government-

KARL STEFANOVIC: [Talks over] We don't need the mandate though? Isn't this a personal responsibility thing. I mean, it's getting to the point now where a lot of people have had the flu that's worse than COVID.

OMAR KHORSHID: Yeah, well, this is where governments though have a role to play. Yeah, we'll do the right thing, but we have seatbelt rules, we have speed limits because we do need to make those expectations really clear to the community when it's critical to protect other people's health, and we're getting very close to that point now. We're not, at this stage, calling for mandates, but if we get to that point, and it may well be, the way the numbers are looking, that that is coming, and if people aren't doing the right things, there may be no choice but for the governments to step up and protect the community by asking us to do the right thing when it comes to masks and only in indoor venues. We're not talking about lockdowns. We're not talking about 2020, 2021 here. We're talking about a new virus, a new situation, but it is one that cannot simply be ignored because it's not going away, Karl.

KARL STEFANOVIC: Are you saying that, say, for example, in indoor restaurants, pubs, that kind of thing, masks should be the go?

OMAR KHORSHID: I'm saying that if you're in a crowded venue with lots of other people, then if you're not actively consuming beverages or food, then yeah, masks are recommended. That is the message from Paul Kelly yesterday, our Chief Medical Officer of the Commonwealth. It's also the message from several of the state governments- sorry, the state

chief health officers. The governments aren't willing to mandate it because they're worried about the blowback. They know Australians don't want mask mandates but at the end of the day, they've got to step up and protect the community, and when that time comes, I expect them to do the right thing.

KARL STEFANOVIC: All right. Good to talk to you, Doctor. Appreciate your time today. Thank you.

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