

Australia calls military in after virus surge

June 24 2020



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Australia's military was called in Wednesday to help tackle a coronavirus outbreak in Melbourne—a surge in infections that has rattled the country's second-most populous city.

Victoria has recorded double-digit increases in new daily cases for more

than a week—mostly in the state capital Melbourne—representing a sizeable spike in cases in a country that has otherwise successfully curbed COVID-19.

Health Minister Greg Hunt said the [federal government](#) had offered the army's support to respond to the [virus outbreak](#), while four other states had offered help with contact tracing.

Officials said Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews has accepted the offers of assistance from the states and asked for logistical support from the army.

"This support will mean we can get even more tests done and results back quickly—and a stronger effort to remind Victorians if you are sick, stay home and get tested," a state government spokesperson said.

It comes as the country recorded its first COVID-19 death in a month, with a man in his 80s dying in Victoria, where community concern about the virus spread is ramping up.

Health officials have reported long queues at Melbourne's coronavirus testing centres, where some patients were turned away from overwhelmed facilities Tuesday—prompting the creation of pop-up centres in several virus "hotspots".

Major supermarkets in the state also reimposed buying limits on toilet paper and other essentials on Wednesday after an increase in demand sparked fears of a return of panic-buying.

Hunt said the situation had reached a "critical juncture" and [health authorities](#) were considering local lockdowns in the worst-affected areas because of the outbreak.

"Somebody has either not known, or not done the right thing, so we need to be honest about that," he said.

Australia has been an international success story to date, recording roughly 7,500 cases of coronavirus and 103 deaths in a population of 25 million.

Several regions are believed to be effectively virus free, with fewer than 200 known active cases across the country.

About three-quarters of those are in Victoria, which had curbed the [virus](#) through early restrictions on travel and gatherings. These measures were being gradually rolled back until this week.

The new clusters have emerged at Melbourne's Stamford Plaza Hotel, which is being used to quarantine citizens returning from overseas, an H&M clothing store in the city's north, and within extended families in a couple of suburbs.

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