

## Questions relating to COVID-19 in Tasmania

Legislative Council Thursday 7 May, 2020



**Ms FORREST question to LEADER of the GOVERNMENT in the LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL,  
Mrs HISCUTT -**

### **QUESTION 1 - COVID-19 - Regulations - Appropriate Work Practices**

I assume we will be able to extend question time again today if we need to. I do not know how many questions there are. We will see how we go.

- (1) With regard to the regulations being drafted to prescribe the appropriate work practices to remote social distancing and prevent risk of spread of COVID-19, which workplaces will these regulations apply to?
- (2) Will the regulations apply to all retailers. If not, why not?
- (3) Who is being consulted in the drafting of these regulations and will the regulations be in place before any further restrictions are lifted?

### **ANSWER**

Mr President, I thank the member for Murchison for her question.

- (1) The regulations will apply to all Tasmanian workplaces.
- (2) The regulations will apply to all retailers operating workplaces in Tasmania.
- (3) The regulations have been developed through advice from public health experts and Worksafe Tasmania. The development of COVID safe workplace guidelines is taking place in consultation with industry bodies. The guidelines will demonstrate to businesses how to achieve compliance with the regulations.
- (4) The regulations will be in place before restrictions are lifted.

### **QUESTION 2 – Work related essential traveller quarantine**

- (1) With regard to work-related essential traveller quarantine exemptions, how many essential traveller quarantine exemptions have been granted for workers into Tasmania?
- (2) What sites have workers been working at who have been granted exemptions?
- (3) How many exempted workers have been at each site?

- (4) What conditions, requirements or measures have been imposed on the above worksites to minimise the potential risk exposure on other workers?

**ANSWER**

Mr President, I thank the member for Murchison for her question. As the answer is just a little bit shorter, I will read it:

- (1) On 29 March 2020 the State Controller, in exercise of his powers conferred under the Emergency Management Act 2006, made a direction relating to the arrival of persons into Tasmania from departure points outside the state. Category 8 of the schedule, in this direction, allows for other persons, or class of persons, approved by the State Controller. At the close of business on 5 May 2020, 656 workers have been confirmed as approved by the State Controller, from 1855 submitted requests.

However, it should be noted that not all exempt workers seek a confirmation letter, and letters can cover more than one individual. For example, a single application may be made on behalf of a group of tradespeople or technicians.

- (2) and (3)

This information is not recorded. Applications have been received from workers across many locations in Tasmania and from a broad range of workplaces.

- (4) When granting an exemption under these circumstances, Annexure A of the direction provides conditions as determined by the Director of Public Health, which must be followed at all times. It is understood that different workplaces and occupations have also implemented their own risk management/exposure measures, often determined by their state/national industry bodies. All other mandated measures stated in directions issued under the Public Health Act 1997 are also required to be followed.

**QUESTION 3 – Land Tax Waiver**

Regarding the land tax waiver for commercial property for the 2020-21 financial year, where the business owner is liable for the land tax, and can demonstrate their business operation has been affected by COVID-19, where commercial property refers to property classified as such, for government evaluation purposes -

- (1) Has the State Revenue Office released any further details regarding future administrative details to its application?
- (2) Will those provisions apply like those announced for the payroll tax waiver?

**ANSWER**

Mr President, I thank the member for Murchison for her question.

- (1) The Government is currently finalising the details of the land tax waiver. The State Revenue Office will publish details for taxpayers on its website outlining the process for the land tax waiver once they are available.

The provision of the Land Tax Act 2000 will continue to apply to the assessment of land tax for 2020-21 financial year. These include the provisions that aggregate the value of land tax where multiple properties in the same class are owned by a taxpayer, and the provisions dealing with related companies.

However, owners of commercial land under the Government's land tax waiver for commercial property, will not be required to pay the land tax for those eligible properties in the 2020-21 financial year.

#### **QUESTION 4 - Identification of Accommodation Facilities**

With regard to hotels and other accommodation properties that have been, or are being used for government-controlled or mandated quarantine and non-essential travellers into Tasmania, how have these hotels, or accommodation facilities been identified as suitable for this purpose

#### **ANSWER**

Mr President, I thank the member for Murchison for her question. I seek leave to table the answer and have it incorporated into *Hansard*.

**Leave granted.**

#### **The incorporated answer read as follows -**

On 29 March 2020, the State Controller in exercise of his powers conferred under the *Emergency Management Act 2006*, made a Direction relating to the arrival of persons into Tasmania from departure points outside of the State.

The Direction requires all of those persons to enter in to quarantine at an accommodation facility specified by an authorised officer.

To date eighteen Government funded accommodation facilities have been used for this purpose. Of these, five are currently in use, two in the South, two in the North and one in the North West.

The requirement to source and establish Government accommodation for quarantine purposes was implemented at short notice by Communities Tasmania, on behalf of the State Control Centre. The process and accommodation options have evolved over time and refined to minimise the number of sites used, ensure they meet a number of minimum criteria and reflect more efficient management processes.

In March 2020, a number of hotel providers offered their services to the Tasmania Government. Other hotels, such as the Gateway Hotel in Devenport were approached directly by Communities Tasmania, as a result of specific requirements such as capacity, onsite facilities and proximity to key arrivals points into Tasmania.

Identified accommodation sites were assessed for viability against a number of minimum criteria. They were required to meet a reasonable standard, have onsite meal or catering facilities, the capacity to accommodate the required Government Liaison Officers and security personnel, and consideration of any security concerns around the venue. The accommodation facilities also needed to be located in an area that would facilitate appropriate rostering of police, compliance staff and other workers necessary to ensure the safety and wellbeing of people subject to controlled and mandated quarantine.

#### **QUESTION 5 – PPE – Government Controlled Accommodation**

With regard to non-essential travellers arriving in Tasmania, who are being quarantined in government-controlled accommodation -

- (1) Why are passengers not issued with basic personal protective equipment - PPE -prior to travelling on a bus where social distancing is not possible?
- (2) Will basic PPE, including face masks, be provided to passengers, especially off the *Spirit of Tasmania*, who have practised social distancing onboard, for use during transit to the accommodation?

#### **ANSWER**

Mr President, I thank the member for Murchison for her question. This is a bit lengthier than the last one, therefore I seek permission to have it tabled and incorporated into *Hansard*.

**Leave granted.**

**The incorporated answer read as follows -**

Buses used to transport passengers from their point of arrival in Tasmania to Government quarantine hotels or accommodation facilities are provided by Redline Charters. The operational arrangements are managed and reviewed by Communities Tasmania, in cooperation with Redline Charters, on behalf of the State Control Centre.

Due to the increased risk of exposure to COVID-19 from working with different groups of arrivals and the potential of being unable to continually maintain good social distances, Government staff onsite at

arrival locations have been issued with PPE. Redline have also provided PPE gear for their staff.

As outlined above, in accordance with current National Guidelines, passengers are not required to have PPE gear if they are not symptomatic. In addition, a number of measures have been put in place to reduce the risk to passengers and enable social distancing practices on the buses.

When loading the buses used to transport passengers the maximum allowable passenger total is not more than 50% of the normal vehicle seating capacity.

There must be social distancing between all passengers including the driver on a bus unless they are traveling as a family/group.

Passengers seated on the buses are to have one row of two seats empty between them and another passenger not part of their family/group. Effectively the row in front and behind of each passenger will be empty. This practice should alternate on both sides of the bus so as to create a zig zag effect on the bus. Redline are also required to clean each bus after each transfer to maintain a clean and hygienic environment for passengers.

Drivers of the buses are required to ensure the above standards are maintained and will work with members of Tasmania Police, present at each collection point, if they experience any issues. Prior to proceeding with a passenger transfer, Redline is required to contact the Communities Tasmania at any stage if the above measures cannot be achieved.

#### **QUESTION SIX – Testing before Release**

- (1) Regarding the release of those complying with government-mandated quarantine, are all individuals tested for COVID-19 prior to release? If not, why not?
- (2) Are all those in quarantine who tested positive on entry to quarantine or subsequent to being placed in quarantine tested prior their release from quarantine? If not, why not?
- (3) Have there been any cases of people being released from quarantine without being tested and subsequently tested positive?
- (4) In any cases referred to in question (3), were these people returned to quarantine? If so, how many were quarantined at home and how many were transferred or returned to quarantine in government-provided hotel accommodation?

## **ANSWER**

Mr President, I thank the member for Murchison for her questions, and seek leave to table the answers and have them incorporated in *Hansard*.

**Leave granted.**

**The incorporated answer read as follows -**

- (1) No. The current National Guidelines around the conducting of tests for CoVID- 19 recommend testing only those who are symptomatic.

If a person undertaking mandatory quarantine in a Government provided hotel or accommodation facility develops symptoms whilst in quarantine, they are referred to the public health hotline and testing will be organised for them.

- (2) Should a person in a Government quarantine hotel or accommodation facility return a positive test for COVID-19, they will be relocated to an alternate site for isolation wherever possible. All individuals who test positive for COVID-19 have a thorough case interview to detect close contacts. A person's length of time in quarantine will be determined by their arrival into Tasmania, or by their last contact with a confirmed case.

Release from isolation of a confirmed case will depend on their clinical symptoms and is based on National Guidelines.

- (3) There is no current evidence in Tasmania of someone being released from Government mandatory quarantine and subsequently testing positive for COVID-19.
- (4) As per the above, there is no current evidence in Tasmania of someone being released from Government mandatory quarantine and subsequently testing positive for COVID-19.

## **QUESTION 7 – Quarantine Breaches**

Regarding the government-mandated quarantine requirements for non-essential or exempted travellers -

- (1) Were there any known or reported breaches of our border quarantine processes?
- (2) If so, how many breaches occurred and what ports of entry to the state did these occur?

## **ANSWER**

Mr President, I thank the member for Murchison for her question.

- (1) and (2)

The State Control Centre has advised there have been no breaches of our border processes. A couple of alleged breaches have been investigated and subsequently discounted due to no evidence to substantiate the claims.

#### **QUESTION 8 - HACC and NDIS services**

With regard to people who receive Home and Community Care - HACC - services -

- (1) how many of these people will have self-isolated and not be receiving services at the moment?
- (2) How many of these people have had their service providers cease funded services?
- (3) How many HACC service providers have ceased funded services normally received by HACC clients?

With regard to people who receive services under National Disability Insurance Scheme - NDIS -

- (1) How many of these people have self-isolated and are not receiving services at the moment?
- (2) How many of these people have had their service providers cease funded services?
- (3) How many NDIS service providers have ceased funded services normally received by NDIS clients?

#### **ANSWER**

Mr President, I thank the member for Murchison for her question. I have answers to the three HACC questions, which I seek leave to table and have incorporated in *Hansard*.

**Leave granted.**

**The incorporated answers read as follows -**

- (1) I am advised that up-to-date and verified data on the number of people who have self-isolated and are not receiving services is not currently available. Anecdotally, some service providers have reported that initially there was a proportion of clients who elected to suspend their services; however, recently there have been increasing requests for services and support.

In addition, where clients have elected to cease services due to concerns regarding coronavirus, service providers have put in place mechanisms to remain in regular contact with those clients to support their wellbeing and need for social engagement. For example, this includes regular phone contact and working with clients and their support networks to provide supportive actions and services to meet their needs while in self-isolation.

- (2) Data on the number of HACC clients who have had their service provider cease funded services is not currently available. Service providers have reported that where services have ceased due to guidance and requirements on social

distancing and other coronavirus prevention measures as directed by Public Health Services, a system of welfare checks and monitoring have been put in place to monitor client health and wellbeing. The services most affected involve day centre, group and social activities.

- (3) There are 14 organisations funded to provide day centre services affected by the coronavirus measures. These are using other media and processes to engage with their clients. One smaller transport provider has notified the program that it is temporarily ceasing service, and will resume as soon as it is able to do so.

## **ANSWER– NDIS**

Thank you for your questions and your interest in people with disability in Tasmania.

As you would be aware the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) is the responsible Agency for supporting NDIS Participants, as the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission is responsible for the registration of providers.

The Department of Communities and the NDIA does not have specific data on the number of NDIS participants self-isolating, or the number of NDIS participants not receiving services as a direct result of the Coronavirus pandemic.

### **1) How many of these people have self-isolated and are not receiving services at the moment;**

People with disability are subject to the same rules and restrictions as all Tasmanians. Some people may have isolated in response to the Directions under the Public Health Act.

Where a person has been required to isolate, they have been able to access supports as has all Tasmanians through the Public Health Hotline and the NDIS.

The NDIA is monitoring and supporting participants in or who present to a hospital regarding their ongoing support requirements and are actively supporting their discharge support needs.

The NDIA is proactively calling participants who have health, disability or circumstances which could make them more vulnerable during the Coronavirus pandemic. The purpose of these calls is to make sure participants have access to relevant information, understand how to use their plans flexibly and can still access the supports they need during this time. In Tasmania, the North West region has been prioritised first for vulnerable participant outreach due to the recent outbreak in that region.

The Tasmanian Government's regular meeting with providers tells us that some participants are choosing not to access services as they have been receiving them, but many people are looking to receive services in a different way. Providers are working with their participants to find new and creative ways to support their participants – such as meeting one on one, via phone or online.



The NDIA has enabled participants to flexibly use their plan funding to purchase low-cost Assistive Technology, including smart devices, to enable continued access to disability supports through telehealth and tele-practice while physical distancing regulations are in place for coronavirus pandemic.<sup>1</sup>

**2) How many of these people have had their service provider cease funded services;**

Reassuringly there is no evidence at this time that this has occurred – if you are aware of any such circumstances, I would like to hear about them.

All service providers have a responsibility to respond to requirements for quarantine or COVID-19 illness among service recipients or staff in accordance with the [Tasmanian](#) and [Australian Government](#) guidelines and instructions, via the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission. Businesses are required to develop and implement business continuity plans to ensure critical supports and services continue to be provided for people with disability, while reducing risk of exposure to COVID-19 of both people with disability and staff.

To date, the NDIA has only seen a small amount of plan adjustments required as a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic<sup>2</sup>.

**3) How many NDIS service providers have ceased funded services normally received by NDIS clients?**

Noting this information is held by the NDIS, we are aware that many providers have changed the way they provide services to respond to the challenges of COVID-19 and to comply with all restrictions.

Providers are required to ensure people with disability their families and carers are notified of any changed practices or service delivery.

Disability services are required to practice social distancing and to comply with orders regarding gathering sizes and the stay at home direction where possible, like all other organisations.

This has seen changes to the way some services are delivered, with many of the community group activities people normally take part in are not possible at the moment, so these are being delivered in different ways- online, on the phone, or in much smaller groups.

This does not mean that people are unable to access supports. Indeed, our disability sector in Tasmania has responded quickly by working hard to find new ways to deliver services and work with people individually in a way they feel safe.

## **QUESTION 9 COVID-19 North-West Coast Municipal Breakdown**

With regard to cases of COVID-19 on the north-west coast - this is separately by municipal areas for the west coast, Circular Head, Waratah-Wynyard, Burnie, Central Coast, Devonport, Latrobe, Kentish and King Island -

- (1) How many positive cases have been detected in people who normally reside in each of the above municipal areas?
- (2) How many of these cases are currently active?
- (3) How many have been or are currently hospitalised with COVID-19?
- (4) How many required ICU care? How many have recovered? How many have died?

## **ANSWER**

Mr President, I thank the member for Murchison for her question and seek leave to table the answers and have them incorporated into *Hansard*.

**Leave granted.**

**The incorporated answer read as follows:**

Public Health Services has publicly released Local Government Area (LGA) data relating to Tasmania's coronavirus cases.

LGA of a confirmed case is determined by their residential address.

The data does not include three cases of people from interstate who were managed in Tasmania after testing positive.

This data will be updated and released on a weekly basis. At all times, Public Health Services takes the confidentiality of patients extremely seriously, and therefore some locality data may be withheld by Public Health Services if in their view it may unnecessarily compromise a patient's privacy.

There are eight Local Government Areas that have not had a confirmed case in a resident.

The Government publicly releases active and recovered case numbers by region, as well as deaths.

As at 7 May, statewide there are 8 COVID-19 hospital inpatients and zero COVID-19 ICU patients.

There has been 13 deaths statewide from COVID-19 (12 in the North West and 1 in the South), and in the North West there are 35 active cases and 102 recovered cases.

**QUESTION 10 - Support for healthcare workers in north-west Tasmania whilst in quarantine**

Mr President, with regard to questions I asked last week regarding contact with and support for healthcare workers in north-west Tasmania whilst in quarantine, the Leader responded that the quarantining process includes daily contact from Public Health Services, which are able to arrange any support or assistance required. Is the Government confident all healthcare workers in quarantine were contacted daily, and if not, how were these people supported?

I also asked how the mental health and welfare and personal safety of these workers was assessed and supported during this period. This question was not answered. Those questions I put again -

- (1) How was the mental health and welfare of these workers assessed?
- (2) How was the personal safety of these workers assessed and supported?

**ANSWER**

Mr President, I thank the member for Murchison for her question and seek leave to have the answer tabled and incorporated into *Hansard*.

**Leave granted.**

The incorporated answer read as follows:

Up to 1 000 calls daily were undertaken during the quarantine of the NW staff. When a call was not answered, a text message was sent and a return call attempted.

Some staff indicated that they did not want to be contacted daily or that they were being supported through other means including their GP, their manager, or the Employee Assistance Program.

A small number of staff were unable to be contacted by Public Health Services during this period as they had not provided current contact details to the Department.

Assessment of individual concerns occurred via the daily call and the appropriate referrals were undertaken when required.

The daily call included questions about financial, social and personal welfare.

**Ms FORREST** - Mr President, I seek some indication from the Leader if she has any other answers for me?

**Mrs Hiscutt** - No.

**Ms FORREST** - I am going to read them all, Mr President. This is the one that was put through last week. I would appreciate these answers being provided at the earliest opportunity, certainly less than three weeks.

#### **QUESTION 11 - Remedial Deep Tissue Massage**

With regard to the provision of remedial deep tissue massage - RDTM - therapy in Tasmania -

- (1) (a) Can RDMT therapists provide RDMT in Tasmania, if the service is provided under referral from a registered health practitioner, within the meaning of the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law (Tasmania), or a person who holds accreditation as an accredited exercise physiologist with Exercise and Sports Science Australia Limited?
- (b) If not, when is the provision for RDTM expected to be able to resume in Tasmania?
- (2) Can the disparity in the ruling between myotherapists to operate in Tasmania but not RDTM therapists be explained, given that these two allied health professions are so similar?
- (3) Is Tasmania the only jurisdiction in Australia in which RDTM therapists are unable to practise due to COVID-19 restrictions and, if so, why?

#### **QUESTION 12 – PPE in Allied Health**

I appreciate the Health department has been very busy in public health, so I am asking that she might respond to when I could get these answers.

With regard to PPE use for allied health and other patient-facing health professionals;

1. what is the advice for workers regarding the use of PPE in both public and private sector facilities, in areas including pathology, phlebotomy and other collection of samples, radiology, nuclear medicine and pharmacy?
2. Are both public and private sector providers required to adopt the advice of the Director of Public Health; and
  - 2.1 Is this advice consistent across all sites and sectors; if not, why not?

#### **QUESTION 13 – COVID-19 Positive Cases**

1. How many COVID-19 positive cases have been reported since 19 April 2020 to date?
2. How many of these cases were self-isolating or in quarantine prior to being tested?
3. How many were picked up through contact tracing?
4. How many north-west cases were unaware of the link to the North West Regional Hospital when contacted for testing?

5. How many, if any, remained unexplained as to the source of the infection?

#### **QUESTION 14 - Inquiry into the NWRH COVID-19 outbreak**

1. With regard to the independent investigation inquiry into the North West Regional Hospital COVID-19 outbreak, how will the terms of reference for the inquiry be determined and set?
2. When will the terms of reference for the inquiry be determined and set?
3. Will State Service employees be empowered to provide evidence to the inquiry without fear of retribution or sanction under the State Service Act 2000 or any other mechanism?
4. When does the Premier intend to actively progress this inquiry? I am disappointed that question was not answered.

#### **QUESTION 15 – Opening of the NWRH**

A further question; regarding the reopening of the North West Regional Hospital and the North West Private Hospital in Burnie-

1. What requirements and/or protocols regarding the movement of inpatients within and between the two hospitals are in place? I am disappointed this cannot be answered because we talked about this in the briefing yesterday.
2. What protocols and processes are in place relating to restriction of movement of staff to the area they are rostered to work within at the North West Regional Hospital?
3. How are staffing levels in the North West Regional Hospital managed to ensure adequate nursing and other health staff are available?

There are two subsequent parts to that question -

- (a) How many overtime hours have been worked by nurses at the North West Regional Hospital since reopening
  - (b) How many double shifts have been worked by nurses at the North West Regional Hospital in the same period?
4. Have all staff completed the PPE update training prior to recommencement of duties?
    - (c) How are infection control measures being implemented, including movement of staff and patients overseen at the North West Private Hospital, since effective control has been handed back to the North West Private Hospital management?

According to our briefing yesterday it has not been handed back, so the answer will be that it has not been handed back as yet.

#### **ANSWER**

Mr President, I thank the member for Murchison for her questions. It is very difficult for the Health department, as the member is very well aware. I have asked my adviser to pursue as many questions as possible before the end of the day. I will seek leave to table

and incorporate any answers I receive in the afternoon into *Hansard*, maybe on the adjournment or at an appropriate time.