

COVID-19 Update
Public Health Unit - Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District
23 December 2020

Local Update

There has been no evidence of community transmission (source unknown, locally acquired) among residents of the Illawarra and Shoalhaven since June 2020.

The Public Health Unit's **weekly epidemiological report** for the Illawarra Shoalhaven is attached.

NSW and National Updates

NSW has recorded 102 locally acquired cases in the last week, 4 of which are from an unknown source. The outbreak is predominately in Sydney's Northern Beaches, but with three small clusters seeded across other parts of Sydney.

Local transmission across the rest of Australia remains low.

Link to NSW reports [here](#) and [here](#), and the national report [here](#).

International Updates

The number of cases being reported globally continues to rise, with a total of over 75 million new cases and 1.6 million deaths reported globally @ 20 December.

New COVID-19 cases and deaths continued to increase during the past week, by 6% and 4% respectively.

[\(Source: World Health Organisation – Epidemiology Situation Report\)](#)

Disease Updates

[Australian Health Protection Principal Committee statement on new variant of the virus that causes COVID-19](#)

AHPPC acknowledges there is a new variant of the virus that causes COVID-19 in the UK. It has several differences in its genome (mutations) in comparison to other SARS-CoV-2 viruses. This new variant is now common among the increasing cases in South East England.

The UK has designated the variant as a 'variant of concern' and is monitoring the situation. Currently, it is not clear whether the mutations are responsible for the higher growth rates in cases, or a combination of factors such as a mutation, winter, super spreading events, or found in areas or populations where people live in more crowded settings.

Four cases with this variant have been documented in Australia, 2 in NSW and Victoria respectively at this time. All cases have been or are being managed in hotel quarantine and the variant has not spread into the community. It is not the cause of the current cluster in NSW.

The AHPPC has stated they are awaiting more evidence from the UK, but has no current concerns for spread of this variant in Australia.

Vaccine Updates

As of 23 December 2020, there are 222 vaccine candidates globally, with 56 vaccine candidates in human clinical trials and 13 candidates in stage 3 clinical trials.

The Australian Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) has given provisional determination to three vaccine candidates:

- University of Oxford/AstraZeneca's candidate ChAdOx1 nCoV-19/AZD1222
- BioNTech/Pfizer's candidate BNT162b2
- Janssen's candidate Ad26.COV2.S

(Source: [NCIRS, COVID 19 vaccine development](#))

The United Kingdom is currently offering the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine to people most at risk from COVID-19, including: some people over 80 who have upcoming hospital appointments, people who live or work in care homes and health care workers at high risk. The vaccine is being given as 2 doses, at least 21 days apart.

On 18 December, the Food and Drug Administration issued an Emergency Use Authorisation for the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine to be distributed in America.

(Source: https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm695152e1.htm?s_cid=mm695152e1_x)

Treatment Update

[Baricitinib plus Remdesivir for Hospitalised Adults with Covid-19](#)

A total of 1033 patients were included in a double-blind, randomised, placebo-controlled trial to evaluate baricitinib plus remdesivir in hospitalised adults with Covid-19. All patients received remdesivir and either baricitinib (515 patients) or placebo (control) (518 patients). The primary outcome measured was time to recovery and the secondary outcome was clinical status at day 15.

The study found baricitinib plus remdesivir was superior to remdesivir alone in reducing recovery time and accelerating improvement in clinical status among patients with Covid-19. Notably among those receiving high flow or non-invasive oxygen, the combination was also associated with fewer adverse events.

Interesting Update

[The Lancet Commentary - Concerns and motivations about COVID-19 vaccination](#)

The *Lancet Infectious Diseases* has periodically collected data in Australia on their willingness to vaccinate against COVID-19. The latest survey, conducted in July, found 90% (1144 of 1274) would get the vaccine if it were available next month, the Australian Government is aiming for 95% uptake. It is important to understand the public's motivations and concerns about vaccination to inform communication and implementation strategies.

The top three reasons across the two most recent surveys for agreeing to vaccinate were:

- "to protect themselves and others" (29%)
- "belief in vaccination and science" (16%)
- "to help stop the virus spread" (15%)

For those who were indifferent or said they would not get the vaccine the top reasons across the two most recent surveys were:

- "Concern about the safety of the vaccine in its development" (36% [139 of 388])
- "Potential side effects" (10%)

Importantly, even among people who were willing to vaccinate, some hesitancy was noted regarding safety of the vaccine (11%).