

Australian Medical Association Limited

ABN 37 008 426 793

42 Macquarie Street, Barton ACT 2600: PO Box 6090, Kingston ACT 2604
 Telephone: (02) 6270 5400 Facsimile (02) 6270 5499
 Website : <http://www.ama.com.au/>



Transcript: AMA President, Dr Tony Bartone, Channel 7, *Sunrise with Samantha Armytage and Natalie Barr*, Wednesday, 22 July 2020

Subject: Need for national approach to face masks

NATALIE BARR: Victoria has recorded another 374 new coronavirus cases, their second worst day on record. It comes as the Australian Medical Association pushes for masks to become mandatory in all hotspot areas. Doctors also want the Federal Government to adopt a nationwide position on face coverings.

Joining me now is President of the AMA, Dr Tony Bartone. Morning to you. Why do we need a national approach to face masks?

TONY BARTONE: Good morning, Natalie. Look, what we have been calling for now is that the National Cabinet is reconvened and comes to a consensus position to try and inform all Australians about the importance of wearing face masks in those community areas where we certainly know we've got hotspots, we've got outbreaks, we've got increased rates of community transmission.

And the evidence is now really clear that if we do add another layer of protection, in terms of wearing face masks, to the other measures of physical distancing, hand hygiene, cough etiquette; we will significantly reduce the rate of COVID-19 spread in our community.

NATALIE BARR: So, what's a hotspot? We look at that map we're putting up of Sydney and there are outbreaks all over the place. For instance, there were two in Paddington the other day - is that a hotspot?

TONY BARTONE: Well, clearly, anywhere now where we've got detected community transmission, especially anywhere where there is no clear pathway in terms of how that infection was acquired, that's a hotspot, that's an area of concern, that's an outbreak. And if you reflect back to many weeks ago, many of those areas were all recording zero cases or one case and it was a clear direct train of transmission identified very early on in the piece.

So clearly, that's what we're trying to really bring and highlight, that by having an approach to wearing masks, especially now while we've got identified extensive areas of community transmission right across from Victoria, right up the eastern seaboard now, we really need to be on our guard and vigilant about trying to reduce this spread, which has obviously now taken us back in terms of where we are with restrictions.

NATALIE BARR: So, you're saying as soon as there's something identified in your area, like Paddington, everyone in Paddington and those surrounding areas should now wear a mask, everyone in Port Stephens yesterday, as soon as there's one identified, everyone in that town or suburb should wear masks?

TONY BARTONE: What I'm saying, Nat, is that by really taking a cautionary approach - we're seeing what's happening in Victoria, we know that there are now seeds of transmission of pockets appearing in Sydney and regional New South Wales. If you've got areas where you can't physically distance, you're in crowds, and you know that there are cases being reported, it's a sensible precaution to wear a mask to try and reduce that spread. That's what we're saying.

NATALIE BARR: So, what do you say to people who say, we had a lockdown, everyone was at home and we didn't have to wear masks then, why now?

TONY BARTONE: Clearly, when we had that lockdown, there was no identified community transmission. Let's get back to basics, during that period, that first part of this first wave as we're now calling it, we really had no community transmission. Everything was coming in from an overseas transmission source, it was identified, and we were tracking it through the community.

Now we have identified clear, clear cases where the number of cases under investigation certainly are now above the thousands, and that really points to the issue that's a concern here. Now, that's the difference, that's what's changed. We now know that it's in there amongst us, it's invisible, and by the time we identify new cases, it's already seven, 10, 14 days on from when those cases were acquired. That's what's changed.

NATALIE BARR: Okay. Thank you. There's a lot of misinformation out there, so thanks for explaining it, Tony.

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CONTACT: John Flannery 02 6270 5477 / 0419 494 761
 Maria Hawthorne 02 6270 5478 / 0427 209 753

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