

Australia's worst day of pandemic sees restrictions tighten

August 16 2021, by Rod McGuirk



People exercise at Bondi Beach in Sydney, Monday, Aug. 16, 2021. All of New South Wales is under strict lockdown after a record number of COVID-19 cases that have authorities concerned for the healthcare system. Australia's most populous state reported its worst day of the pandemic with 478 new COVID-19 infections and seven deaths as pandemic restrictions tightened in other parts of the country. Credit: Bianca De Marchi/AAP Image via AP

Australia's most populous state on Monday reported its worst day of the pandemic with 478 new infections and seven COVID-19 deaths as pandemic restrictions tightened in other parts of the country.

The previous record daily tally in New South Wales was 466 new cases reported on Saturday.

Two of the dead had received a single dose of a two-shot vaccine. The rest were unvaccinated, New South Wales Premier Gladys Berejiklian said.

Only 26% of Australians aged 16 and older had been fully vaccinated by Saturday. Australia has one of the slowest vaccine rollouts among wealthy countries, which is making the spread of the delta variant particularly dangerous.

The first shipment of 1 million Pfizer doses that Australia bought from Poland arrived in Sydney overnight.

Residents aged 16-to-39 in Sydney's worst-affected suburbs will be given 530,000 of the new doses, the government said. This age group was responsible for most of the virus spread.

Berejiklian blamed Sydney residents' failure to comply with the city's lockdown restrictions and stay-at-home orders for the escalating infections.

"The case numbers are disturbingly high and we are ... at a fork in the road," Berejiklian said.

"We will see the numbers come down when people stay home and people don't move about unless they absolutely have to. Until we see that, we're not going to see the case numbers go down," she added.

Melbourne reported 22 new infections on Monday. Even with the substantially smaller problem, Victoria state Premier Danial Andrews said Australia' largest city after Sydney was at a "tipping point" in its battle to stamp out all infections.



A person walks a dog along St. Kilda foreshore in Melbourne, Monday, Aug. 16, 2021. Melbourne reported 22 new infections on while the state Premier Danial Andrews said Australia' largest city after Sydney was at a "tipping point" in its battle to stamp out all infections. Credit: Daniel Pockett/AAP Image via AP

A lockdown that was due to end on Thursday was extended to Sept. 2 with a 9 p.m.-to-5 a.m. curfew beginning on Tuesday.

Tougher restrictions include a ban on people removing face masks to drink alcohol in public. This followed a "Walk. Talk. Sip" event advertised on [social media](#) that encouraged people to stroll from pub to pub in the suburb of Richmond with takeout drinks over the weekend.

"We've seen people turning the footpath into an impromptu beer garden and doing pub crawls," Andrews said. "We've seen lots of people flouting these rules, not doing as they should, making really poor choices."

The national capital Canberra also extended a lockdown that was to end this week until Sept. 2 after reporting 19 new infections on Monday. The virus came from Sydney but authorities don't know how.

There have been a total of 28 cases recorded since Canberra locked down when the first case was detected on Thursday last week.

The Northern Territory introduced a snap three-day lockdown because of a single case detected on Monday.

The American man, aged in his 30s, tested positive in the Northern Territory city of Katherine where he had traveled for a job, officials said.

Katherine and the Northern Territory capital Darwin, where he spent three days last week, will be locked down until Thursday. People are only allowed to leave home for essential reasons and must wear masks outside their homes.

The New South Wales government has been criticized for waiting 10 days before locking down Sydney after a limousine driver was infected while transporting a U.S. air crew from Sydney Airport and tested positive on June 16.

Surrounding New South Wales was entirely locked down from Saturday because of recent infections detected in regional towns and virus found in wastewater north and west of Sydney.

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