

Australian Medical Association Limited

ABN 37 008 426 793

42 Macquarie Street, Barton ACT 2600: PO Box 6090, Kingston ACT 2604
 Telephone: (02) 6270 5400 Facsimile (02) 6270 5499
 Website : <http://www.ama.com.au/>



OMICRON UNDERLINES NEED FOR MORE VIGOROUS BOOSTER ROLL OUT AND NATIONAL QUARANTINE FACILITIES, SAYS AMA

The emergence of the Omicron COVID-19 variant underlines the need for Australia to develop a network of dedicated quarantine facilities and to pursue the roll out of booster shots more vigorously, the AMA said today.

With public health measures easing around the country and hotel quarantine starting to be dismantled, the AMA warned Omicron and the resurgence of COVID-19 in many parts of globe is a timely reminder that the pandemic is not over.

“The emergence of Omicron in Africa should come as no surprise, given the very low levels of vaccination in many African nations, providing the ideal environment for COVID-19 to mutate and spread to other nations,” AMA President Dr Omar Khorshid said.

“Effective dedicated quarantine arrangements are a necessary tool in our efforts to combat the inevitable emergence of COVID-19 variants and to protect the community.

“While work on quarantine facilities has commenced in some states and territories, we are yet to see a nationally coordinated approach, which could provide Australia with a national asset of dedicated Commonwealth quarantine facilities.

“National Cabinet also needs to approach the roll out of booster doses with far more vigour.

“While the Commonwealth’s decision to proceed with a booster program is welcome, it has failed to adequately fund general practices to take a proactive approach to getting boosters into people’s arms.”

Dr Khorshid said while motivated people will come forward for their booster shot, others will not.

“Without funding for general practice to follow these patients up and encourage them to come forward, hard to reach groups, older Australians and those that are hesitant about a booster dose will be left behind and put at risk of infection and serious health outcomes.

“Some states and territories are also winding back their vaccination efforts but at this point in the pandemic, we cannot afford to become complacent,” Dr Khorshid said.

The AMA said Australia had only distributed just over 15 per cent of the vaccines it committed for donation to other countries and it should pick up the pace of these donations as part of a genuine world wide effort to tackle COVID-19 globally.

“Until the whole world is vaccinated, we all remain at risk,” Dr Khorshid said.

“By taking coordinated action National Cabinet can help ensure Australia avoids making the same mistakes as we have seen overseas, that can have devastating impacts on people’s lives, health systems and the economy.”

CONTACT: AMA Media: +61 2 6270 5478
media@ama.com.au

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