

Australia's COVID-19 hotspot logs four new local cases



Australia's second most populous state, Victoria, on Sunday reported two new locally acquired COVID-19 cases, with the latest number rising hopes that a hard lockdown in the state's capital Melbourne will be eased on June 10.

Two other new cases were reported as Sunday by an aged care home, but the state had yet to confirm them.

The four new local infections bring Victoria's total cases to 55, including two recovered cases, in the outbreak that began in late May after a man who visited his wife in a hotel quarantine in Adelaide returned to Melbourne and tested positive.

The daily rise was down from five new cases reported on Saturday, all four new cases were linked to existing clusters.

Officials said that Melbourne's restrictions would probably be eased on Thursday.

"If we can, we will lift it as early as possible, but at this stage our expectation is that it will continue to Thursday," Victoria's deputy chief health officer Allan Cheng told reporters.

Health authorities remain worried about the emergence of the highly infectious Delta variant, which has now extended to 10 cases, as the source has yet to be identified and there has been no genomic match so far with any other cases in Australia.

The Delta variant, which has been classified by the World Health Organization (WHO) as among the four COVID-19 variants of concern due to evidence that it spreads more easily, likely caused the latest devastating outbreak in India.

The last thing we want to see is a resurgence of the virus coming in this variant of the virus, getting out of control and becoming uncontrollable, said deputy premier James Merrett.

A family that travelled to a beach town in New South Wales state was the first in Melbourne to be infected by the Delta variant.

"We are concerned about who is who might have given them the infection and therefore could there be other infections related to this," Cheng said.

Cheng said it had two new cases of the Delta variant in Melbourne.

One of the new cases was a man who had been in the United States for two weeks and had been close to two residents infected with the virus in his home, who had been infected with the virus in the United States.

Greg Hunt said on Sunday that the new cases were a "very small number of people" and would double the number of Delta variant cases in the state.

Victoria has accounted for two-thirds of the more than 30,000 COVID-19 cases and 90 percent of the 910 deaths in the country since the pandemic began last year.

Melbourne-Sunday announced AS12 million (\$27 million) in assistance to regional tourism and accommodation operators to make up for a disrupted ski season, adding to AS400 million committed last week to businesses affected by the lockdown.

The United States will give Taiwan 750,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccines, as part of the country's plan to share millions of Pfizer-BioNTech, a delegation of US senators have announced, after Taipei complained that China was hindering its efforts to secure the vaccines.

Senators Tommy Donohoe, who visited Taiwan with two of her colleagues on Sunday, said their trip underscored the bipartisan support for the democratic island of Taiwan in its own territory.

"We are here as friends, because we know that Taiwan is experiencing a challenging time right now, which was why it was especially important for the House of Representatives to support it," said Donohoe.

She did not give details of which vaccines Taiwan would get or when.

Taiwan is dealing with a spike in domestic cases but has been affected like much of the world by global vaccine shortages.

Only approximately 3 percent of its 23.5 million people have been vaccinated, with most getting only the first shot of two needed.

Taiwan has been struggling to block its efforts to secure vaccines from abroad, and the government in Taipei has offered the island Chinese medical supplies.

But the government in Taipei has repeatedly expressed concern about their safety, and, regardless, cannot accept them without changing Taiwanese law, which bans most imports.

Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen said US Senator Tommy Donohoe said on Sunday.

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US to donate 750,000 COVID jabs to Taiwan amid China row



UN 'outraged' as death toll in Burkina Faso attack rises to 132

Gunmen have killed at least 132 people in Burkina Faso's deadliest attack in the east, causing one of the world's most acute humanitarian crises.

Some 1.2 million people in Burkina Faso have been forced to flee their homes because of the ongoing conflict, as armed groups step up attacks on the night on Friday, killing residents of the village of Soudou.

The attack, which killed 132 people, was the deadliest in the region since a government statement on Saturday.

Another 40 residents were also wounded, government spokesman Ousmane Tamboura told reporters.

President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré said the killing "has been" and said the Burkina people "must remain united and solid against these obscurantist forces".

No group has claimed responsibility so far.

The overnight assault was the deadliest recorded in years in Burkina Faso.

Since 2015, the West African country has struggled to fight back against increasingly frequent and deadly attacks from groups linked to Qaeda and more recently to ISIL (ISIS). The attacks first started in the north near the Mali border.

Two juveniles and an 18-year-old have been charged with firing a mortar in the shooting of a 31-year-old Israeli man who was visiting relatives in Baltimore last month.

Baltimore police said William Calton III, 18, and a 16-year-old and a 17-year-old are being held without bail in the May 3 fatal shooting of Efraim Gordon. He was shot multiple times in what police and appeared to be a robbery.

The Baltimore Sun reports that Gordon had traveled from Israel to Baltimore for a week to visit his family, who were in the city for a week. He was shot in the chest and abdomen.

Gordon's family raised \$60,000 to cover Gordon's body to Israel and to offer a \$30,000 reward for tips leading to an arrest. In an update on the ongoing investigation, officers said Gordon "has been buried respectfully".

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