

Media Release

The Hon James Merlino MP

Deputy Premier

Minister for Education

Minister for Mental Health

Acting Minister for Health

Acting Minister for Ambulance Services

Acting Minister for Training and Skills

Acting Minister for Higher Education



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PANDEMIC CODE BROWN TO SUPPORT HOSPITALS

A coordinated Pandemic Code Brown will be implemented across all public metropolitan and major regional hospitals, putting in place a formal emergency management structure to make the best use of hospital resources as Victoria battles the global Omicron outbreak.

Like many around the world, Victoria's health system is juggling workforce shortages because of staff in isolation, a vast number of coronavirus patients requiring hospitalisation, and ongoing treatment for patients with urgent and emergency needs.

With our health services asking for further assistance to manage the emergency situation, the Department of Health is calling a coordinated Pandemic Code Brown – with affected public hospitals activating their Code Brown plans by midday on Wednesday, 19 January 2022.

Changes health services can implement include configuring services to free up more staff, including the delivery of outpatient services outside the hospital, and the rapid offload of ambulance patients at emergency departments to get paramedics back on the road as soon as possible. Hospitals may also choose to redeploy staff to work in areas of highest clinical priority.

In addition to hospitals in Metropolitan Melbourne, the Code Brown will be implemented at Barwon Health, Grampians Health, Bendigo Health, Goulburn Valley Health, Albury Wodonga Health and Latrobe Regional Hospital.

A coordinated approach to activating Code Brown response plans is necessary to help health services – including Ambulance Victoria – work together rather than in isolation, in the face of overwhelming demand.

Health services and the health workforce will continue to have responsibility for clinical and operational decisions that affect patients and their communities. This includes decisions around how to manage internal patient flow within a health service as well as the assessment, treatment and referral of patients.

Additionally, there will be an expansion of covid streaming sites to increase the number of hospitals caring for coronavirus patients – easing the pressure at hospitals currently handling the most patients.

The Department of Health will also establish a new *Health Service Response Centre* which will help hospitals coordinate patient flow, distribute activity and support decisions around service reconfiguration – such as suspending some activity or moving to home-based care.

The Pandemic Code Brown is expected to last four to six weeks and health officials will monitor the situation to determine when it's safe to begin winding down arrangements.

Quotes attributable to Acting Minister for Health James Merlino

“Our hardworking health workers on the front-line are caring for record numbers of coronavirus patients every day – this is the best way to ensure our hospitals can continue to safely care for those that need it most.”

“Our health services will have to make some hard decisions over the next few weeks to manage increasing demand and I thank every single one of them for making the tough calls necessary to help as many Victorians as they can.”

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