

VICTORIA PREPARING FOR 'TENS OF THOUSANDS' OF CORONAVIRUS COVID-19 CASES

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The Victorian Government is preparing for potentially "tens of thousands" of coronavirus cases, pumping an extra \$6 million into research and flagging possible delays to elective surgery to free up hospital capacity.

Key points:

- The State Government expects the virus to begin spreading within the Victorian community
- Measures are being considered to free up hospital space
- Extra funding for the Doherty Institute will go towards coronavirus testing and treatments

Nine people have tested positive for COVID-19 in Victoria so far. There have been 33 cases nationally including two of local transmission in NSW. Premier Daniel Andrews said today that there was every reason to believe the current containment strategy would end as the virus began spreading within the local community. "If we get to what many believe to be an inevitable pandemic phase — so where containment no longer works and we finish up with more and more transmission at a local level — we'll have tens of thousands of people who will need care," Mr Andrews said. "Some will be able to get that care in primary care settings, some may need because of underlying conditions or the severity of their case, they'll need to be admitted to hospitals.



"That's why we're creating additional space, doing that detailed planning work, so that the inevitable large number of people who will be presenting to hospitals who wouldn't normally be there can have every confidence that they'll get the very best care possible." [What you need to know.](#)

[Here's a rundown of all the facts about coronavirus, and how you can make sure you're protected.](#) Mr Andrews made it clear the Government was not implementing the measures yet but later down the track they could include delaying non-urgent care or procedures, such as elective surgery.

"It may be the case that we need to defer or cancel a whole range of non-urgent care because there will be large numbers of people who are sicker and need to be treated much quicker than those who might be on an elective surgery waiting list," he said. "That will be inconvenient. That will be challenging, but that's the only appropriate evidence-based, fact-based way to respond to the circumstances." Health Department officials were to meet with hospital chief executives today to finalise health sector plans, he added.

Virus researchers get funding boost.

Mr Andrews also announced that the State Government would be providing \$6 million to Melbourne's Doherty Institute — a joint venture between the University of Melbourne and The Royal Melbourne Hospital — to work with the Burnet Institute and other experts to fast-track new treatments and vaccines for COVID-19. This comes on top of a \$3.2 million donation for the institute announced today by the Jack Ma Foundation, which was established by Alibaba Group founder Jack Ma. Space to play or pause, M to mute, left and right arrows to seek, up and down arrows for volume.

Scientists at the Doherty Institute were the first outside China to grow COVID-19 in the laboratory, and the first to share it with public health laboratories nationally and globally at the end of January. Doherty Institute director Sharon Lewin said the money would go towards developing a vaccine as well as tests and treatments for the virus. However, she said a vaccine treatment was still a way off. "There are many candidates currently being tested for a vaccine," Dr Lewin said. "We talk often about platforms — these are technologies that we know work and are now being applied for COVID-19 — and some of those platforms will be in clinical trials, actually quite soon. "One of those is from the US using RNA. Others, if you're starting from scratch, may take 12 to 18 months to get into clinical trials. "So I think we would still be 12 to 18 months away before we see anything."

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