

MEDIA RELEASE

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Control of COVID outbreak questioned

AMSANT today expressed concern at the description of the NT COVID-19 outbreak as “under control”.

“The COVID outbreak has demonstrated that complacency and overly-optimistic assurances present a real risk of avoidable adverse consequences”, AMSANT Chief Executive Officer, John Paterson, said.

“AMSANT is concerned that evidence that the NT COVID response is not under control is not being sufficiently acknowledged:

1. Hospitalisations are now higher than the peak Doherty Institute said we could safely cope with.
2. All elective surgery has been cancelled and hospitals are relying on overtime and double shifts with more staff away with COVID at the same time as they are full of COVID patients.
3. The NT has the highest per capita rate of hospitalisations in the country - our current rate is the equivalent of double the NSW peak.
4. There are still too many people who have not had their boosters.
5. About 10 government clinics in Central Australia remain with reduced or only visiting services.
6. Specialist outreach services remain cancelled.
7. There has been a significant shortage of RATS which has slowed testing in many communities. This is now improving.
8. People can't self-isolate due to overcrowding.
9. Workforce burnout and disruption of non-COVID PHC care is a threat to the current outbreak response and recovery.

“We are very thankful for the low number of deaths but every death matters.

“We understand that this is largely a mild disease for those who are fully vaccinated especially where boosted but too many people aren't. Boosters are essential protection particularly for older and sicker people who still have significant risk of hospitalisation if they are only double vaccinated.

“We need to do more to flatten the curve and the single most important additional measure is to ensure positive people are provided a safe place to isolate where they can be fed and supported when this cannot be achieved in their homes. This would help stop positive people moving around in the community because they have to get food and because they don't want to stay at home and infect others. This will slow the spread.

“Continuing with a mask mandate outdoors is also an important tool in reducing spread. We know positive people are moving round in towns and communities and we need them to be wearing masks at all times.

“We know we can't stop spread but we need to still flatten the curve as case numbers continue at 1000 a day with no sign of the peak they have been promising for weeks. The high case numbers will continue to translate into high hospital numbers if we don't slow it down.

“We once again call on the government to immediately establish group isolation facilities that could be supportive places for many positive people who then don’t have to infect their households. We are going to need these places for the next 12 months or more and isolated hotel rooms are not acceptable. People need to be able to mix and move while infected inside a supportive facility. This has not been possible in Central Australia at all.

“There should be group isolation facilities at least in all the regional centres so transport is not the major barrier it has been and it’s not too far from home”, Mr Paterson concluded.

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