

NSW Government's management of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Thursday 7 May 2020 Hearing

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS

QUESTION 3

New South Wales Health reports that 315,770 persons have been tested as at 8pm Monday 11 May 2020, however some patients are receiving multiple tests. How many separate individuals have been tested as at that date?

ANSWER

As at 8pm 11 May 2020, there were 345,324 PCR tests for COVID-19 in NSW performed on 315,770 individuals.

QUESTION 4

The Prime Minister on the 730 report on the 16 April 2020 talked about broader testing including "random" or "sentinel testing". Victoria is testing asymptomatic people, that's how they discovered the large cluster at a Melbourne meatworks.

Victorian asymptomatic testing has also detected a case in an aged care facility which was subsequently closed.

Meanwhile testing advice in New South Wales still current, but published on 24 April 2020, requires patients to show symptoms. That is, it does not countenance asymptomatic testing.

(a) Why is it that nearly four weeks after the Prime Minister discussed random or sentinel testing the New South Wales has not made this central to its practice?

(b) What are the constraints on random or sentinel testing?

(c) Isn't random or sentinel testing central to the economic recovery process?

ANSWER

New South Wales is following the advice of the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) for asymptomatic testing. AHPPC advice published on 14 May is that large-scale, non-targeted COVID-19 testing in asymptomatic people in Australia is currently not recommended.

<https://www.health.gov.au/news/australian-health-protection-principal-committee-ahppc-coronavirus-covid-19-statements-on-14-may-2020#statement-on-the-role-of-asymptomatic-testing>

QUESTION 5

5. Resumption of live performance gatherings

(a) When is it likely that live performance gatherings of more than 100 persons are likely to resume?

(b) When is it likely that live performance gatherings of more than 500 persons are likely to resume?

ANSWER

The NSW Government continues to consider the easing of restrictions in accordance with health advice. You can find up to date information on the COVID-19 section of the nsw.gov.au website

QUESTION 6

Dr Chant clarified at budget estimates on 12 March 2020 that New South Wales had its own modelling of the impact of the virus. Media reports have suggested that doctors and hospitals were briefed on a possible surge in cases this winter. Those reports were denied. What information does New South Wales Health hold on the prospect of a surge over winter months?

ANSWER

NSW COVID-19 modelling has focused on a range of scenarios to support health system preparedness. NSW Health continues to use a range of inputs and indicators to consider the likelihood of an increase in cases over the next few months.

QUESTION 8

None of the modelling released in Australia shows a second wave. Meanwhile Imperial College modelling in the UK, even in its early versions, did refer to potential second wave effects.

- (a) Why does the published Australian modelling not show a second wave effect?
- (b) Has New South Wales modelled a second wave effect?

ANSWER

The published modelling from the AHPPC is a type of modelling called 'nowcasting'. This modelling uses data from from the previous 14 days to more accurately understand the present state of the epidemic.

QUESTION 9

Contact tracing in New South Wales

- (a) How many contact tracers are currently employed in New South Wales?
- (b) Is this number expected to increase in the near future?
- (c) What is the target for the number of target contact tracers employed at its highest point?
- (d) Is New South Wales considering adding police officers and detectives to the contact tracing squad, as has been the case in Queensland?

ANSWER

- (a) – (c)
The Ministry of Health contact tracing team has 270 staff. Additional contact tracing staff are employed in Local Health Districts. Additional staff are deployed as needed.
- (d) NSW has a process to work with the police to support contact tracing efforts.

QUESTION 10

Twiggy Forrest has been reported as procuring 10 million tests for Australia.

- (a) Does New South Wales Health believe those tests will work?
- (b) Are those tests of long handled variety which pose a risk to personal protective equipment should a break in the stem occur?
- (c) How many of those 10 million tests are expected to flow into the New South Wales health system as opposed to being delivered to Western Australia or to the national stockpile?

ANSWER

- (a) The 10 million COVID-19 tests reported to have been purchased by the Minderoo Foundation are PCR test kits developed by the Beijing Genomic Institute (BGI). These are PCR test kits that can detect genetic material of the virus that causes COVID-19. The test kit has approval

from the TGA under the emergency exemption to accredited pathology laboratories and is widely used.

As with other PCR tests for diagnosing COVID-19, the test kit undergoes a thorough validation process by the laboratory, comparing the test performance against other well tested assays, before the test is used for diagnostic purposes.

- (b) The PCR test kits do not pose any greater risk to laboratory scientists than other PCR tests that are performed in the laboratory.
- (c) I am advised the Minderoo Foundation is working with leading Australian diagnostic industry partners, including Sonic Healthcare and Healius, to expand testing in every state and territory.

QUESTION 11

The role of increased testing in economic recovery.

- (a) Does NSW Health agree that increased testing is crucial to economic recovery?
- (b) Why is it that Victoria is testing more of its citizens than New South Wales?

ANSWER

- (a) High testing rates are crucial to understanding community transmission, and this is important for guiding the lifting of restrictions.
- (b) NSW has had among the highest testing rates in the world and continues to promote and facilitate testing in the community.

QUESTION 12

What is the effective transmission rate of the virus in New South Wales?

ANSWER

Analysis on effective transmission rates for COVID-19 are performed by the Commonwealth. Modelling released by the Commonwealth on 1 May estimates that the effective reproduction rate number was less than 1 in NSW.

QUESTION 13

The COVIDSAFE app.

- (a) Is New South Wales currently able to access the data from the COVIDSAFE app?
- (b) What is the current take up rate among citizens of New South Wales of the Commonwealth operated COVIDSAFE app?

ANSWER

- (a) Yes, the COVIDSafe App has been used with recent locally-acquired COVID-19 cases.
- (b) Information about the take up rate of the app is not held by NSW Health. It may be available from the Commonwealth Department of Health and the Digital Transformation Agency.

QUESTION 14

How long will New South Wales keep the current boost to ICU units operating?

ANSWER

NSW Health manages its bed base on a day-to-day basis according to operational demand. Provision for additional ICU capacity will be maintained for COVID-19 as long as is required based on infection and hospitalisation rates across the state.

QUESTION 15

Is it anticipated that New South Wales will set a higher testing target in the current 8000 test target per day in order to boost the prospect of economic recovery?

ANSWER

Refer to response at Q11.

QUESTION 16

The national stockpile.

- (a) What agreement is in place to ensure that New South Wales is able to draw down from the national stockpile?
- (b) Have we had any guarantees about access to the national stockpile?

ANSWER

The National Medical Stockpile (NMS) comprising pharmaceuticals and personal protective equipment (PPE) is maintained by the Australian Government Department of Health (DOH). The principal purpose of the stockpile is to have immediate access, during an emergency, to items that are not normally available in Australia in the quantities required during times of increased demand. The NMS supplements the stock held by state and territory health authorities.

The Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) provides advice on managing the stockpile during national health emergencies. The DOH Chief Medical Officer authorises the release of NMS supplies.

QUESTION 17

17. NSW Health capacity.

- (a) How many ICU beds does New South Wales currently have?
- (b) How many ventilators does New South Wales currently have?
- (c) How many trained staff are currently available who are able to operate those ventilators?
- (d) What is the current laboratory processing capacity for COVID-19 testing in New South Wales?
- (e) What proportion of the tests completed in New South Wales today have been conducted by general practitioners?
- (f) What are the current stocks held in NSW of the drugs required to operate ventilators propofol and cisatracurium?

ANSWER

(a) NSW Health manages its bed base according to operational demand. In normal operations, NSW Health operates over 530 adult intensive care beds. This capacity has been significantly expanded to respond to potential demand from COVID-19, with the ability across the state to quadruple this capacity (in both public and private facilities) if required.

(b) As at 26 May, NSW Health has identified over 1,300 ventilators for potential use in the COVID response across public and private hospitals. This number excludes a range of ventilators that would continue to be used through business as usual operations. NSW Health continues to procure additional ventilators, with large numbers currently on order and arriving on an ongoing basis.

(c) Each Local Health District is responsible to ensure they have enough staff trained to meet the clinical service needs of patients; including the operation of ventilators in their hospitals.

(d) NSW Health Pathology's dedicated COVID-19 testing laboratories can perform more than 9000 tests per day, which exceeds current demand. NSW Health Pathology's COVID-19 testing capacity

extends right across NSW, with nine dedicated testing laboratories in metropolitan and regional areas.

Rapid PCR (polymerase chain reaction) COVID-19 testing is also available at 34 NSW Health Pathology laboratories in NSW, including in rural and regional areas. This delivers results in just hours for priority patient care.

This is in addition to testing conducted by the private pathology sector in NSW.

(e) General Practitioners (GPs) can refer patients to specialist COVID-19 Clinics located in NSW public hospitals where all diagnostic testing is performed by NSW Health Pathology's dedicated COVID-19 testing laboratories. GPs also refer patients to private pathology providers for COVID-19 collection and testing.

(f) NSW Health hold current stock of all drugs with further supplies coming.

QUESTION 18

18. Random or sentinel testing in New South Wales.

(a) Is there a plan in New South Wales to conduct random or sentinel testing and aged care facilities?

(b) Is there a plan in New South Wales to conduct random or sentinel testing in group residential homes?

(c) Is there a plan in New South Wales to conduct random or central testing in detention facilities?

ANSWER

New South Wales is following the advice of the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) for asymptomatic testing.

<https://www.health.gov.au/news/australian-health-protection-principal-committee-ahppc-coronavirus-covid-19-statements-on-14-may-2020#statement-on-the-role-of-asymptomatic-testing>