



## **The Hon. Greg Hunt MP**

Minister for Health

# **TRANSCRIPT**

20 August 2020

### **INTERVIEW WITH DAVID KOCH SUNRISE**

*E&OE...*

*Topics: Vaccine for COVID-19; Australia's Vaccine Agreement; New funding for COVID-19 clinical trials.*

**DAVID KOCH:**

Now, the Prime Minister has clarified that any potential coronavirus vaccine would not be made compulsory but will be strongly encouraged.

Joining me now is Health Minister Greg Hunt from his own isolation in Canberra. Minister, obviously the success of a vaccine is reliant on how many people take it.

Would you consider making incentives for people to be vaccinated such as no job policy?

**GREG HUNT:**

We certainly would encourage as many people as possible.

We'd like to see a take up of up to 95 per cent, which is where we're at with our children's immunisation rates at 94.77 per cent announced on the weekend, record rates.

So we're doing the right thing as a country.

We have absolutely kept on the table concept such as No Jab, No Play, the things that we're already doing that have helped Australia have one of the highest childhood immunisation rates in the world and that saves lives and protects lives.

**DAVID KOCH:**

So would you link it to welfare payments, to school attendance, to travel maybe, even going to sporting events or restaurants?

**GREG HUNT:**

Our first goal is to encourage as many Australians as possible, and I'm confident that with a vaccine that can save lives and protect lives, that can give people hope, that can give people their freedoms back, all of the things that we value and have helped us as a nation, prosper as a community, I'm confident that a very, very large numbers of Australians will take it up.

But we reserve the right, subject to medical advice, to take steps that might assist.

Authorised by Greg Hunt MP, Liberal Party of Australia, Somerville, Victoria.

I'll certainly be taking the vaccine. And we aren't there yet but we are one of the leading candidates and there are other eggs in the basket as well.

**DAVID KOCH:**

It's a big discussion, even here at Channel 7 among staff, and so many though are saying, hey, they've cut corners to get this through. They've pushed it through too quick. I don't know if I want to be in the first batch because I don't know if they've done it right.

What assurances can you give us that all the processes being followed correctly?

**GREG HUNT:**

So there are three lines of protection.

Firstly of course, the Oxford Vaccine and AstraZeneca together, they are two of the world's great institutions - one academic, one pharmaceutical and medical - and they have to go through all of the processes in the UK.

Secondly, you have in Australia the work of the Therapeutic Goods Administration which is our medical regulator.

And then thirdly, the vaccine is reviewed through a medical expert panel, led by Professor Brendon Murphy but with the heads of our Advisory Group on Immunisation, Professor Blythe.

Professor Cheng, the Chief Scientist, the head of- the chief medical officer, the head of the CSIRO and many others. So nothing will be more thoroughly reviewed.

**DAVID KOCH:**

Okay. Clear this up: have you done a deal for it or not?

The Prime Minister came on the show yesterday and said, yep, we've done a deal for 25 million.

But even the company, AstraZeneca said, well, no, you haven't really done a deal, it's just a letter of intent, nothing more.

**GREG HUNT:**

Yes, we have. And these agreements are done in multiple stages, and this is the first and the most important agreement.

What it does is it secures us whole of population access for Australia. And then as the results come in, there are additional elements that are completed.

But what it means is that we're in a position to be one of the first countries in the world to have access to this vaccine.

Other eggs in the basket, but right around the world these agreements are done in multiple stages.

They're security for Australia that it's there if it's safe and it's effective, we'll proceed.

**DAVID KOCH:**

But why would the company even cast doubt on that? Are they trying to screw you for a better price? That sort of thing.

Have negotiations on price and everything been done?

Authorised by Greg Hunt MP, Liberal Party of Australia, Somerville, Victoria.

**GREG HUNT:**

Yes, absolutely. We're in deep discussions on those. I spoke with the Australian head last night. I've spoken with the global head a couple of months ago.

They were very keen for Australia to be part of this because we had manufacturing capacity to help Australia, New Zealand, the South Pacific, the ability to extend their reach around the world with their product.

In addition, though, there was one report yesterday - that was wrong, the company wrote and published the response which declared that the statement on that particular website was incorrect and that they stood by the fact that there is a very, very clear (inaudible).

What's important for Australia is the hope and the reality of vaccine access.

**DAVID KOCH:**

Okay. You've just announced an additional \$25 million to help our researchers find breakthroughs in preventing and treating COVID. What do you hope this achieve?

**GREG HUNT:**

This is for clinical trials. This is on top of \$333 million that we've already put into research. Further \$25 million for clinical trials, whether it's for vaccines, preventions, or treatments.

And there are a range of ways of defending - obviously the vaccine we've been talking about.

But preventions are medicines that might reduce the likelihood or reduce the impact of the disease and then treatments obviously, such as Remdesivir or Dexamethasone.

They're existing treatments that are being used in different places around the world, including Remdesivir in particular in Australia, which can mitigate the impacts on people who are very sick.

It can reduce the likelihood of death or reduce the consequences for people in ICU.

And further trials on new medicines or repurposing existing medicines and these are other things that can save lives.

**DAVID KOCH:**

Will the program at Flinders University get some of that money? We had them on the show the other week, the professor saying he wasn't getting any reaction from the federal government on their trials.

**GREG HUNT:**

They're currently going through a separate, already open program which is an assessment for vaccine candidates.

**DAVID KOCH:**

Okay. Alright, that's terrific. Really appreciate the update, Greg Hunt. Thank you.

**GREG HUNT:**

Thank you, David. Cheers.

**ENDS**

Authorised by Greg Hunt MP, Liberal Party of Australia, Somerville, Victoria.