

Consul-General of Japan in Sydney's Newsletter

No. 12 Australia's Response to Coronavirus (Part 2) – “Hibernation Strategy” and “Social Distancing” to overcome the “Twin Crisis”

3 April 2020

Measures to deal with COVID-19 continue to be the top priority of Australia and Japan, and also of this Consulate.

Above all else, we must avoid a situation where we get a so-called “explosion of infection”, which would lead to many deaths. On the other hand, various restrictions are forcing many businesses to stop their operations, which has resulted in large numbers of people without work. We are now at a crucial moment when we must save people's lives and support their livelihood.

There has been a large impact on traffic between Japan and Australia. Most direct flights have been reduced in frequency or cancelled. On 31 March, the Government of Japan raised the level of travel advisory regarding the risk of infection from Australia to level 3 (recommendation to suspend travel). Furthermore, on 1 April, stronger border enforcement measures were implemented: foreigners who have been in Australia will be denied permission to land apart from some exceptions, and people arriving from Australia, including Japanese nationals, will have to undergo a PCR test to check for COVID-19 and will have to wait for the results.

This Consulate is following the daily press conferences and announcements by the Australian federal and the NSW and NT governments in order to gather information which will affect the lives of Japanese nationals and to distribute this information in Japanese language. The Australian Government's measures against COVID-19 are being developed strategically, centered around the National Cabinet. In order to respond to these measures appropriately, it is not only necessary to know what each separate measure is, but also to understand the thinking behind them.

Therefore, in this newsletter, I would like to share with you what I feel are the important developments that have occurred since the last issue (25 March) and the thinking that lies behind them.



**The announcement of the JobKeeper Payment
(Prime Minister of Australia's website, 30 March)**

At the G20 leaders meeting held on 26 March by videoconference, Prime Minister Morrison stressed that all efforts must be made to address the “twin crisis” of health and the economy. At the start of his press conference held the next day (27 March), Prime Minister Morrison stated his Government's basic thinking: that there are no easy decisions, because while it is essential to tackle problems facing health and the economy as both have major impacts on people's lives, the measures necessary to fight on the health front have an extremely negative effect on the economy.

NSW Premier Berejiklian has stated that people's lives take precedence, and to that end, all necessary measures must be implemented to ensure a “no-regrets policy”; if no further measures are required because everyone cooperates, that would be a successful outcome. It is important to strike a good balance. I believe, this is the basic position shared by all members of the National Cabinet.

Coming from this position, a “hibernation strategy” has been worked out to deal with the “economic crisis”. In his opening statement at the 27 March press conference, Prime Minister Morrison announced his strategy to enable businesses to reopen after the danger of the COVID-19 crisis has passed by enabling businesses to ‘pause’ through a range of subsidies to cover loans and rent for 6 or more months.

The key measure is the “JobKeeper Payment” announced on 29 March. This subsidy will be available to businesses which have seen a major drop in turnover and will cover \$1,500 per fortnight of an employee's salary for a period of 6

months. The aim of this subsidy is to enable ties between businesses and their employees to be maintained in these difficult times. The JobKeeper Payment will cost \$130 billion. This amounts to approximately one quarter of national revenue (\$513.7 billion), which shows the scale of this undertaking.

This is in addition to the supplement of \$550 per fortnight (again for a period of 6 months) to those receiving the JobSeeker Payment and other income support, as well as measures to support cashflow of small- to medium-sized enterprises. The fluid nature of the current situation and the difficulty estimating the budget required to deal with it have also led to the decision to postpone the federal budget (announcement and deliberation) until early October, a decision made in consultation with the Opposition.



**NSW Premier Berejiklian's press conference
(NSW Department of Health website, 31 March)**

A “further strengthening of border enforcement measures” has been worked out to deal with the “health crisis”. The Australian Government had already implemented an in-principle ban on all foreign nationals entering the country and required all people entering Australia to self-isolate for 14 days. On 27 March, Prime Minister Morrison announced that from midnight the following day, all people entering Australia via airports would be required to self-isolate for 14 days at hotels near their airport of arrival. The reason for this is that two thirds of all COVID-19 cases in Australia originate overseas and this still poses the greatest risk. Moreover, the federal government announced it would mobilise the army in order to enforce measures in all states and territories.

In New South Wales, over the first five days of the measure from 29 March (Sun.), around 3,700 people were moved under the direction and surveillance of the police from Sydney International Airport to hotels provided by the state government to commence their self-isolation.

In the Northern Territory, there are additional measures: not only international arrivals, but also inter-state arrivals must go through forced quarantine for 14 days, effective from midnight on 1 April (Wed.), and after midnight 3 April (Fri.), the cost of the forced quarantine must be paid for by the individual.

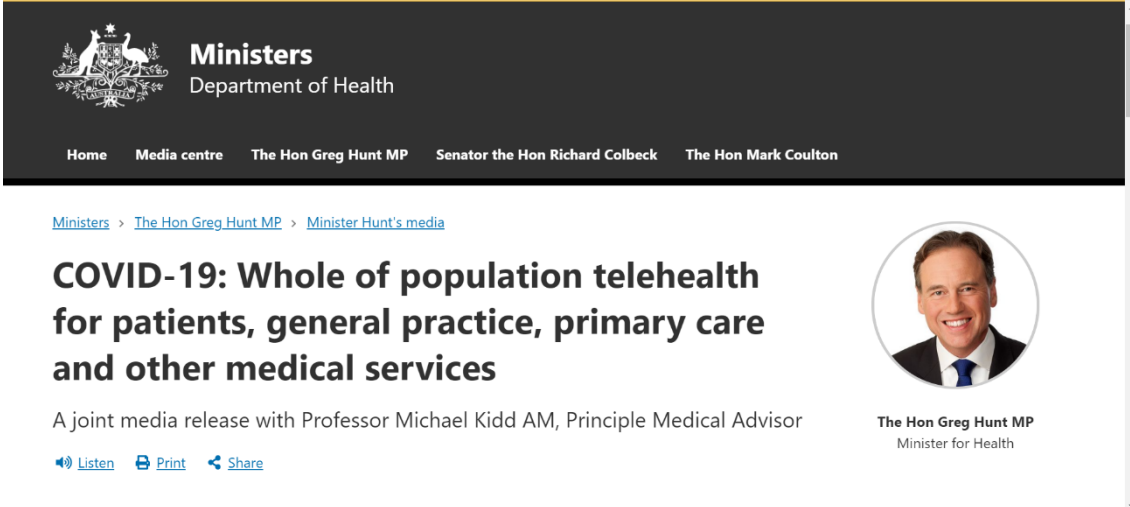
Another measure against COVID-19 is “social distancing”. Measures such as the ban on large gatherings and restaurants being restricted to deliveries or takeaway were already in place when Prime Minister Morrison announced further measures to prevent infections – these further measures include staying-at-home except when making essential purchases, health care, exercise or commuting to work or school; no gatherings of more than 2 people; and the closure of playgrounds and gyms. These measures have been promptly adopted in NSW and the NT, over which this Consulate has jurisdiction.

“Social distancing” requires the cooperation of every individual. At her daily press conferences, Premier Berejiklian emphasizes that while we cannot stop infection, we can slow down, contain and control the spread of COVID-19, and by doing this, flatten the curve and lessen the future burden on hospitals. She explains that saving lives is the objective and emphasizes many times that it is important for everyone to “adapt” and “adjust” to the new series of measures. From my own observations as I go about my daily life, the majority of people are carefully practising “social distancing”.

These series of measures aim to prevent “community transmission”, and the most valuable tool for this is “contact tracing”. “Testing” is being strategically undertaken to enable contact tracing. At the 31 March morning press conference, NSW Chief Health Officer Dr Kerry Chant announced testing would be increased in areas where there are clusters of infections (such as Bondi). The purpose of this is to “contact trace” or identify as quickly as possible people who are carrying the infection and anyone they have had contact with, thereby preventing the further spread of infection. Dr Chant explained that these are the key steps that complement the “social distancing” strategy. On its website, the NSW Department of Health publishes maps of local health districts (local government areas for regional NSW) showing the number of cases of infection, the number of cases of

community transmission and any clusters, so that the media and general public can understand the situation.

With regard to the testing, Prime Minister Morrison explained at the 2 April press conference that Australia reached a testing rate of more than a 1,000 tests per 100,000 population, which means 1 percent of the population. He said Australia is the first country to the best of their knowledge that has been able to exceed that mark.



The screenshot shows the top navigation bar of the Australian Department of Health website. It features the Australian coat of arms and the text "Ministers Department of Health". Below this is a menu with links for "Home", "Media centre", "The Hon Greg Hunt MP", "Senator the Hon Richard Colbeck", and "The Hon Mark Coulton". The main content area has a breadcrumb trail: "Ministers > The Hon Greg Hunt MP > Minister Hunt's media". The headline reads "COVID-19: Whole of population telehealth for patients, general practice, primary care and other medical services". Below the headline is a sub-headline: "A joint media release with Professor Michael Kidd AM, Principle Medical Advisor". There are three icons for "Listen", "Print", and "Share". To the right is a circular portrait of Greg Hunt with the caption "The Hon Greg Hunt MP Minister for Health".

The announcement of the online health consultation (telehealth) initiative (Australian Department of Health website, 29 March)

Running in parallel with these measures, the health system and its capacity are being strengthened. On 29 March, Prime Minister Morrison and Health Minister Hunt announced that “telehealth” would be extended to all Australians. This should be a key weapon in the fight against COVID-19. Furthermore, at a press conference on 31 March, Health Minister Hunt announced the “partnership between public and private hospitals”. In return for underwriting the continued operation of private hospitals, private hospital staff, equipment and facilities will be made flexibly available, and in this way, hospital beds, ICU, ventilators, personal protection equipment (PPE), doctors and nurses can be secured as necessary. At this stage only a limited number of facilities and equipment are being used, but the government is diligently working well ahead of time to procure what would be needed in the worst-case scenario.



Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) Advice to National Cabinet on 30 March 2020

The Australian Health Protection Principal Committee recommended special provisions be applied to vulnerable people in the workplace.

The Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) Advice to National Cabinet (Australian Department of Health website, 30 March)

What is making this series of undertakings possible is the framework of the “National Cabinet” and the “Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC)”. By working across federal, state and regional boundaries, the AHPPC is providing advice based on collated and integrated specialist medical knowledge, and the National Cabinet enables quick and consistent political decisions to be made at the federal, state and regional levels.



Social distancing being observed at a supermarket in Sydney

Gathering and widely disseminating information about these Australian initiatives will not only assist Japanese nationals in their day-to-day life. Such information can be a good reference for other countries and regions, including Japan. I hope you find this newsletter helpful.

The Consulate will continue to follow press conferences and announcements by the Australian Government and the NSW and Northern Territory Governments, and we intend to provide you with the latest information via our consular e-Bulletin, and on our website, Facebook and Twitter. If you have any opinions or requests, please let us know. Thank you for your continued support.

Australian Government Covid-19 Website

<https://www.australia.gov.au/>

Prime Minister of Australia Website (Press conference transcript, media statement, etc.)

<https://www.pm.gov.au/>

New South Wales Government Covid-19 Website

<https://preview.nsw.gov.au/covid-19>

Northern Territory Government Covid-19 Website

<https://coronavirus.nt.gov.au/>

Latest information on Covid-19 in Japan (Prime Minister's Office, Consulate-General of Japan in Sydney)

<https://japan.kantei.go.jp/>

https://www.sydney.au.emb-japan.go.jp/itprtop_en/index.html

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