

Sydney tops 1,000 COVID cases in 30 days as Australian outbreak forces “snap” lockdown in Victoria

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Sydney, the capital of New South Wales (NSW), today registered 97 new locally-acquired cases of COVID-19 as the Delta variant continues to ravage Australia’s most populous state.

Today’s tally brings the total of local cases recorded in and around Sydney since the current outbreak began on June 16 to 1,027. This is the state’s highest number of community-transmitted cases in a 30-day period since March 2020.

Significantly, the 587 new cases recorded in the state in the last seven days is more than 2.75 times the 213 confirmed cases the previous week. Since the introduction of what has been dubbed a “mockdown” on June 26, the state has seen 945 COVID-19 infections.

At least 29 of the new cases announced in NSW this morning were infectious in the community—a direct product of the inadequacy of the state’s partial lockdown—and 34 have not been linked to a previously known case of cluster.

The outbreak has now decisively spread to Victoria, with the state recording new cases in double digits yesterday and today. The introduction of a “snap” lockdown by Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews from midnight last night was necessary because of the reckless decision by the state government to lift all restrictions and to allow mass gatherings, including major sporting events, which threaten to become super spreader events.

The 125 exposure sites in Victoria include the Melbourne Cricket Ground, where a positive case was one of 31,834 people who attended an Australian rules football match at the ground last Saturday. To date, at least two others have been infected as a result, with the

potential for many more.

Also on the list was AAMI Park, where a person with COVID-19 attended a rugby union match between Australia and France on Tuesday, along with more than 20,000 others.

In NSW, many of the new cases are the result of workplace transmissions. While the daily press briefings continue to stress that most cases are spread through immediate families, the fact remains that the initial case in a household had to come from somewhere external.

While the current outbreak initially flared up in the relatively affluent eastern suburbs of Sydney, the vast majority of cases are now being detected in the working-class southwestern Fairfield, Liverpool and Canterbury-Bankstown regions.

Two neighbouring construction supply businesses in the southwest Sydney suburb of Greenacre have been revealed as exposure sites after a worker tested positive and was found to have been infectious without symptoms for two weeks. Already, three workers have tested positive at a construction site that is part of the state government WestConnex project, which had received deliveries from the concrete business.

Many of the states’ positive tests are in the healthcare sector. At least 70 Sydney paramedics are in isolation after three workers tested positive. Confirmed cases have also been recorded at two of Sydney’s major hospitals, Liverpool and Westmead. Cleaning staff at Westmead reportedly have refused to enter the hospital’s COVID-19 ward because they have not been supplied with proper personal protective equipment.

Medical staff are also in isolation after positive tests at Royal Prince Alfred hospital, and 120 workers at

Fairfield hospital remain in isolation after being exposed to a COVID-19-positive unvaccinated nurse earlier this month.

Infections have also been recorded in recent days at Chris O'Brien Life House as well as numerous pharmacists, medical centres, aged care facilities and GPs.

Of the 952 currently active cases in NSW, 75—almost 8 percent—are hospitalised and 18 are in intensive care. As a result, Sydney's hospitals, already stretched thin by decades of funding cuts, are on the brink of collapse.

Exposing the consequences of Australia's shambolic vaccine rollout, none of the patients in intensive care are fully vaccinated and only one has had a single dose.

To date, only 12.5 percent of Australians—and 11.7 percent of NSW residents—aged over 16 have received two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine.

The state's limited "lockdown" measures, primarily targeted at prohibiting social interactions, place no limitations on the continued operation of all types of retail business, including large department stores and shopping malls. While it was announced yesterday that the NSW "lockdown" would be extended for a further two weeks to July 30, the measures themselves have not been tightened in any substantial way.

Despite the advice of numerous epidemiologists and health experts, and even the admission earlier this week by NSW Deputy Premier John Barilaro that the state should have gone "harder and earlier," nothing has been done to halt retail and other businesses that are patently not "essential."

Asked at a press briefing this morning why this was the case, NSW Premier Gladys Berejiklian said: "The worst thing we could do is put in additional measures that don't have the desired effect."

While the language was deliberately vague, Berejiklian's meaning was clear. The premier would prefer to risk a further acceleration in community transmission than do anything that might threaten the profit interests of big business.

Modelling conducted by the Burnet Institute, a Melbourne-based medical research organisation, predicts that, if current NSW restrictions are maintained," it will take until the end of the year to reduce case numbers to zero.

The institute's modelling indicates that measures similar to the "stage 4" restrictions introduced in

Victoria late last year, including the closure of "non-essential" retail and stricter limits on what types of workplaces can remain open, could reduce new cases to zero by the end of August. The government has made clear that zero cases is not their goal. Berejiklian has repeatedly stated that restrictions will be lifted when there are near-zero cases infected while not in isolation and active in the community.

NSW Premier Berejiklian continues to steadfastly refuse to provide a concrete definition of what constitutes an "essential" business, instead insisting that individuals should rely on their "common sense."

The apparently contradictory approach of allowing virtually all businesses to continue trading while giving daily press briefings berating residents of working-class suburbs for failing to sufficiently curtail their movement serves a definite political purpose.

In refusing to order businesses to close, Berejiklian is attempting to distance herself and the NSW government from their failure to prevent or contain the outbreak and from any responsibility to provide financial aid to "non-essential" employees who are not able to work from home.

The current surge in COVID-19 cases is a direct result of the continued refusal of Australian governments to put in place stringent restrictions to prevent transmission of the deadly Delta variant and the parlous state of the country's vaccine rollout.

Australian governments at the state and federal level, Labor and Liberal alike, as well as the corporate media, have relentlessly promoted the conception that Australia has largely escaped the global pandemic. In fact, the current outbreak shows that the subordination of public health to the profit interests of big business is every bit as dangerous here as anywhere else.



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