



## **Australian Jewish community management of COVID-19 pandemic**

### **National Bulletin #4**

**28 August 2020**

After an interval of several months, with the approach of the chaggim we are taking the opportunity to issue a new national bulletin to provide an update of how Jewish communities and communal institutions across Australia are managing with the pandemic.

The focus continues to be on the care of the elderly and the vulnerable, whether they are in aged care facilities or living independently or semi-independently. Maintaining physical distance, especially during the chaggim when Jewish families and friends would ordinarily gather together in homes and synagogues, will again present a special challenge. Another concern is complacency and fatigue with restrictions, particularly among younger people.

After our last National Bulletin in early April, Australia went through a period of more than two months when the number of new infections recorded each day was very low – less than 30 per day nationwide – and there were only a very small number of additional deaths. This has been followed by a resurgence in the numbers of infections and deaths recorded in Victoria in June, July and August which dwarfed the numbers for the whole of Australia during the initial outbreak in March and April.

As at the time of writing this report, the total recorded number of people who had been infected in Australia exceeded 25,000, compared to fewer than 8,000 on July 1. Total recorded deaths increased from 104 on July 1 to more than 550 yesterday.

So far, the resurgence seems largely to have been confined to Victoria. There have been outbreaks in various locations in NSW, despite the continuation of restrictions on gatherings and border restrictions with Victoria. New infections in NSW appear now to have been contained to fewer than 10 per day, although this could increase given the persistence of small numbers of new infections whose source cannot be traced. The number of new daily infections in other States and Territories has remained at or close to zero.

Sadly, the Australian Jewish community recorded its first COVID-19 deaths in August, all of them in Melbourne (see below).

Jewish community organisations and leaders across Australia continue their efforts to manage the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Jewish institutions, families, individuals and, most especially, the elderly and vulnerable. We recognise with deep appreciation the continuing work being done by the Jewish community roof bodies in each State, the Crisis Management Teams of the Community Security Groups, shules, the Day Schools, the aged care sector, the welfare sector and volunteers, and commend them for the high sense of responsibility they have demonstrated.

The following is an update from last week's summary of the current status of Jewish community life in each State and Territory.

### **Victoria**

- Two deaths of Jewish residents occurred following an outbreak of the virus at Jewish Care's Windsor Residential Home. We were informed that some 30 residents and several staff members have been infected. We wish everyone else at the home a refuah sh'lema. A third Jewish resident died in another aged care facility not operated by the Jewish community.
- The Victorian government reimposed a Stage 3 lockdown on Metropolitan Melbourne and Mitchell Shire from 8 July 2020, and this was extended across regional Victoria from 6 August 2020. From 6pm on 2 August 2020, the Victorian government imposed Stage 4 restrictions in metropolitan Melbourne, including a curfew between the hours of 8pm and 5am.
- The Stage 4 restrictions in Melbourne will last until at least 13 September 2020. Although restrictions may be relaxed after that date, it is unlikely that usual synagogue services will be able to be held over the Yamim Noraim.
- All schools are currently operating on remote learning. The Victorian Government has announced that they anticipate that there will be a return to classrooms for term 4.
- Community groups are continuing to provide support to vulnerable members of the community

### **New South Wales**

- The NSW Jewish Emergency Management Plan (JEMP), which is operated by CSG NSW, is maintaining the structure of its centralised Emergency Operations Centre which was established at the time of the pandemic outbreak. However, it is now operating from the CSG office and not from

separate premises. To all intents and purposes, it is in background mode and able to be fully activated at a moment's notice if the situation requires it.

- The JEMP Decision Makers Group (DMG) is meeting fortnightly by Zoom and continues to coordinate and keep a watchful eye on what is happening in NSW. It is in constant contact with relevant authorities and with a broad range of communal leaders. Prime in its activities are the following:
  - The medical sub-committee continues to actively plan and prepare for the ramifications of a potential increase in spread of COVID-19 within the Sydney Jewish community
  - The financial sub-committee is monitoring the financial scenarios which are impacting on the operations and wellbeing of community members and community institutions. The JCA has approved immediate allocations for two Jewish day schools, and in addition, funding support has been facilitated through Jewish Care for community members in need.
  - Work is being done with synagogues in the lead up to the High Holy Days and good coordination between synagogues is being evidenced. In general terms, synagogues are diligently working within the parameters established by the health authorities
  - There is evidence that communal organisations are, in the main, acting very responsibly in the current circumstances.
  - CSG is active and continuing its work at communal institutions (albeit in a modified form). In the background the team research analysts is monitoring potential threats to the community. There is some local evidence that anti-Jewish online activity is increasing as a result of the pandemic.
  - The communications sub-committee continues to actively work on relevant community messages, with an emphasis on what community members should or should not do during the High Holy Days.

## **Western Australia**

- **Notice sent to all shuls on Sunday 23 August in preparation for the chaggim**
  - WA is currently in Phase 4 of COVID-19 restrictions. For further information see <https://www.wa.gov.au/organisation/department-of-the-premier-and-cabinet/covid-19-coronavirus-wa-roadmap#phase4>
  - In Phase 4, places of worship are permitted to open with capacity limits determined by the [2 square metres per person rule](#), excluding the people required to conduct the service.
  - WA is moving towards more liberal restrictions in Phase 5 are tentatively scheduled for 24 October, but that will of course be dependent on what's going on with community transmission both here and interstate.
- **Maurice Zeffert Home (MZH)**
  - Having received the updated Public Health State of Emergency Directions for Western Australia, the MZH COVID -19 response

Committee has agreed to lift restrictions to align them with current legal requirements

- Commencing Monday 20th July 2020 restrictions were eased as follows:
  - Visiting sessions Monday to Friday 10am – 4pm. Sunday 10am – 3pm. with no limit to the length of visit but only two visitors at any one time. Use of hand sanitiser provided and temperature recorded on entry.
  - Children of all ages may now visit with proof of a current 2020 influenza vaccination and undergo temperature screening prior to entry. Same rules for volunteers and private companions
  - Visitors may continue to visit in the outdoor garden areas of MZH. However the communal areas are still restricted.
  - MZH remains confident that it is safe for residents to leave the facility to attend small family gatherings, attend previous supervised activities (up to 30 people) and continue to take short walks around the facility avoiding the school area.
  - Residents are strongly discouraged from attending public venues.

- **Carmel School**

Back to normal, except there will be no sleep-away camps this year

- **Menora Charity**

- Reopened the Menora warehouse on the 13<sup>th</sup> July for donations as well as volunteers
- Held mini re-inductions for volunteers each day re Covid-19
- Signage displayed in the warehouse re social distancing
- Everyone including random visitors must sign in and use disinfectant
- Only allowing three people at a time in the clothing sorting room
- If making a warm drink only disposable cups to be used
- At warehouse sales all customers must sign in and use disinfectant
- After calculating usable space, maximum of 20 customers inside if using the smaller part of the warehouse, and 35 customers if using the larger space.

## Queensland

- The Queensland Jewish community has continued not to have any Covid cases as far as is known. As of now, the general Queensland community is experiencing a Covid spike and time will tell if it gets out of hand.
- All Synagogues have been operating under the "Industry Standard" which means all Queensland places of worship have all agreed to meet the same standards of social distancing, maximum numbers based on size of each physical property. Pre-booking has also become the norm now with lists being maintained for contact tracing should it be needed.
- Funerals are also being managed as per government requirements.

- The school is functioning within the government guidelines as are the kindergartens.
- Cheders have also advised that they are maintaining social distancing.
- Chabad Houses around Queensland are bound by government requirements for house guests, as they do not actually meet the definition of place of worship as far as the government is concerned. However, they have not reported in to the QJBD to confirm they are meeting these requirements.
- All regular organisations continue to meet by Zoom or similar. Some smaller groups have met face to face.
- Communal Leaders Zoom Meetings continue, although there are signs of 'Zoom fatigue'. Most feedback is that Zoom meetings are being less well attended, as many are over the concept, but it is not sure they would go out to meetings either. Will be interesting to see what happens with functions etc when they are able to be held again.
- JCare Qld report there have been no additional cases of need, but those who had need help have been requiring a bit more.
- Jewish Help in Need advise that they have had a few additional applications / requests for their no interest loan program in recent months.

## **ACT**

- The whole ACT currently has no active cases, and has had zero cases since July.
- Nevertheless, the ACT Jewish Community is asking people who have travelled to known hotspots in the previous 2 weeks not to enter the National Jewish Memorial Centre (NJMC).
- Current restrictions in the ACT permit up to 100 people in the NJMC.
- Cheder and all youth and adult education classes have resumed in person though some adult classes are also being offered via Zoom.
- Synagogue services have resumed in person though each of the Orthodox and Progressive spaces can only fit up to 36 people with the current physical distancing restrictions.
- High Holy-day services are limited to financial members only and members must pre-register for the service(s) they wish to attend over the High Holydays.
- Minimal kiddushim are being held.

- Community volunteers continue to support the elderly and vulnerable members of the community.

### **South Australia**

- In South Australia, the progressive synagogue is hosting services in person with physical distancing measures and the option for virtual attendance via Zoom for all services.
- The orthodox synagogue is hosting services with lay leaders, as border restrictions have impacted staffing.
- Both organisations have implemented protocols in line with requirements of the SA Police.
- Jewish Community Services, continues to provide in-home aged care support and general support to the community, including new clients impacted by the current situation.
- The Israeli cultural society Tarbut has recommenced opening the local Hebrew library with story time for children. It is also providing coordinated support for migrant Jewish families, mainly Israelis, whose careers or job searches have been impacted by the economic downturn.

### **Tasmania**

- Hobart Synagogue resumed Shabbat services in June, following the relaxation of State government guidelines for gatherings.
- As there has been no community transmission in Tasmania since early May, Hobart Synagogue is holding Yamim Noraim services with physical distancing restrictions in place.

Please keep safe and keep those around you safe, by maintaining physical distancing requirements and good hand hygiene, and exercising every precaution.

Shabbat shalom.

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