

CORONAVIRUS — TESTING — REGIONAL AREAS

**174. Mrs R.M.J. CLARKE to the Minister for Health:**

I refer to the state government's response to the impact of COVID-19 on our health system.

- (1) Can the minister update the house on the testing regime being undertaken for COVID-19? In particular, what is happening in regional Western Australia?
- (2) Can the minister update the house on how the government is providing more support for our healthcare workers during this difficult time?

**Mr R.H. COOK replied:**

- (1)–(2) I thank the member for the question. It is an important question for the members of her constituency, who will be very interested to hear that from tomorrow we will be opening up our first regional COVID-19 clinic at the Bunbury Regional Hospital at the South West Health Campus. It will be set up to assist not only the doctors and nurses who are working on the front line in the emergency department and other areas of the hospital, but also, most importantly, the people in that community, so that they have a place that they can go to if they have symptoms of COVID-19 and have recently travelled or have come into close contact with someone who has been confirmed as a COVID-19 case. Clinic staff will also be tested for COVID-19. In particular, we will be providing them with information and support to make sure that they understand what needs to happen if they have a temperature or an influenza-like illness. As I said, the clinic will open tomorrow morning. It will operate from 10 am to 4 pm, seven days a week.

Currently, people residing in country WA who meet the testing criteria are also able to be tested for suspected COVID-19 at one of WA Country Health Service's 100 hospitals and health services. They can also be tested at clinics operated by the Royal Flying Doctor Service, the Aboriginal Medical Service, or Silver Chain. They are not required to travel to the metropolitan area for testing, which, of course, is an important element.

Of all the regions, the south west area is the most densely populated, with more than 170 000 residents. It comes as no surprise that of our regional communities the demand for testing is highest there. So far, over 300 residents in the region have been tested for the COVID-19 virus and cleared. I had discussions today with the Western Australian Primary Health Alliance, which detailed to me some of its ambitions for COVID-related clinics in other regional areas of Western Australia, specifically Albany and Geraldton. We very much look forward to advancing the plans that are currently in place for extending these clinics to other regional areas.

Anyone who experiences symptoms outside of clinic hours should continue to use the emergency department of the local hospital. If the situation deteriorates, they should call 000. People should also be reminded to take precautions over the coming months including social distancing and making sure they practice good personal hygiene, such as washing their hands, and sneezing or coughing into the crook of their arm or a tissue. In particular, if they are suffering from flu-like symptoms they should stay away from others, including family members, friends and, in particular, older Western Australians. The WA Department of Health is significantly tooling up and muscling up to make sure that it has the people and the clinics to serve Western Australians wherever they may live. Yesterday I announced advertising of our new work pools. I am pleased to say that by day end yesterday we had had almost 32 000 hits to that website. By this morning we had almost 1 000 applications from doctors, nurses, allied health staff and support workers who have heeded the call to sign up and be part of our great effort to make sure that, as a community, we get through this COVID-19 influenza crisis.