

Statement

The Hon Dan Andrews MP
Premier



Sunday, 17 May 2020

STATEMENT FROM THE PREMIER

Earlier this week, we made a number of announcements on easing restrictions in Victoria. These decisions were informed by data – including the biggest testing blitz in the nation and one of the highest testing rates in the world.

At the same time, we asked Victorians to use common sense when it came to deciding what they could do – and who they could do it with.

We also said, that for the moment, there would be no changes to restrictions on cafes, restaurants and pubs while we undertook more testing.

After smashing through our goal of 50,000 tests in the last week, the results of this data has given us the confidence we need to plan to slowly start lifting some more restrictions.

Today, and informed by the advice of the Chief Health Officer, I can announce our cautious and careful next steps.

The continuing low numbers of community transmission and the high rates of testing give us confidence that cafes, restaurants, pubs and other hospitality businesses can begin planning for a phased re-opening from the beginning of June.

From 1 June – cafes, restaurants and pubs will be able to reopen their doors to serve meals to up to 20 customers at a time per enclosed space.

From 22 June – this could increase to up to 50 patrons.

During the second half of July, up to 100.

The timelines we're announcing today are reliant on Victorians continuing to get tested when they show even mild symptoms and on those tests continuing to show low numbers of positive cases around the state.

Before each of these dates, the Chief Health Officer will review the rates of community transmission in Victoria, confirm our ability to test, trace and respond to possible outbreaks and make sure we have an adequate safety net in the health system – before we take the steps outlined.

This industry has told us they need time to plan and prepare to protect the safety of their staff and customers. Making these announcements now will be giving them that time.

The hospitality industry is one of the pillars of the Victorian economy and has been among the hardest hit by this pandemic – re-opening the venues we all love is a critical piece of the puzzle in saving jobs and restoring our local communities.

We need to be really clear though: this is not a done deal. These timelines will depend on how we're tracking.

And just as we've used evidence to inform our decisions the whole way through this – these next steps will be no different.

If, in the coming weeks, we see a sudden upswing in community exposures from an unknown source – we may have to make the call to delay.

For information about coronavirus visit coronavirus.vic.gov.au or call 1800 675 398.

Similarly, if an initial opening led to a whole series of uncontrolled crowds or breaches –we’d look at that pretty seriously too.

A number of precautions will be put in place to guide these changes.

All venues will need to abide by existing physical distancing requirements of one person per four square metres. Tables will also need to be spaced at least 1.5 metres apart.

Venues will be required to take the contact details of every customer to assist in rapid contact tracing.

And there’ll be other safety requirements too, including extra cleaning, staff health screening and temperature checks.

Further work will need to be done on how we manage shared areas like entrances and bathrooms, and will be done in consultation with the industry and unions and on the advice of our public health team.

Once in place, these changes will apply to standalone restaurants and cafes, as well as restaurants and bistros within a pub, hotel, bar, registered and licensed club, RSL or community club.

Restrictions on other spaces within these kinds of venues – including public bars and gaming areas – will remain in place throughout June, as will restrictions on food courts.

As we take these important steps, we must also continue to make a number of sacrifices, as the cumulative effect of easing too much too soon could undo all the hard work we have done together.

That means, for most Victorians the advice has not changed: if you can work from home – you must work from home.

I know many of us are missing seeing our colleagues and our work friends in-person.

Sharing lunch in the staff room. Morning tea for a birthday. And maybe a sneaky knock-off beer after work.

But right now, the science is very clearly telling us that we can’t afford to take that risk.

We can’t have millions of people moving across our state – particularly around the Melbourne CBD – touching elevator buttons or opening front doors.

In fact, we probably won’t be able to return to work as we know it for some time.

As always, we’re asking Victorians to take on their share of the responsibility in all this.

After all, it’s up to each of us to make this work.

None of us want to be responsible for seeing the gains we have made together disappear.

And for every action or activity we can resume – there will be others that we just can’t.

For now, and for the foreseeable future, this must be our new normal.

Lives and livelihoods are counting on it.

