Australia posts record number of new virus cases

July 27 2020

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Australia on Monday posted its highest number of new coronavirus cases since the pandemic began, even as officials expressed hope outbreaks in locked-down Melbourne may have peaked.

A day after Australia reported its highest daily death toll, authorities

confirmed at least 549 new COVID-19 infections—almost entirely driven by an outbreak in the southeastern state of Victoria.

Authorities admitted a second wave of clusters in Melbourne was taking longer to suppress than hoped.

But the state's top health official voiced optimism that a partial lockdown of five million people, now in its third week, was working.

Chief Health Officer Brett Sutton said modelling showed "today should be the peak" even if the number of new cases continues to fluctuate and new daily records could yet be set.

The number of daily new cases has passed the March peak of 459 at least three times in the last week, according to data compiled by AFP.

Sutton indicated any future increase would likely be driven by closely monitored outbreaks at care facilities for the elderly.

Australia had dodged the worst ravages of the pandemic, logging around 15,000 cases in total—fewer than many hard-hit countries see in one day.

But the second [outbreak](#) is still proving deadly, with the nation's death toll rising to 161 on Monday.

"The outbreaks are really volatile," Sutton said pointing to some virulent clusters. "In aged care settings the numbers can increase very significantly in a very short period of time."

Officials around the country are eyeing the situation in Victoria nervously, as neighbouring New South Wales monitors several clusters sparked by a Melbourne traveller to Sydney earlier this month.

"Whilst we are holding the line ... we only have to tragically look at what is happening in Victoria to realise that could be us in a few weeks," New South Wales premier Gladys Berejiklian said.

Almost all of New South Wales' cases have been traced to a specific source or cluster, making management much easier.

Nevertheless the chief minister of the Northern Territory, which like most of Australia has effectively suppressed the virus, delayed plans to open travel with Sydney until at least late August.

"In recent weeks I think the entire nation got a reality check, any hopes that we'd be through this crisis in a few short months have been dashed," Michael Gunner told media in Darwin.

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