All Australian jurisdictions have agreed to take a suppression strategy to the management of the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.

Under a suppression strategy it remains probable that Australia will experience periodic outbreaks given the:

- continued growth in confirmed cases in other countries, and the number of Australians and Australian permanent residents still overseas who may return
- sporadic community transmission.

Since late May, Victoria has commenced easing restrictions. In the early weeks community transmission was maintained at low and stable levels, in the last week an increase in outbreaks and community transmission in double digits has become a concern.

As a result, on 22 June, Victoria deferred some easing of restrictions (expanding venue caps) for three weeks and increased restrictions on family and social gatherings.

The six local government areas of Hume, Casey, Brimbank, Moreland, Cardinia and Darebin have been publicly identified by the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) as coronavirus ‘hotspots’ due to the level of community transmission. The City of Maribyrnong also includes a suburb of concern but has not been publicly identified as an LGA of concern.

‘Hotspot’ was defined as having at least five non-overseas acquired cases since 1 June 2020.

A COVID-19 Suburban Testing Blitz has been developed to manage these outbreak areas of concern.

**Suburban Testing Blitz**

A targeted testing blitz will occur across the following local suburbs:

1. Keilor Downs
2. Maidstone
3. Albanvale
4. Sunshine West
5. Hallam
6. Broadmeadows
7. Brunswick West
8. Fawkner
9. Reservoir
10. Pakenham

These suburbs have been selected due to the high rates of recent community transmission, the risk of undetected coronavirus circulating in the community and the risk of outbreaks occurring that threaten Victoria’s suppression strategy.

Over the next **10 days**, commencing in Keilor Downs and Broadmeadows on **Thursday 25 June**, all residents of these suburbs will be eligible for free testing, with or without symptoms, with a priority on testing symptomatic cases. Over those 10 days, we have set a target of testing **10,000 residents** a day, to get a better sense of how the virus is spreading in these communities.
The first three days will focus on Keilor Downs and Broadmeadows, as the areas of most concern. Up to 50% of all residents will be tested to get a better sense of how the virus is spreading in these communities.

Across all of the hotspot suburbs a combination of new community outreach techniques will be applied, working closely with cultural and faith organisations, alongside expanded testing capacity, to provide increased engagement with these suburbs, which contain a high proportion of culturally and linguistically diverse residents.

Next week, in an Australian first, we will commence collection of saliva samples to bring an easier sample collection method to our hotspot communities. This will make testing faster, easier and more comfortable.

Anyone with symptoms should stay home until they receive their test results.

All those who test positive and close contacts of positive cases must isolate for 14 days. Those who cannot isolate safely at home will be provided with hotel accommodation.

In addition, to ensure cases are quickly tracked and traced and outbreaks contained, the contact tracing team and outbreak unit will increase by at least 350 staff.

**Suburb selection criteria**

The suburbs have been selected as they have the highest number of confirmed new cases and proportion of positive tests in the period 16-22 June. Consideration has also been given to cases in the preceding week of 8-15 June, where the highest number of cases were in Pakenham and Broadmeadows.

Across these suburbs there are over 200,000 residents and approximately 100,000 tests will need to be conducted over the **ten days**, an average of **over 10,000 tests** per day.

**Future suburb identification and rollout**

The Public Health team will undertake a daily assessment of new cases and their location and identify if there has been any material change that may warrant expansion of the testing program to further suburbs. A regular report will be provided to government for consideration.

If new suburbs are added to the program, the community doorknocking and engagement element of the program will be rolled out first, rapidly followed by testing teams.
Testing rollout

A range of options will be provided to these communities to maximise access and enable testing. Initially, several teams of health care workers, including medical and nursing professionals, will offer nasopharyngeal testing door to door, starting from 25 June in Keilor Downs and Broadmeadows. This will include testing at someone’s home or at a mobile testing van or marquee near their home. This will specifically assist in targeting vulnerable members of the community.

This team will rapidly grow to 800 testing workers, and from next week we will shift to using saliva testing. Due to the lower complexity and discomfort involved, this will enable the rapid expansion of the suburban testing blitz.

Testing sites

As part of the Suburban Testing Blitz, testing will be available at the following locations:

- workplace testing across large and higher risk workplaces such as food processing, recreation and education settings;

- We are also adding 10 additional pop up testing clinics will be set up at the following (or similar locations):
  - Melbourne Showgrounds
  - Bunnings West Footscray
  - Broadmeadows shopping centre
  - Merri Health Service and a retail site at Melton
  - Pakenham, in partnership with Monash Health

Two pop-up clinics have opened at the Melbourne Showgrounds to provide large-scale testing of Keilor Downs College school students, parents and teachers/staff, and separate access to testing for the general public.

Sunshine Hospital is providing testing for students from Albanvale Primary School, with teachers offered asymptomatic testing at the Deer Park drive through testing site.

The pop-up clinics at Bunnings West Footscray and Broadmeadows shopping centre are also now open.

State-wide Testing

Across the state, over 130 fixed and drive/walk through testing sites, including at health services, community health centres, retail centres and general practices will increase capacity, through longer opening hours and more staff.

In addition to the targeted tests to be performed each day across the hotspot suburbs, it is essential to maintain a baseline testing level to effectively monitor the spread of the virus across the state.

A baseline target of 10,000 tests a day will be set to ensure anyone with symptoms can get tested across Victoria.

Existing retail and drive through sites will be maintained. An additional ten drive through testing sites will be stood-up this week. Victoria has also requested support from Australian Defence Force (ADF) medical staff for delivery of large-scale testing sites.
Community Engagement

A team of 1000 community engagement personnel will be going door to door across all LGAs that have experienced significant community transmission in June, to ensure locals understand the virus, where to get tested and how to access financial support if they need to self-isolate. Door knocking commenced in Hallam and Keilor Downs on 24 June.

Once testing moves to saliva samples, door knockers will support the delivery of free door to door testing to make it easier for people to know whether they are positive or not.

Advice for the approach over school holidays will emphasise that it’s important for all Victorians to remain vigilant and not go away for the holidays if a family member is unwell.

Travel advice

School holidays are fast approaching and we are asking all Victorians to remain vigilant, if you are sick, get tested and do not travel. If someone in your household is sick, make sure they get tested and do not travel. While you are waiting for your test result, you should stay home, rather than go on holiday.
Pathology and Lab capacity

Laboratories in Victoria, with surge staff capacity, can process 18,000 tests a day, noting that turn-around times are adversely affected when there is sustained testing above 14,000 tests per day.

New South Wales, South Australia, Queensland and Tasmania have agreed to provide surge lab capacity of over 4000 tests a day. Private laboratories can also provide surge capacity of around 13,500 tests a day through their interstate operations. This will allow for at least 25,000 Victorian tests to be processed a day.

There are currently sufficient test kits to meet this level of demand. In addition, private pathology providers can draw on interstate supply chains. Safeguards, including repeat testing, will manage the risk of false positive tests.

The State Control Centre

The State Control Centre (SCC) and other emergency management arrangements are fully engaged in coordination, operations and logistics, including through whole of government coordination and engagement with other agencies such as the ADF.

The operation will involve targeted deployment of DHHS operational capabilities in each region, Victoria Police capacity (in particular to support enforcement and compliance at hotel quarantine locations and elsewhere) and deployment of ADF personnel and capability in support, planning and logistics roles, and to transport pathology samples interstate for testing if required.

The State Control Centre (SCC) has remained operational at Tier 2 for the duration of the COVID-19 response. Resourcing of the SCC is scalable and will be enhanced by the State Control Team as necessary to support this mission.

Increased capacity for outbreak unit and contact tracing team

There will be enhanced capacity for the public health team including:

- Increased number of contact tracers (including from interstate) and call takers
- Increased use of face to face contact tracing with greater information sharing, and family testing at home
- Increased size of the outbreak team
- Teams on the ground will conduct welfare checks, ensure appropriate isolation is occurring and arrange hotel emergency relief accommodation. Consideration will be given to including personnel such as social workers, translators, paramedics, nurses, and retired police with varied applicable skill sets

Through these avenues, the team will embed expanded capacity of at least an additional 350 staff.
Enforcement

Victoria Police will support the operation of the Suburban Testing Blitz through highly visible and targeted enforcement of Chief Health Officer (CHO) directions, and in accordance with operational planning of emergency arrangements to achieve public health outcomes.

Operation Sentinel will increase spot check activities to enforce quarantine orders for those in hotspot suburbs who have tested positive or who have had close contact and been identified through contact tracing.

National Assistance

The government has requested the assistance of the ADF as we continue to ramp up testing and work to control the spread of the virus.

This includes operational coordination, logistics and planning support to add to the team of planners currently operating from the State Control Centre and up to 100 ADF personnel to support passengers entering and exiting hotel quarantine, similar to the support already provided in NSW.

In addition, the government has requested 200 medical and co-ordination staff to support drive through testing focused on the large drive through sites being established this week, including at the Melbourne showgrounds.
Restrictions

The Chief Health Officer advises that a focus on lifting rates of symptomatic testing, enhanced community engagement and effective behavioural change are the core measures required to respond to the recent increased community transmission levels.

The 10 target locations have been chosen on the basis of their recent confirmed case rates but they are also in LGAs that predominantly have higher levels of positive cases per 100,000 population, with testing rates below the state average and some behavioural risk indicators, such as a high proportion of symptomatic people not isolating at the time of testing.

Asymptomatic screening will be part of a blended community engagement strategy, but resourcing and operational strategies will prioritise symptomatic testing as having the greatest likelihood of finding undetected cases in the community and isolating them.

It may be expected that about 15-20% of the population has symptoms (such as a runny nose). Of the 50% testing target we should seek to maximise the number of symptomatic people.

It is recommended that over the next week, if:

- New community transmission remains stable; and
- Mobility, police and COVID-19 data indicates changed behaviour and further compliance with physical distancing

Then a further lockdown will not be required at this point.

The results of this outbreak strategy will be reflected in the case data in 3-4 weeks (given the incubation period of 2 weeks). Lead indicators of success will include:

- Testing rates, especially among symptomatic people in hotspot areas
- Positive case rates
- Rates of people isolating while symptomatic
- Indicators of community compliance with Directions and physical distancing instructions.

Advertising and Media blitz

An advertising and media blitz will be undertaken. As of Friday 26 June:

- All local newspapers and radio stations will be briefed twice weekly to partner with Government on messaging
- Local newspaper advertising and geo-targeted social media blitz
- Schools blitz
- Total government advertising push across all channels and real estate by all government departments and statutory authorities and agencies
- Out of Home buy in all key areas
- Community engagement teams in all areas
Testing Models

Comprehensive door to door testing will ensure that cases in high-risk areas are identified early before they contribute to large clusters or spread to other areas. It will also encourage people to get tested who may be reluctant to do so, or those who may be attracted by the ease of availability of testing in this way. This will complement the other strategies that focus on state-wide surveillance.

Saliva testing is a scalable approach with low cost, high community acceptability and therefore the best chance of good compliance. Recent evidence and emerging international best practice, including in the UK, suggest that this is the best option. Testing machines are currently being recalibrated to run tests for saliva, ready to begin next week.

**Initial model – Mobile nasopharyngeal testing**

To ensure immediate door to door testing in high risk areas, an initial phase will use the best test currently available, nasopharyngeal testing. This requires supervised self-collection or needs to be administered by a trained tester.

In this phase, health care professionals, which will include trainee and qualified nurses, will offer to supervise tests on people’s doorsteps, or administer the test very close to their home in either vans or a pop-up marquee with heaters nearby.

This approach will achieve several hundred tests per day, but more importantly, it will introduce the door to door approach, complement the work of Community Engagement Teams, and provide 2-3 days during which a much larger workforce of community testing workers will be trained up for a rapid roll out of saliva testing.

**Saliva testing**

Door to door saliva collection for testing will start operating from next week.

Community engagement teams will be used as advance teams in the targeted suburbs to engage, communicate and prepare people for undertaking saliva testing.

Different approaches to collection of saliva samples at scale will be tried to identify which is most effective. One model will be to bring specimen pots door to door for testing.

Another will be to distribute pots and labels out ahead and give people the option to text to arrange pick-up. When collection visits are made under the second approach, they would be combined with door to door visits to prompt others in the street who have not yet texted for pick-up.

These teams could be rapidly scaled up depending on need. Initially 800 staff would be deployed, with more added if outbreaks continue to grow.

Both models would need multiple workers per visit for safety, and require priority access to social work, mental health professionals and police if needed.
Find out more www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus

If you are concerned, call the Coronavirus hotline 1800 675 398 (24 hours)

Please keep Triple Zero (000) for emergencies only

To receive this publication in an accessible format email COVID-19@dhhs.vic.gov.au

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