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Transcript: AMA President, Dr Omar Khorshid, Sky News Live, *Weekend Edition with Tim Gilbert*, Sunday, 9 August 2020

Subject: PPE for healthcare workers, community restrictions, State borders

TIM GILBERT: The Victorian Premier maintains his State has enough masks and PPE to help residents protect themselves during the second wave of coronavirus. Joining us now to talk about the crisis is AMA President, Dr Omar Khorshid. Doctor, is there enough PPE?

OMAR KHORSHID: There is probably enough PPE, Tim. But the problem is it's not much use if it's sitting in a warehouse, and what we really need to see is the right type of PPE on healthcare workers when they're looking after sick Victorians.

TIM GILBERT: So, what advice do you have for the Victorian Government at the moment?

OMAR KHORSHID: The Victorian Government has actually moved well in the last week or so to allow healthcare workers, in fact require them, to use the higher level of mask, which is what we call the P2 or N95 mask. That's a mask that actually protects the wearer from virus in the air. And so those are now required for many healthcare workers in high-risk settings, places where there's a lot of patients either with coronavirus or suspected to have it, and there's the chance that there is that virus in the air and that they're breathing it in. The problem...

TIM GILBERT: [Interrupts] Doc, has- yes, sorry, continue.

OMAR KHORSHID: I was just going to say, the problem is that the rest of the country hasn't yet followed suit, and the national guidelines still don't require those masks that actually protect the healthcare worker for use with patients with coronavirus.

TIM GILBERT: Sorry to interrupt you there as well. Has Victoria's crisis reached its peak? Should we start to see case numbers come down?

OMAR KHORSHID: We're expecting to see the case numbers stay the way they are for around a week and possibly a little longer, until we start to see the effects of the lockdown. Victorians shouldn't be disappointed if they still see around that 500 cases a day mark for the next week or so. It doesn't mean the lockdown has failed, it just takes that long for the numbers to respond to the new measures.

TIM GILBERT: And it doesn't matter how many times we say it, we've got to continue to say it. I had a couple of calls from friends of mine in Melbourne yesterday. When people were door-knocked there were still those that weren't at home. It's just unacceptable when 99.9 per cent of people are doing the right thing, that they are being handcuffed by those that aren't.

OMAR KHORSHID: That's exactly right. And this really is a community response and whilst the Government can take strong measures and put in restrictions, it's still up to every one of us to do the right thing to contribute to the health of the community, and it only takes one person doing the wrong thing to create a complete disaster. We've seen that already in Victoria, and the rest of the country certainly needs to learn those lessons.

TIM GILBERT: What are your thoughts on Queensland shutting its border again?

OMAR KHORSHID: The border closures have been the most effective thing that's been done by all our governments, our Federal Government and our State Governments, in order to control this virus. The only way we've got to control it is to keep it away from us, so that's keep it out of our country, out

of our States, but also once it's in the State, to keep people apart. And if we do that, we can stop it in its tracks and keep it at bay whilst our scientists work very hard to find a vaccine.

TIM GILBERT: Well, that's the liberating thing, isn't it? The vaccine is the chief liberator worldwide. Where do you think we are, not only with the vaccine but with some of the medications that are now being looked at as options of limiting the disease and eventually, hopefully, getting rid of it around the world?

OMAR KHORSHID: I think firstly the message is that we're unlikely to see an effective vaccine in the near future. It takes a long time to prove that these vaccines are both safe and effective, and also even longer to then manufacture the extraordinary number of doses that would be required to effectively vaccinate the entire world. So there's a lot of science still to go, a lot of work, a lot of manufacturing, even if a successful vaccine was found today.

So I guess the message for everybody is: we're going to be living with this virus for quite some time, possibly months, possibly years, and we need to get used to having to bring in restrictions and modify our lives. This is our new normal for the moment, and it's really important that Australians get that message and understand that wearing masks in public, or whatever the restrictions that are brought in are, they're there for a reason and there to protect our lives.

TIM GILBERT: To give people in Melbourne and Victoria a little bit of positivity this morning, I know you don't carry a crystal ball around with you, but what kind of forecasting can you give to them where life might get back to some semblance of normality through the course of this year?

OMAR KHORSHID: We're certainly hoping, as does the Victorian Government, that the Stage 4 restrictions will be effective and we'll start to see numbers drop from next week, possibly the week after. And then it will unfortunately take some time. So the prediction of six weeks of lockdown seems right to me. And that will hopefully be able to go back a little bit, perhaps to the previous level 3 type restrictions. But we're not going to be having completely normal lives for a long time. So it's really what level of restrictions are there. We've got to get used to this new way of living for a period of time until we have a successful and safe vaccine.

TIM GILBERT: Doctor, thanks for getting up for us very, very early on a Perth morning on a Sunday, I appreciate it.

OMAR KHORSHID: No worries, Tim, cheers.

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