

Five million begin lockdown in Australian city

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Five million people in Australia's second-biggest city began a new lockdown Thursday, returning to tough restrictions just weeks after they ended as Melbourne grapples with a resurgence of coronavirus cases.

Residents have been told to stay at home for six weeks after other

measures to contain a spike in COVID-19 failed to prevent the virus spreading.

The state of Victoria, which announced a further 165 new cases Thursday, has been effectively sealed off in an effort to preserve the rest of Australia's success in curbing the virus.

However, a rush of travellers across the border into neighbouring New South Wales on Wednesday has raised concerns those efforts could be torpedoed. Police said some 30,000 cars made the crossing in less than 36 hours.

"A few cases coming over the border from Victoria (can) tip that [magic number](#) into outbreaks that are going to be very hard to control," epidemiologist Mary-Louise McLaws told public broadcaster ABC.

New South Wales Premier Gladys Berejiklian said two cases of COVID-19 had been identified in the border town of Albury and she warned against travel to or from communities on the state frontier.

"We want to make sure that we're flushing out any potential seeding that occurred prior to that spike in cases becoming evident," she told reporters in Sydney.

Queensland state announced Thursday it would turn away all travellers from Victoria—removing an option that had allowed them to spend 14 days in quarantine on arrival.

In Melbourne, there are concerns over the economic and mental health impacts of the second lockdown, which officials estimate will cost the economy Aus\$6 billion (\$4.2 billion).

Restaurants and cafes are limited to serving takeaway food, while gyms,

beauty salons and cinemas have been forced to close again.

Residents are restricted to their homes except for work, exercise, [medical care](#) or to buy essentials.

Despite the harsh measures, many said they support the restrictions.

"I think it is a very good thing," resident Don Sherman told AFP.

"Everybody has to be aware of their rights and what they have to be in this critical situation."

Authorities are waiting for more test results from high-rise public housing estates where roughly 3,000 people have been confined to their apartments since a cluster emerged Saturday, unable to leave for any reason in Australia's strictest lockdown.

There are fears the virus has spread across the towers, which officials have likened to "vertical cruise ships" and where many residents are reportedly in poor health.

So far, 111 tower residents have tested positive during the multi-day rollout of testing while another similar-sized cluster has emerged at a school in Melbourne's west.

New cases were also detected among staff at several hospitals and aged care facilities in the city Thursday, sparking concerns for the sick and elderly patients.

Melbourne resident Monica Marshall said the most difficult part of the new lockdown was being separated from her 91-year-old mother, who recently entered a [care home](#).

"The idea of not being able to see people that you love and care for is really distressing, really distressing," she told AFP through tears.

"I hope that people have got the message that they really need to take notice—it's very disconcerting watching some people on the news where they really don't care."

Government workers are going door-to-door in Melbourne urging residents to get tested for the virus, with officials saying about 10,000 people have refused after being influenced by online disinformation.

Australia has recorded just over 9,000 cases of COVID-19 among a population of 25 million, with 106 deaths.

Outside of Victoria, the country has seen few new infections, with most cases involving returned international travellers in hotel quarantine.

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