

Australian swine flu tally hits 303

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Over 300 people have been diagnosed with swine flu in Australia, health authorities have confirmed.

The number of swine flu cases diagnosed in Victoria has risen to 212 – making up more than a third of the national total.

Australians in all states and territories are now affected with the virus, with Queensland reporting 20 cases, New South Wales 57, South Australia seven, the ACT four and Tasmania, Western Australia, and the Northern Territory have one case each.

The latest cases are those of 39 people aged from five to 18 in Melbourne and two children and an adult at Cairns, in Queensland's north.

Federal Health Minister Nicola Roxon says the measures to contain the spread of swine flu will be stepped up if the rate of spread continues.

"They now include cases in every state and territory, so we have one in Tasmania, and one in the northern territory," she said.

"The largest increases still remain here in Victoria, where we have 10 schools that are currently closed, although a number of those are commencing to reopen early next week."

Containment measures

Ms Roxon says tracing people who have been diagnosed with the virus and those they have had contact with will no longer be an appropriate containment measure, if the numbers continue to rise

"There is a tipping point at which it won't be possible to continue to do that and where we can assess that the disease really has become a community disease," she said.

"Then we'd move to a new phase where all of those efforts go into treatment and identification of people who are at risk. We're not at that point yet."

The Victorian Government's request for 5,000 surgical masks has been approved by the Federal Government.

The masks, to be used to deal with the swine flu outbreak, are on the way to the Department of Human Services in Melbourne.

Meanwhile, health officials say they are awaiting the last batch of test results from passengers on board the cruise ship the Pacific Dawn, which is travelling back to Sydney.

A medical team has been assessing and swabbing passengers on the cruise liner who have complained of flu like symptoms.

Cruise ship tests

So far there have been no positive swine flu results among the passengers but the last lot of tests were collected from the ship at Coffs Harbour on the New South Wales mid-north coast this morning.

The Health Department's head of communicable diseases, Dr Jeremy McNulty, says analysis is now underway.

"The results of those will determine the next phase and we'll have more information about that later this evening," he said.

The 1,800 remaining passengers on board the ship which docks in Sydney tomorrow are still waiting to learn if they will be allowed to disembark, or be forced to remain in quarantine.

The new head of the Australian Medical Association says health authorities have not overreacted to the swine flu threat.

Dr Andrew Pesce says officials have taken the appropriate precautions.

"As an obstetrician, I'm very familiar with the fact that everything seems okay until something goes terribly wrong," he said.

"I think it's very, very important to keep on top of things.

"I think there's been an appropriate amount of concern raised in the community to make sure that people do follow sensible precautions to minimise the risks of getting the disease."