

NSW Government's management of the COVID-19 pandemic

Hearing – 30/09/2021

QUESTION 1 – Page 3

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE: I suspect you are going to have to take this on notice, but I am interested in how many contact tracing staff there are currently, how many there were at the peak and how many you are expecting to have post-11 October.

Dr CHANT: Could I just say, a lot. But I will take that on notice in terms of giving you the numbers.

ANSWER

The number of contact tracers needed in the COVID-19 response changes frequently. At the peak there were more than 1,000 staff working to assist COVID-19 contact tracing.

The NSW contact tracing workforce has the flexibility to expand and shrink in line with demand. NSW will continue to monitor the COVID-19 situation and contact tracing requirements.

NSW Health workforce data is publicly available in the NSW Health Annual Report at: <https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Reports/Pages/default.aspx>. The 2020-21 Annual Report will be publicly available at the end of 2021.

QUESTION 2 – Page 10

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Today is the last day for health workers to be vaccinated as part of the mandatory requirement. What is the figure as at today's date of healthcare workers who are unvaccinated?

Ms PEARCE: It is just over 2½ per cent.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: And how many actual workers is that?

Ms PEARCE: I would have to take that on notice, Ms Houssos.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Are you able to provide any information about a breakdown of where those workers are—geographically where they are?

Ms PEARCE: Ms Pearce here. Again, we would have to take that on notice. I do not have that information in front of me at the moment.

ANSWER

As of 25 October 2021, 2,348 or 1.5 per cent staff of the approximate 156,000 healthcare workforce were unvaccinated across all health agencies.

QUESTION 3 – Page 10

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: What planning have you done to ensure that those 2.5 per cent of positions are able to be filled going forward?

Ms PEARCE: There has been extensive work done by my colleagues in Workforce here at the ministry to work with all of our local health districts to understand any areas of impact. We believe that at present the impact will be minimal and the discussions with our local health districts are ongoing, obviously to ensure that any risk associated with that is managed.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Are you able to provide us with any general insights about where specifically you are looking at those gaps?

Ms PEARCE: Again, I am sorry, Ms Houssos; I will have to take that one on notice.

ANSWER

Staff continue to get vaccinated, reducing the 2.5% referred to by the Hon Courtney Houssos MLC to 1.5% as of 25 October 2021. Local Health Districts, networks and organisations have advised that any local service delivery impacts due to staff not being vaccinated are limited and temporary, with plans in place to manage.

QUESTION 4 – Page 10

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Perhaps you can provide on notice how many applications for paid and unpaid leave have been received at this stage and how many have been approved?

Ms PEARCE: Thank you.

ANSWER

This information is not available centrally.

QUESTION 5 – Page 12

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Thank you, Dr Chant. Can I just ask a question to Ms Pearce. In terms of the 2.5 per cent of health workers who are unvaccinated as at today's date, how many resignations have been received from those workers?

Ms PEARCE: Again, I would have to take that on notice, Ms Houssos.

ANSWER

As of 25 October 2021 the Ministry is aware of 215 resignations.

QUESTION 6 – Page 13

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: Sure. Just while you are finding that, I have a general question around why the current ICU numbers do not include paediatric intensive care unit [PICU] or neonatal intensive care unit [NICU]. Is there a reason for that?

Dr CHANT: My understanding is that they do include those, but if you have any different information I am happy to pursue that.

Ms CATE FAEHRMANN: I have the COVID-19 Risk Monitoring Dashboard printout from the 28 September 2021 and under "healthcare settings" it does say that the current ICU number does not include PICU or NICU.

Dr CHANT: I would probably have to take that on notice. We are very transparent with our data. I was not aware of that. I cannot confirm that, but let us take that on notice. I think we have clearly reported when we have children in ICU and it is an important piece of information for the public. Could I also just indicate—and I know this was asked in the previous inquiry and I apologise that it has been delayed—that the National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance has done a frequently asked questions on the disease, vaccines and schooling and that is now uploaded on the NCIRS website. I will get someone to provide that to you because I know you had a keen interest in the evidence around children, transmission, vaccines and other aspects, and that document is there for consumers.

ANSWER

The COVID-19 Risk Monitoring Dashboard – HealthCare Settings includes the number of cases in intensive care units (ICU) which reflect adult intensive care cases. This information is sourced from the NSW Health Patient Flow Portal.

The report has only included adult intensive care patients as the incidence of COVID-19 cases in Paediatric and Neonatal ICU (PICU/ NICU) has been extremely low.

NSW Health has been carefully monitoring COVID-19 numbers in NICU and PICU since the beginning of the pandemic, including the current Delta outbreak.

QUESTION 7 – Page 17

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Thank you, Chair. Of the healthcare workers who are unvaccinated, do any of those fall into the criteria that Mr Shoebridge was outlining—because they have had COVID they are not required to be vaccinated?

Ms PEARCE: I do not know that we have the specifics on that, Ms Houssos, but they would be treated as would anybody else. Should they have had COVID then they would be treated in the same way as the general population in respect of that.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Okay, if you could provide that to us on notice that would be quite helpful.

Ms PEARCE: That is fine, thank you.

ANSWER

This information is not available centrally. According to the updated Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) advice dated 8 October 2021, people with SARS-CoV-2 infection can be vaccinated as soon as they have recovered from their acute illness or can defer vaccination for up to six months after onset of the SARS-CoV-2 infection.

QUESTION 8 – Page 17

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I wanted to ask about a couple of other issues. How many extra health staff have been recruited back from retirement?

Dr CHANT: I would have to defer to my colleagues but we might have to take that question. Can we take that question on notice, if that is okay?

Ms PEARCE: Unless Dr Lyons can comment?

Dr LYONS: I think we will have to take that on notice.

ANSWER

The Australian Health Practitioners Registration Authority sub-register reinstated registration for 8,300 clinicians who had relinquished their registration in the previous 10 years. Recruitment information from this sub-register is held by Local Health Districts.

QUESTION 9 – Page 18

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: That is excellent news for everybody. Can I ask you about the mass vaccination centre at Wollongong? What is the current capacity that it is operating at? How many vaccines is that doing a day?

Ms PEARCE: I have not got the figures on a daily basis, Ms Houssos. Certainly what I can say, though, is that we have provided and have been providing the Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District with some additional vaccine in the most recent last couple of weeks. We are obviously very focused on ensuring that they are vaccinating particularly vulnerable groups of people in the Illawarra, and we have made arrangements for additional vaccine to go to them just as late as last Friday. So that is good news for them as well.

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: Do you have an average of how many vaccinations are being done per day?

Ms PEARCE: Not in front of me at the moment. I could certainly take that on notice and provide that information to you.

ANSWER

On 20 September 2021, an additional 17,500 doses of the Pfizer vaccine were made available at the Wollongong Mass Vaccination Centre.

Vulnerable and at-risk communities, including homeless populations, cluster-style housing residents and the region's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, have been receiving priority access to these additional Pfizer doses, as well as local residents aged 12-59 years. A further 5,800 doses of the Pfizer vaccine were received in late September and are being used to further protect at-risk communities, specifically cluster-style housing residents and areas of low vaccine take up.

The District is now also offering walk-in Pfizer and AstraZeneca vaccinations at the Wollongong Mass Vaccination Centre and at the Shellharbour City Centre Vaccine Clinic.

On average, since the start of October 2021, the Wollongong Mass Vaccination Centre has been administering 850 vaccinations per day.

QUESTION 10 – Page 18

The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS: I just have one final question. Dr Chant, obviously sewage testing across regional communities has been really important in detecting where there might be cases undetected. How many regional communities—is it being conducted in all regional communities across New South Wales now?

And how long will that be continued for?

Dr CHANT: I can provide a list of the communities in which it is done and I think we released the sewage testing data publicly. I am happy to provide that to the Committee.

ANSWER

Information about the NSW Sewage Surveillance Program, including sampled sites, is publicly available in NSW Health COVID-19 weekly surveillance reports at:

<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/Infectious/covid-19/Pages/weekly-reports.aspx>.