

Opinion: Major COVID course correction immediately required

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Australian governments must immediately take action to tackle the present COVID crisis by delaying the return to face-to-face schooling, and reinstating necessary infection mitigations and financial supports.

The [health system](#) is under immense strain, businesses are shutting due to sick staff. Consumer spending estimates show Australians are in a

shadow lockdown already. Mass workplace absence due to COVID-19 is already affecting supply chains, food and diesel availability. Exponential growth of the epidemic, predicted to peak in late January by NSW modeling, means unprecedented case numbers will threaten every sector, not just the health system. Sending [unvaccinated children](#) back to school at the predicted epidemic peak will worsen the situation.

Repeated claims from politicians and some health leaders are wrong—that cases 'do not matter'; that cases had 'decoupled' from hospitalisations; and, that the spread of Omicron is a wave that we must 'ride.' These statements undermine the gravity of the situation, and erode trust in decision-making and leadership, especially when the community is left without access to testing or [support](#). OzSAGE notes the World Health Organization's latest briefing which states that Omicron is not mild and should not be described as such.

"A major course correction is required to support our health system, businesses, children and the [general health](#) and wellbeing of all Australians," OzSAGE Member James Bolster said.

"Every Australian needs access to free rapid tests and N95/P2 masks, because public health must be publicly funded. And, additional infection reduction measures must be reinstated, alongside financial supports for individuals and businesses who have already been hit by reduced activity caused by this outbreak," Mr Bolster said.

In addition to [recent recommendations](#), OzSAGE recommends the following immediate actions:

Free rapid tests and N95/P2 masks, readily available to everyone

- Reinstatement of work from home arrangements, and additional social distancing and venue measures; for the avoidance of doubt,

most states and territories must increase their present infection reduction measures further than recent changes

- Reinstatement of significant financial support packages for both individuals and businesses impacted by COVID
- The postponement of face-to-face schooling for primary and secondary students to enable double vaccination of children; to avoid the late January peak of the present wave (per NSW modeling), and; to ensure indoor air standards are able to be met at all schools. This action must include hybrid learning or alternative arrangements for [vulnerable children](#) requiring supervision and [emotional support](#), as well as appropriate IT provisions and support
- Review the recent reclassification of 'close contact' to align it with evidence and best health practice
- Preparation and release of a disaster plan before the further deterioration of conditions, including how disaster resources (such as military support, as seen in UK) will operate to support logistics, food security, the [health](#) system and communities. The plan must incorporate vulnerable communities including regional, rural and remote communities, people with disabilities, people at risk from domestic violence, older Australians, economically disadvantaged and First Nations peoples.

Provided by OzSAGE

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