**Record of meeting between the Minister for Health and the Acting Chief Health Officer**

30 December 2021

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Minister for Health: The Hon. Martin Foley

Acting Chief Health Officer: Professor Benjamin Cowie

Acting Secretary, Department of Health: Jacinda de Witts

Acting Deputy Secretary, Public Health Policy and Strategy: Doctor Evelyn Wong

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The Minister for Health asked the Acting Chief Health Officer (ACHO) for additional advice following the recommendations from the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) and the outcomes of the meeting of National Cabinet on 30 December 2021.

The ACHO advised the Minister for Health that the reporting from National Cabinet has significant implications for Victoria. The ACHO recommended that Victoria aligns to the nationally endorsed positions for self-isolation and self-quarantining periods in reflection of changing nature of COVID-19 pandemic.

The ACHO noted the significant pressure being experienced by the testing system and the need to protect capacity for testing those in whom the value of testing is highest on both public health and clinical care grounds.

However the ACHO also noted that any reduction in testing access, and any reductions in the effectiveness of contact tracing, isolation and quarantine, while contribute to increasing transmission of COVID-19 in Victoria, and attendant risk of public health consequences including pressure on the health care system. Therefore in the near future, I recommend that review of the impact of the proposed changes, including consideration of reinforcing further testing and contact tracing measures beyond those agreed at National Cabinet today, be strongly considered. I would of course be happy to provide further advice at any time in this regard, and recommend consideration of further modelling of the impact of these changes on the projected trajectory of the COVID-19 pandemic in Victoria.

For diagnosed persons:

* The ACHO recommended that, in line with the national settings announced by the APHCC and National Cabinet that the self-isolation period for diagnosed persons is reduced from 10 to 7 days from the date the person took a COVID-19 PCR test where they were diagnosed with COVID-19.
* In line with this, the ACHO recommended to the Minister that a person's infectious period be changed from 10 days to 7 days from the date the person took a COVID-19 PCR test where they were diagnosed with COVID-19.

For close contacts:

* In line with national settings announced by APHCC and National Cabinet, the ACHO reconfirmed advice that the self-quarantine period is 7 days for close contacts, irrespective of whether the close contact is vaccinated or unvaccinated.
* The ACHO recommended that all symptomatic close contacts must undertake a PCR test on the first day of their self-quarantine. If the result is negative, they must undertake a rapid antigen test (RAT) on the sixth day of self-quarantine.
* For those developing symptoms of COVID-19 during or following the quarantine period, they must undertake a PCR test as soon as possible.
* For asymptomatic close contacts, the ACHO recommends mandating close contacts to undertake RATs on the first day after they are informed that they are a close contact, and on the sixth day of their self-quarantining period.
* In addition, consideration should be given to recommending daily RAT for asymptomatic close contacts while in self-quarantine (for a total of 5 tests during the quarantine period), which would increase the sensitivity of RAT for detecting COVID-19 through repeated testing
* The ACHO confirmed that he recommends that if a close contact returns positive RAT, then the close contact must undertake a PCR test.
* For close contacts that cannot access a RAT, they must undertake a PCR test on the sixth day of self-quarantine and remain in self-quarantine until they receive a negative result.

Exposed persons (workplace and educational facility contacts) and social contacts

* The ACHO recommended that people who have been advised they are an exposed person or a social contact must undertake a PCR test if symptomatic, or if they develop symptoms of COVID-19.
* The ACHO recommends that exposed persons and social contacts who are asymptomatic be strongly recommended to undertake five RATs each day for five days, and that the Minister should consider mandating this recommendation when RAT supply is sufficient to meet demand.
* The ACHO reconfirmed the recommendation that social contacts be required to notify their contacts when diagnosed.

The ACHO advises that it is no longer reasonable that a person be required to self-isolate for 10 days should they not undertake a required PCR test, and that the current infringement system is appropriate for managing those individuals.

The ACHO confirmed that, for an asymptomatic person who is not able to access RATs each day for five days, that a lower number of RATs at a lesser frequency is better than not testing at all, and that individuals should monitor for symptoms. The ACHO advised that the recommendation to undertake the RAT tests each day is based on the understanding that increasing the number of tests improves the sensitivity of the testing.

The ACHO reconfirmed the recommendation that the existing provisions in Victoria should be retained to provide powers for the Chief Health Officer (CHO), ACHO, Deputy Chief Health Officers and Local Public Health Units (LPHUs) to respond to and manage outbreaks in sensitive settings by directing individuals to isolate and test on a case-by-case basis. The ACHO noted that while National Cabinet was silent on these existing arrangements, these powers are fundamental to the management of the COVID-19 pandemic in Victoria.