

CORONAVIRUS — TESTING RATES

10. Dr D.J. HONEY to the Minister for Health:

I refer to Western Australia's low testing rates and reports from esteemed epidemiologists that Omicron cases may be much higher than reported.

- (1) Does the minister agree that the government should be using every tool available to ensure that all possible contacts get tested?
- (2) What advice, if any, has the minister received on publishing or not publishing exposure sites?
- (3) How can Western Australians get tested if they do not know where the exposure sites are?

Ms A. SANDERSON replied:

- (1)–(3) The testing rates are lower than we would like. We have said every day, certainly since we had the original Delta outbreak just before Christmas, that we want more and more people to get tested all the time. The reality is that our testing has been steadily at around 4 000 and 5 000 tests a day, and our polymerase chain reaction clinics have the capacity to test around 30 000 people a day. Our consistent message to people has been to go out and get tested. The Leader of the Liberal Party will recall that we recently shifted to the high case load setting, which essentially changed the definition of “close contacts” and took away the requirement for, or even existence of, casual contacts in that framework. Therefore, it is a natural effect that we have seen fewer exposure sites because there are fewer close contacts and no casual contacts. The public health team makes these decisions based on its own expertise and every individual circumstance. There are many reasons why certain sites do not go up. I am not going to second-guess public health officials or the Chief Health Officer, who has made sensible decisions and provided steady and solid advice throughout the last two years that has saved Western Australian lives.

All the measures that we have put in place have slowed down the rate of infection. The high rates of vaccination, the eased transition of the border settings, with 30 000 people coming through, and a shorter isolation period—all those things—are helping to slow down the transmission. Although there are probably a number of unknown cases out there, once they become symptomatic, they will soon become known to us and those people will be supported. But the reality is that we are experiencing lower numbers because of the strong management of this virus.