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Transcript: AMA President, Dr Tony Bartone, Seven, *Sunrise*, Tuesday, 17 March 2020

Subject: Coronavirus, school closures

DAVID KOCH: Now, the Prime Minister and the Health Minister have held talks with the Australian Medical Association, and for more, we're joined by Dr Tony Bartone, the President of the AMA. Tony, good to see you again. Firstly, how was your phone hook up with the Prime Minister? Will there be any changes that come from it?

TONY BARTONE: Good morning, Kochie, and thank you for letting me on. Look, we had a very long, and robust, and frank discussion about the announcements at the press conference on Sunday, the gratitude and indeed the immense thanks that the Prime Minister and, indeed, the Health Minister have in respect of all health care workers, but in particular for my medical colleagues who are at the frontline, and the importance of the measured responses that are being implemented in trying to protect the community. It was a very, very positive, and a very reassuring conversation to assure me, that the Minister, and the Prime Minister, and indeed the whole Cabinet and the AHPPC, are right in the forefront of making the decisions to protect the Australian public.

NATALIE BARR: Okay, let's talk about schools. There is a variety of opinion on whether they should be open or closed. As our chief doctor, what do you think?

TONY BARTONE: Look, and this is a really important point, the decision to look at schools and whether, when and where to close them is one that's on the table and will be on the table every day as we get deeper into this evolving COVID-19 spread. At the moment, there is no clear definitive evidence that this is a time to go, but that is going to be reviewed day by day.

If you go too early, you lose the bang for your buck by going too early. At some stage, it is likely that we will need to go - that is being reviewed. When we do go, it will be at the time that it will get the best return for that measure, because it's going to be an important measure, along with all the other proportionate responses that we've got, to try and prevent the spread of COVID-19, the rate of spread into the community.

DAVID KOCH: Do you know, that is the most sensible answer I have heard from anyone, and thank you for giving it to us. It's all about the timing as we manage this all the way through. Same thing with the bans on major events staying in place - will this be the new normal for 2020?

TONY BARTONE: We're going to have to review the data and the rates of infections and the spread and all the community data that we get from testing over the current next few weeks and months. As we find out more from the virus, we'll learn more about its behaviour and we'll be able to plot and plan what we need to do.

Clearly, by doing it, by implementing the measures so soon now, it's not about trying to be inconvenient for the public, it is not about trying to impose hardship. It is about trying to limit the rate of spread of COVID-19 into the community so that our health system can manage the

expected burden on the frontline and ensure that everyone gets the access and care they need when and where they need it.

DAVID KOCH: Tony, so appreciate your time this morning. As I say, it's always great to catch up with you.

TONY BARTONE: Thank you, Kochie.

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