

Sunday, 6 September 2020

STATEMENT FROM THE PREMIER

Today is Father's Day.

And just like Mother's Day earlier this year, I know there'll be plenty of families missing each other.

Whether it's dad or grandpa, baba, papa or cha – today is a day that is supposed to be spent together.

Normally, for us, it'd be lunch with Cath and the kids. And maybe a trip back home to see mum – and visit dad. This year, though, it's got to be different.

I know that same sense of loss and missing those you love is being felt by every single Victorian family.

But each of those sacrifices – each of those big, real and meaningful sacrifices – is making a difference. And slowly, together, we are driving this virus down.

When Melbourne was in Stage 3 restrictions, it was taking an average of 49 days to cut our number of cases in half. In Stage 4, we're doing it in just 18.

At the same time, the expert modelling tells us that even with that enormous effort – we're likely to be averaging around 60 cases a day by next weekend. For reference, last time we eased restrictions, we were averaging around 10 a day.

If we go too far too soon, the modelling also tells us we'd be on track for a third wave by mid-November.

That'd mean we're back to where we are now, maybe even worse. Days, weeks, months of sacrifice – gone. Confidence for business – destroyed. More families suffering. More lives lost.

It's why, even as we release a roadmap for reopening, it's got to be done in safe, steady and sustainable steps.

Currently, Melbourne is in Stage 4 restrictions. From 11:59pm on 13 September, we'll take our First Step towards COVID Normal. Regional Victoria, currently in Stage 3 restrictions, will be able to jump to the Second Step of reopening.

By moving from stages to steps, we're giving Victorians a long-term plan for our path out of restrictions and into COVID Normal.

Importantly, we want the whole of the state to be at COVID Normal by the end of the year – making sure family barbeques, summer holidays and a trip to the beach can all still happen.

These steps will be guided by dates – and the data. That means if we're on-track to take a step forward, we can do so confidently.

With clear and articulated case targets, we're creating "trigger points" for review for our public health team – and giving Victorians even more insight into how we're tracking.

The First Step will mean modest changes. Small improvements we can make, to make life a little bit easier, without giving away any of Victorians' hard-won gains.

That includes the creation of a “bubble” for people living alone and single parents. This would allow more isolated Victorians to nominate one other person to help them through this – a friend or family member that can visit them in their home.

I understand that isolation is a real issue for many. But I’d ask people only add someone to their bubble if they need to. After all, the more people you see, the more chance there is of coming into contact with someone who has the virus, putting us back on a path to lockdown.

Exercise will also be expanded. Under the First Step, it will also be lengthened to two hours every day. This could be a two-hour block or split into two one-hour blocks.

You can continue exercising with one other person outside your household – or those you live with.

We’ll also expand this to include “social interaction”. These are activities that don’t require the reopening of a workplace or recreational facility – things like sharing a picnic in your local park or reading a book at your local beach. And for parents just as much as kids, the reopening of playgrounds.

Finally, recognising we’re slowly getting to warmer weather, curfew will also move back an hour to 9pm.

As I said, these are the small sustainable forward steps we can take to make life just a little bit easier. Ahead of 28 September, and if we’re on track with our case numbers, our public health team will review our progress and ensure we can confidently move metropolitan Melbourne to the Second Step.

Under the Second Step in metropolitan Melbourne, we’ll get more people back to work – some 100,000 workers across construction, manufacturing, and landscape garden and maintenance workers who operate alone.

Childcare will also open without permits – making life a little less stressful for parents working from home.

I know for a lot of businesses, they’ll want to know what comes next for them too, and certainty to plan for the future. And while the current arrangements will remain in place until at least 28 September, we’ll continue meeting with you – and listening to you – to make sure you have that certainty going forward.

For regional Victoria, the Second Step will mean some changes too.

From 11:59pm on 13 September, people living alone and single parents will also be able to have a bubble.

Up to five people will be able to gather together in outdoor public places – the park, the beach – up to a maximum of two households. By limiting it to two households, we’re again limiting the virus’s ability to spread.

Outdoor pools and playgrounds in regional Victoria will also open. And religious services can be conducted outside with a maximum of five people, plus a faith leader.

For schools and students, we’ll begin a staged return to onsite learning from Term Four.

All VCE and VCAL students – in Melbourne and regional Victoria – will attend onsite for the General Achievement Test and other essential assessments from 5 October.

In regional Victoria, all students will return to onsite learning between 12 and 16 October and in Melbourne, VCE and VCAL students and Prep to Grade 2 will also return for onsite learning from the 12 of October.

There’s a lot to take in – many of those questions will be answered on the website www.vic.gov.au/roadmap – and if they’re not, we will work to answer them over coming days.

I understand there’ll be some people who’ll be disappointed, those who wanted more and sooner. But these are the steady and sustainable steps that our health experts tell us will see us out of this – safely.

This roadmap is about making sure we stay one step ahead of the virus – and making sure we don’t have to take another backwards step.

I say it often: we all want this to be over. And we all really do. But for this to be over, we each have to find it in ourselves to keep going just a little bit longer.

We've all come too far, given too much, to see it wasted.

By not seeing our dads today, we're that much closer to seeing them at Christmas.

By spending another night on the couch at home, we're that much closer to being able to catch up with mates at the park.

And by staying the course, we will get through this – and we'll get through it together.