

PREMIER AND MINISTER FOR TRADE
THE HONOURABLE ANNASTACIA PALASZCZUK
Ministerial Statement -
Wednesday, March 18, 2020
Check Against Delivery

NATIONAL CABINET UPDATE

The world, our country and our state are changing.

Things will continue to change.

They will continue to change by the day and by the week over the immediately foreseeable future as we deal with and confront the Coronavirus crisis – an event we have not seen in our lifetimes, an event that is a once in 100 year event.

Today I want to assure Queenslanders that we will get through it. We will get through it by working together, by supporting each other, by keeping calm heads and by listening to accurate, expert advice.

Australia will continue to keep running. Queensland will continue to keep running.

But this will take at least six months for us to get through.

And it may be longer.

So, decisions need to be made. Critical decisions. Important decisions.

Last night the National Cabinet met and I want to keep Queenslanders informed about those critical decisions that were made at the meeting.

From the outset, let me say I have never before experienced such cooperation, such cohesion and such support among the state and territory Premiers and the Federal Government and that is crucial during this extremely difficult time.

It is absolutely paramount that we cooperate with each other so we can respond to this crisis and so we can ensure that our country continues to run as smoothly as possible.

It's vital we keep Queenslanders working, it's critical we keep Queenslanders safe, it's crucial that we support each other, particularly our most vulnerable.

Rumour and speculation have no place in this current situation.

I urge all Queenslanders to ignore it – on the internet, on social media and even to an extent sometimes in the mainstream media.

Rumour and speculation should be treated with scepticism and, in the meantime, I encourage all Queenslanders to listen to state and federal leaders and to Chief Health Officers for accurate, precise, up-to-date information.

The measures agreed to by the National Cabinet are fundamentally and rightly about containment and limiting the spread of this virus.

All Queenslanders can be confident in our system.

But the Federal Government has now declared a Human Biosecurity Emergency which allows it to take action under the Biosecurity Act.

That does not mean that it is a time for panic. It is a time for important decisions to be made to keep all Australians safe.

Overseas travel by Australians is no longer an option. I repeat the words of the Prime Minister – DO NOT GO OVERSEAS.

The biggest threat to our country with this virus has been Australians returning from other countries.

Bans on indoor gatherings of more than 100 people for non-essential purposes will be enforced in Queensland.

What is the difference between essential and non-essential?

The list is still being finalised but the Prime Minister said a number of essential gatherings would include considerations such as airports, public transport, medical and emergency facilities jails, courts, the Parliament, business premises, construction and mining sites, schools, universities, child care centres, hotels, motels and other places where people are transient – like supermarkets and the Queen Street Mall, for examples.

I stress that whatever gathering you are attending, social distancing should be practiced – everybody has a duty to do this, every single one of us and we must set the example.

Additionally, the ban on outdoor gatherings of more than 500 remains in place.

There will be no change to domestic air travel because it is considered low risk. However, parts of the country – such as vulnerable indigenous communities – should be avoided to limit the spread of the virus.

And there will be further discussions about this over the coming days and I ask for people's patience as we work through these incredibly complex issues.

Schools will remain open based on the best possible health advice. The advice tells us that this virus operates differently in children.

But if your child appears to be ill, keep them at home. Don't send them to school.

If you are a teacher or a cleaner or work in the office at a school and you are unwell, you must stay at home.

That is very important.

It is not just students and teachers it is other people who work at the school.

If you are unwell you must stay home.

We cannot disrupt our schools for what will be at least six months – that would be catastrophic – and, as I said, the decision is based on the best possible health advice.

In relation to aged care facilities, strict restrictions will now come into place.

The following visitors and staff, including visiting workers should not be permitted and will not be permitted to enter an aged care facility, such as:

- Those who have returned from overseas in the last 14 days;
- Those who have been in contact with a confirmed case of COVID-19 in the last 14 days;
- Those with fever or symptoms or acute respiratory infection, those who haven't been vaccinated against influenza after the 1st of May.

The facilities must also implement the following measures for restricting visits and visitors to reduce the risk of transmission to residents.

This is very important for all Queenslanders to understand and all Queenslanders I ask you to please listen to the advice and obey this advice.

Limiting visits to a short duration:

- Limiting visits to a maximum of two visitors at one time per day. These may be immediate social supports, family members, close friends or professional service or advocacy workers;
- Visits should be conducted in a resident's room, outdoors or in a specific area designated by the facility, rather than communal areas where the risk of transmission to other residents is greater;
- There should be no large group visits or gatherings, including social activities or entertainment, to be permitted at this time;
- No school groups or baby groups of any size should be allowed to visit aged care facilities;
- Visitors should be encouraged, as all Australians are, to practice social distancing, where possible;

- Children aged 16 years or less should be visiting only by exception, as they generally won't necessarily follow the hygiene measures all the time like adults will and children can be asymptomatic.

In cases of end of life, very tough decisions will have to be made and rules will have to be done on a facility by facility basis, as everybody understands that this is an incredibly personal family time and the intention is not to restrict family during those times.

As Queenslanders also will already be aware, Anzac Day ceremonies will be cancelled across this state. This is unavoidable. There will be a televised national event from the Canberra war memorial.

We are living in a different world today to the world that we knew yesterday, last week or last year. It is a rapidly changing world and we need to be prepared for that.

That means helping each other, supporting each other and respecting each other.

Some of the behaviour I have seen in our state recently and around the country has shocked and it has saddened me.

People continue to raid supermarkets and other shops with the intention of hoarding.

It is not necessary. We are not going to run out of food in Queensland.

I understand that people are anxious, they are stressed but it saddens me that some Queenslanders are behaving this way at the expense of others.

And I think we all need to be conscious that some people have more access to money than others.

Some of our most vulnerable members of our community live week by week or paycheque by paycheque.

People going into supermarkets and raiding them at this particular point in time or hoarding is putting the lives of some of our less fortunate in our society at great risk.

This is a very important social message and the media and the public and the leaders of this House have to stand up and show leadership in their community.

I say stop it.

Stop it today.

Let's show the great Queensland spirit and instead, put your energies into caring for your family, your friends, your community, your neighbours.

By doing that together we will get through this together.