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Department of **Health**

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EASING OF INTERSTATE BORDER CONTROLS IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Dear Premier

The implementation of border controls at both international and state levels, along with public health, mass gathering and social distancing measures, continues to be highly effective in preventing COVID-19 outbreaks in Western Australia (WA).

Background

On 20 May 2020, I advised that, until community spread is eliminated in the two affected jurisdictions (New South Wales (NSW) and Victoria), which would require at least 28 days to confirm (two 14-day incubation periods), opening of the interstate borders was not recommended. On 21 June 2020, I advised that, as WA increased the size of mass gatherings in the hospitality, community and sports sectors in Phase 4, the re-introduction of COVID-19 back into the community from travellers could lead to substantial outbreaks, which could require either delay in easing of further restrictions or re-introduction of social distancing and mass gathering measures, and, as such, opening of the borders was not recommended.

From 20 July 2020, under the 'Quarantine (Closing the Border) Amendment Directions (No 3)', Victorian visitors were required to hotel quarantine. From 14 August 2020, under the 'Presentation for Testing Directions (No. 4)', those persons entering from Victoria and NSW were required to be tested within 48 hours of arrival and on day 11. From 27 August 2020, under the 'Quarantine (Closing the Border) Amendment Directions (No 4)', the exemptions for NSW were tightened to mirror the entry restrictions applying to Victoria ('Quarantine (Closing the Border) Amendment Directions (No 2)'), but self-quarantine at home for 14 days was permitted. From 05 October 2020, under the 'Quarantine (Closing the Border) Amendment Directions (No 7)', the exemptions were eased to bring NSW in line with the current conditions applying to all other States and Territories except Victoria, including day 11 testing only. New Zealand visitors arriving internationally, or through NSW or the Northern

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Territory, have been required to hotel quarantine since 06 April 2020 under the 'Quarantine (Closing the Border) Directions'. The most recent advice on maintaining current border arrangements was provided to the State Emergency Coordinator on 26 October 2020. This advice represents updated advice on the need for border restrictions based on an ongoing review of the factors outlined below.

The current WA interstate border arrangements are designed to manage the risk from COVID-19 outbreaks currently occurring in Victoria and NSW, and, to a lesser extent, from visitors from New Zealand coming through NSW and the Northern Territory under the Commonwealth's New Zealand travel 'bubble' arrangements. When the above stricter arrangements were introduced, there were 341 cases in Victoria (20 July 2020), which rose to a peak of 686 cases on 04 August. In NSW, there were 16 cases (27 August 2020), after a peak of 22 cases on 30 July. In Queensland, there was a small outbreak with 8 new cases on 09 September 2020, which has now resolved with no community cases reported for more than 28 days. In New Zealand, there have been several small outbreaks over the last 3 months, but no community cases reported since 22 October 2020. The current border arrangements have been highly effective in reducing the numbers of potential cases who have travelled from NSW, Victoria and Queensland, and in ensuring that there is no further introduction of COVID-19 disease into WA. There has, however, been significant physical, psychosocial and mental health impacts, as work, compassionate and family travel have all been adversely affected. These arrangements also continue to have an impact on our quarantine hotels, with approximately 10% of the rooms occupied by New Zealand and interstate arrivals. This restricts WA's ability to increase its international cap to vulnerable Australians overseas, as well as contributing to the expansion of the hotel quarantine program to its maximum safe level. A review of the health risk posed by individual jurisdictions and the proposed trigger points for reviewing decisions on border controls is at Attachment 1.

Proposed immediate amendments to border controls

While there is still no current evidence of COVID-19 spread in the WA community, with all recent cases involving international travel or maritime crew, the situation in Victoria, while continuing to improve with only 2 cases within the last three days, remains of concern. The outbreak in the northern suburbs of Melbourne, which produced 13 new community cases on 23 and 24 October, still has the potential to produce further cases over coming weeks and the final effectiveness of the targetted testing, tracing and isolation measures implemented may not be clear for a further 14 days. Victoria has had 22 new community cases in the last 7 days and 87 active cases were reported on 27 October 2020. Given the size of this most recent outbreak, it is anticipated that it may still take another month to get this outbreak fully under control. The current Victorian mass gathering and public health measures are still unlikely to prevent exportation of the disease, particularly to neighbouring states.

As Victoria will significantly ease restrictions from 28 October 2020, with increased mixing and numbers of non-household contacts, the impact of these eased restrictions on community spread may not be fully apparent for up to 3 weeks. Victoria continues to decrease their case numbers, with both 5-day and 14-day rolling averages reported

as being less than 5 community cases per day. This is expected to continue; but may be impacted by further outbreaks and easing of restrictions as outlined above. As cases have fallen to less than 5 cases per day over both averages, the exemptions currently in place for NSW, Queensland and other Australian jurisdictions are suitable for application to Victoria from 31 October 2020.

NSW has reported only 4 new community cases over the last 5 days, all in quarantine and linked to known clusters, and 52 cases in the last week, which includes cases in hotel quarantine. NSW, after reaching a peak of 22 cases in this current outbreak, now has less than 3 community cases per day on both a 5-day and 14-day rolling average. NSW has currently had 6 days of no community cases from an unknown source. For the purpose of this advice, a 'community case from an unknown source' is defined as a case that arises from either a previously unknown community case or where the contacts of a known case become cases while in the community and not in quarantine. Given the testing and contact tracing being undertaken, the numbers in NSW are expected to fall to less than 1 community case per day and to continue having no community cases from an unknown source. The border controls are considered appropriate and proportionate at this time.

In New Zealand, there have only been cases in hotel quarantine since 22 October 2020. As their situation is similar to NSW, where they have been able to enter without quarantine since 16 October, and given the robust testing and contact tracing being undertaken, New Zealand is expected to continue having no community cases with an unknown source over the next two to three weeks. The border controls, however, reflect their status as international travellers, and are no longer considered proportionate at this time if they are coming through another Australian jurisdiction, as they are required to have been in New Zealand for 14 days prior to entering that jurisdiction. As they have had no community cases for 5 days, the exemptions and conditions, including home quarantine and day 11 testing, currently in place for NSW, Queensland and other Australian jurisdictions should be applied to New Zealanders entering across state borders from 31 October 2020. Given the risk of mixing with other international passengers and the lack of agreed arrangements to separate them from such groups, those arriving from New Zealand directly or through a third country across international borders should continue to be managed in the same way as other international travellers. This should occur until alternative arrangements, which address the above risks, are put in place.

Overseas passengers who have completed their 14 days hotel quarantine and testing in other jurisdictions and have returned directly to WA will not require any further quarantine in accordance with current Directions.

Proposed future amendments to border instructions

There is currently no COVID-19 disease in the other Australian jurisdictions not previously addressed, apart from international traveller cases in hotel quarantine, and all have had no community spread for at least 28 days. Many of these jurisdictions have announced their intentions to open to NSW and Victoria over the next 5 weeks, with all jurisdictions planning to open to NSW by 02 November 2020 and several to

Victoria by 01 December 2020. It is anticipated that any imported cases from NSW or New Zealand into these jurisdictions will have been identified by 14 November, given the robust current testing and contact tracing arrangements across the various jurisdictions. If this remains the situation prior to 14 November 2020, as confirmed by the Chief Health Officer, this would be an appropriate and safe time to open these borders without the requirement for further quarantine or testing.

If the NSW and Victoria cases continue to improve as anticipated, the border control exemptions should be eased on 14 November 2020 to permit entry to all travellers who have been in NSW or Victoria in the last 14 days, while continuing home quarantine and day 11 testing to prevent any importations from any ongoing outbreaks. The current exemptions from home quarantine for Federal politicians and Australian Government staff should continue to apply. If NSW and Victoria continue to have no community cases, from either an unknown source or where the contacts were not in quarantine, for 28 days, the border controls should be amended to reflect those of other Australian jurisdictions. If New Zealand continues to have no community cases with an unknown source for 28 days, the interstate border controls should be amended to reflect those of other Australian jurisdictions.

Review of Phase 4

The re-introduction of COVID-19 back into the WA community from interstate travellers could lead to substantial outbreaks. Current modelling continues to show that WA, even in Phase 4, remains the most susceptible to a major outbreak of all the States, only surpassed by the Northern Territory, due to the increased numbers of people moving around in our society and the mixing between non-family groups. Given this susceptibility, I advised on 15 October 2020 that Phase 5, given our population and the expected significant increase in the numbers and mixing at high risk venues, is anticipated to raise that susceptibility of WA to a COVID-19 outbreak to the highest level in Australia and should be delayed, with a review in 2 months.

A review of the COVID Safe plans and contact registers in other jurisdictions and within WA has highlighted the need to further enhance these requirements, including better mechanisms for contact registers, including the consideration of QR registration systems and the extension of the requirement for COVID Safe plans to additional businesses. This will further enhance the current contact tracing mechanisms and will provide further support to our outbreak management arrangements when we move to Phase 5.

Other Measures

The susceptibility of the Western Australian population is also an important consideration in ensuring no importations come directly from affected States or indirectly through currently non-COVID jurisdictions. While a proposed commencement date of 14 November 2020 will help mitigate concerns of infected people entering through other jurisdictions, further measures are recommended to manage this risk. I recommend that all visitors make a declaration as to their whereabouts in the last 14 days and a declaration of their current health status. The

health declaration and temperature check at airports could be reviewed and any symptomatic people would be either requested to undertake a COVID-19 test, if they were from a non-COVID jurisdiction, or required to take a test, if they came from NSW, Victoria or New Zealand, at the airport. The health screening measures should be reviewed after 28 days to ascertain their ongoing efficacy. Once cleared, people will be free to enter WA without quarantine if they have been in a non-affected jurisdiction. If they have been in NSW, Victoria or New Zealand in the last 14 days they can enter; but would be required to home or self-quarantine for 14 days and to undertake day 11 testing.

For the reasons outlined above, I am of the current view that the 'Quarantine (Closing the Border) Directions' should be amended from 31 October 2020 to:

- broaden the exemptions for Victoria in line with the current conditions applying to other States and Territories in the 'Quarantine (Closing the Border) Amendment Directions (No 7)', including day 11 testing only; and
- align New Zealand visitors travelling within Australia with the current NSW restrictions, including exemptions, home or self-quarantine and day 11 testing.

I am also of the current view that the Quarantine (Closing the Border) Directions should be amended from 14 November 2020 to permit, subject to a declaration of their whereabouts and a health check:

- any person who has been in a non-COVID affected jurisdiction for 14 days to enter WA without the requirement for quarantine or testing; and
- any person who has been in Victoria, NSW or New Zealand in the last 14 days to enter WA across state borders with requirements for day 11 testing and home quarantine only, subject to confirmation of the public health status of the jurisdictions at the time.

Yours sincerely



Dr Andy Robertson
CHIEF HEALTH OFFICER

28 October 2020

Trigger Points for Reviewing Border Controls

Risk of importation from affected jurisdiction (as at 28 October 2020)	Trigger Point for Review	Proposed amendments to current conditions	Recommended review date and proposed action
High Risk	Greater than 20 new community cases per day, on 5-day and 14 day rolling average	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Hotel quarantine for travellers as per current Quarantine (Closing the Border) Directions. 2. Testing at days 2 and 12. 	
Medium Risk	5 to 20 new community cases per day, on 5-day and 14 day rolling average	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Home quarantine for travellers as per current Quarantine (Closing the Border) Directions for Victoria. 2. Testing at days 1 and 11. 3. Exemptions as per current Directions. 	2 weeks. If risk falls to a low risk, implement low risk conditions
Low Risk	Less than 5 new community cases per day, on 5-day and 14 day rolling average	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Home quarantine for travellers as per current Quarantine (Closing the Border) Directions for other jurisdictions. 2. Testing at day 11. 3. Exemptions as per current Directions 	4-6 weeks. If risk falls to a very low risk, implement very low risk conditions
Very Low Risk (No community cases, from either an unknown source or where the contacts of a case were not in quarantine, for 28 days	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Open interstate borders to all visitors from very low risk jurisdictions. 2. No quarantine or testing required. 3. Declaration that visitor has been in a very low risk jurisdiction for last 14 days 4. Health screening. 	4 weeks. If all jurisdictions meet the very low risk criteria, implement the negligible risk conditions
Negligible Risk	No community cases, from either an unknown source or where the contacts of a case were not in quarantine, for 28 days in all jurisdictions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Open all interstate borders 	