

CORONAVIRUS — INTERSTATE BORDER RESTRICTIONS

609. Dr J. KRISHNAN to the Premier:

I refer to the state government's management of the COVID-19 pandemic and its commitment to protecting the health of Western Australians.

- (1) Can the Premier update the house on Western Australia's controlled border arrangements?
- (2) Can the Premier update the house on the state's preparedness to respond to any cases of COVID-19 in the community?

Mr M. McGOWAN replied:

- (1)–(2) I thank the member for Riverton for the question and his role in securing the Indian Community Centre in Willetton that we were able to successfully open on Sunday. I thank the member for Riverton and the member for Jandakot, who also had a significant role in that.

Queensland has now gone 19 days with no new cases, and we received advice from the Chief Health Officer recently that we could therefore reclassify Queensland as a very low risk jurisdiction, from its current low risk categorisation. That means that from 12.01 Friday morning, arrivals from Queensland will no longer need to quarantine. This means Queensland will join South Australia, Tasmania and the Northern Territory as a very low risk jurisdiction. All I will say to people is that if you wish to go to Queensland and catch up with family, this is your opportunity. Obviously, with what is happening in New South Wales, the ACT and Victoria, we cannot be sure how long that border will be open. This is your opportunity, should you wish to do it. Our approach will continue to be very cautious and, as I said earlier, we are not shut off to about 80 per cent of the Australian landmass.

In terms of vaccinations, our vaccination rate, based upon the eligible population of people aged over 12 years, has now grown to 73.2 per cent for the first dose and 54.7 for both doses. Considering that 12 to 15-year-olds have been eligible for vaccination for only about a month, that figure is rapidly climbing, which is good. On current projections, more than 60 per cent of Western Australians aged 12 years and older will be fully vaccinated by the end of this week, which is an amazing achievement, and I am very proud of the people of this state for doing that.

As of yesterday, first doses for the eligible population aged 16-plus was at 73.44 per cent; that is above the rates for Queensland and the Northern Territory, and just behind South Australia. If anyone wishes to compare our vaccination rates with those of Victoria or New South Wales, they need to understand that those jurisdictions had a significantly increased number per capita of Pfizer vaccinations and approved the AstraZeneca vaccination for a greater number of people than we did, they put in place a shorter interval between first and second doses, and they have obviously had significant outbreaks, which has driven the vaccination rates over there. We have learnt from New South Wales and Victoria that the majority of hospitalisations relate to unvaccinated people. If that is not evidence enough of the need to get vaccinated, I do not know what is.

In terms of our outbreak preparedness, we have a well-defined outbreak surge plan. This includes 8 631 public and private general beds, and a capacity of 316 intensive care unit beds. We have a ventilator capacity of 600. We recently announced, as part of the budget, 332 new beds. We will continue to work with the commonwealth government to move out of hospitals people who should be in residential aged care facilities; there are ongoing negotiations around that.

However, I have seen in today's matter of public interest motion and in commentary over recent days that, once again, the Liberal and National opposition is undermining all our efforts in demanding that the borders come down. It did not learn the lessons of last year. There are currently 22 500 active cases in Victoria and 4 158 in New South Wales, with 273 new cases today. I do not want to open up to those states whilst that position continues. I note that the Leader of the Opposition said that our efforts over the last year and a half have been a "wasted opportunity" for WA. We have the best health outcomes in the world, we have no community spread of the virus, we have the lowest unemployment rate in Australia and we have the best budget and financial situation of any state in Australia and around the world, yet she describes that as a wasted opportunity. We have not had hundreds of people in hospitals or dying in their homes, like they have over east, yet the opposition describes that as a wasted opportunity. That is frankly another disgraceful effort by the Liberals and Nationals to undermine everything the people of Western Australia have done.