

CORONAVIRUS — VACCINATIONS — TRANSITION PLAN

3. Ms C.M. COLLINS to the Premier:

My question is to the Premier —

The SPEAKER: You can stay in your spot; that is fine. I am just asking members to wait until the little red light on the microphone comes on so that the audiovisual people can determine where people are. Thank you.

Ms C.M. COLLINS: I refer to Western Australia's safe transition plan and the state government's efforts to safely manage the spread of Omicron in our community. Can the Premier update the house on how changes to the safe transition plan have allowed WA to safely and cautiously respond to the Omicron emergency facing other states across the country?

Mr M. McGOWAN replied:

I thank the member for Hillarys for the question.

The arrival of Omicron in Australia changed everything. It is far more transmissible and infectious than the Delta variant of the virus. Since the start of the year, we have seen death, infection and hospitalisation rates increase dramatically. Until yesterday, since the start of this year, New South Wales has recorded 1 057 deaths; Victoria, 765 deaths; Queensland, 377 deaths; and South Australia, 152 deaths. As I said when I announced the removal of the border on 5 February, back in the December, it was barring some unforeseen emergency or catastrophe. In my view, the death rate that has been occurring over the course of the last five or so weeks is an emergency. In Australian terms it is an emergency. We are a country that values human life. Therefore, it would have been reckless and irresponsible to have just opened the borders without restriction, with a low third-dose vaccination rate, whilst the eastern states' numbers were peaking. It would have been absolutely irresponsible.

I note that the Prime Minister himself backed our decision. What he had to say was—he said it in national cabinet as well—that Omicron is a completely different beast to the earlier variants. It changed everything. He said it on radio here in Western Australia. The rules had to change. It is completely different from managing Delta, which was the predominant virus when we announced the border opening back in December. Given the threat of Omicron, we have taken a safe and cautious approach. We have delayed a full reopening and we have eased the border to allow for 30 100 people to come into Western Australia since 5 February, by air and by road, so that families can be reunited in a safe, compassionate way, involving one week's quarantine and a testing regime. This has avoided the state being swamped by COVID-19 whilst we continue to get our third-dose vaccination rate up.

The third vaccination dose, according to all the health advice, is very important to saving lives. We now have some of the highest vaccination rates in the world. We have more than 98.5 per cent first dose for those aged 12-plus. People said it could not be done. The Liberal Party said it could not be done. We have done it. We have a 95 per cent second-dose rate, 12-plus. We are at a 52.3 per cent third-dose rate for 16-plus—the eligible population. These are some of the highest vaccination rates in the world, which will put us in far better stead than other states and other countries when we get much more widespread virus infection and when we bring down interstate and, indeed, international borders.

So, vaccination is one of the many things that this government has done to prepare Western Australia for COVID. I thank the overwhelming—and I mean overwhelming—majority of Western Australians who have gone out and got vaccinated. They have listened to the medical advice and done the right thing by themselves and their families.