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Transcript: AMA President, Dr Tony Bartone, ABC Radio Melbourne, *Mornings with Virginia Trioli*, Monday, 2 March 2020

Subject: Coronavirus

VIRGINIA TRIOLI: You may have heard the Victorian Chief Health Officer last week - it was just a throwaway line but he certainly did say this in the conversation to me - that it might be sensible to get a few things in the pantry just in case you did have to be home for a couple of weeks; home detention, if you like, if you manage to contract COVID-19, which is the full name of the virus.

Well, that and now other observations by other people similar to him really seems has sparked off a whole lot of panic buying. Is it necessary? Tony Bartone is the Federal AMA President - forgive me, I got the title wrong a moment ago. Tony, good morning.

TONY BARTONE: Good morning, Virginia.

VIRGINIA TRIOLI: Should we be stockpiling?

TONY BARTONE: Look, at this stage, obviously there is an enormous amount of misinformation and concern and almost fear in certain parts of the community. The only thing that we need to be cognisant of is that in the supply chain that is a world village and so a global village, there is going to be some delays in some parts of resources, and things that we've become accustomed to having in abundance are going to need a second or third way of getting to us. So that's going to put a stress on supply.

But there's no reason to go out and panic buy, you know, the almost bunker level materials at this present time. And we've seen some of the pictures and some of the reports and the queues outside of supermarkets completely are disproportionate to the issues at hand.

And so my message is basically just for everyone to take heed of the public health messaging and the messages from both State and Federal Government communication arms and just to keep themselves as best prepared, to practise good hygiene measures and, obviously, if they've got symptoms, to stay away from the workplace - we don't need to spread other conditions around.

And it is almost the flu season when we start to spread the message about getting your influenza shot up to date, which is going to be an important part of public health messaging in the next month or so.

VIRGINIA TRIOLI: Yeah. That'll be very soon that we do that. I have information - and we've been I think reading about this too - that some medical centres and doctors' practices are really struggling with the supplies they need in order to be that frontline for people turning up saying that they think they might be infected - running low on masks, running low on rubber gloves and silicon gloves and the like. Is that the case? And, if so, is the Federal Government stepping in to provide more of these basics?

TONY BARTONE: So, these conversations are part of the conversations that I'm involved in every day and especially with the Federal Government and Department of Health. We need to ensure that there is no breakdown in that supply chain to the frontline healthcare staff. They're going to be crucial in the response over, over coming weeks and months.

VIRGINIA TRIOLI: But it looks like there has been a breakdown in that supply chain. And I know of at least one, and it's a large one, that has almost run out of gloves.

TONY BARTONE: And Virginia, you're absolutely right. There have been some cases where this has occurred and this is part of the conversation I'm having every day with the Minister and the Chief Medical Officer - that we need to ensure that there is a better, more coordinated and much more immediate solution than what's currently on offer at the moment. And that's part of the conversation that was last week, last Friday, at the COAG meeting and certainly has occupied the various stakeholders in this space over the weekend and, in fact, there are more meetings planned today and tomorrow about this very issue.

VIRGINIA TRIOLI: What can you tell us about the Victorian woman who's been diagnosed with COVID-19?

TONY BARTONE: Look, other than what's been clearly reported in the papers - and that is that she developed symptoms on the flight coming to Melbourne, and there was the two stop offs and the contact tracing of those that were immediately seated adjacent to her and a couple of rows either side - not much more than that. But it does underline the reason why the Government put in the travel advisory recommendations for Iran, because there seems to be an enormous amount of these type of cases around the world occurring disproportionate to the numbers that are being reported in the country.

So, the sense is there are unique situations in Iran which actually suggests that it may be that the rate of infections is actually running a lot ahead of the rate of which they're able to diagnose and confirm certain cases.

VIRGINIA TRIOLI: And Tony Bartone, take us through the protocol if you think you may have contracted it. And, at that early stage, is there a way of distinguishing between what might just be a head cold or an upper respiratory tract infection and COVID-19?

TONY BARTONE: Look, at a very early stage, no. There won't be much and that will be the way in the first few hours or the first day. The symptoms, you know, for COVID-19 is fever with a sore throat, cough, and respiratory shortness of breath symptoms in particular. But also the underlying usual, so far still the correct assumption is about having that travel history to any of the affected areas or direct contact with someone that's been a confirmed case.

Now, clearly those travel areas are getting larger and larger at the moment in terms of the number of cases, and we've seen in recent days where the number of cases is significantly rising at a much faster rate around the world than in the original epicentre of this situation.

VIRGINIA TRIOLI: Tony, no doubt we'll have an opportunity to talk again. Can you update us if there's any change to the- the official support or financial support or supply to

doctors' offices and GP offices in and around Melbourne in Victoria from the Federal Government? Because that seems to be a real pressure for a lot of doctors and nurses right now.

TONY BARTONE: I will happily do that and make sure you get that information and so do your listeners.

VIRGINIA TRIOLI: That's great. Tony Bartone, thank you.

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