



The Hon. Greg Hunt MP

Minister for Health

TRANSCRIPT

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INTERVIEW WITH GARETH PARKER 6PR BREAKFAST

E&OE...

Topics: COVID-19 vaccine roll out

GARETH PARKER:

We reached a milestone over the weekend with five million doses of COVID-19 vaccinations delivered in this country. It has been a slow start, there's no doubt about that, but I think it's reasonable and it's fair to say that the vaccination effort is gathering pace.

There's still, I think, is hesitancy amongst over 50s who don't want to take AstraZeneca and are instead trying to wait for Pfizer. Your experiences, I'm keen to keep collecting them on 922-11-882.

Last week, we talked about Central City Medical Centre, who basically have access to the old Myer Megamart store on Rowe Street. They say they could vaccinate 10,000 patients per week if needed - in fact, that's what they want to do, but as a GP clinic, they're limited to a supply of 200 doses per week, and they can't really figure out.

Now, we spoke to Dr Chris Denz who couldn't really figure out why they can't get more vaccine. So, that's one isolated issue. But supplies do seem to be ramping up.

On the line, the Federal Minister for Health, Greg Hunt. Minister, good morning.

GREG HUNT:

And good morning, Gareth.

GARETH PARKER:

Thank you very much for your time. Can I just deal with this issue of the Central City Medical Centre first? The operators of that clinic could really do a lot more, and they want to do a lot more, but they say that they're finding it a very difficult system to navigate and they're just being landed with the 200 doses a week.

Is there any way that, given the nature of their facility, someone can help them out and ramp them up?

GREG HUNT:

So what we've done is we've actually tripled the number of doses for the smaller clinics and doubled the number of doses for the large clinics. We also have added more where there's been what's called high utilisation - so a GP practice is doing more than 80 per cent of their doses through utilisation, they're actually making use of them, we've added more again.

So, I'm happy to get the details, we'll look at them. And essentially, we focus on making sure that those practices which had high capacity and were willing to service the general public and not just their patients had high volume.

So if your program could send through the details, we'll look at them. We'll work with the clinic. We often check the claims because we find that sometimes clinics will not be distributing more than 80 per cent of, more than 80 per cent of their doses. They're all doing a great job, but happy to work on it and get the details.

GARETH PARKER:

Alright. Well we'd appreciate that, because I think that this is an obvious one to get an easy win. I know that there's been a lot of debate about this, but time is of the essence, is it not, Minister?

GREG HUNT:

Yes, absolutely, and we go as fast as we can within the available supply. And what you've seen is that rapid ramp-up as the supplies come in and people have been coming forward. So we hit five million yesterday and that's the fastest million that we've done, each million has been successively faster.

GARETH PARKER:

Yeah.

GREG HUNT:

And WA is due to hit 500,000 themselves, probably today. There were 495,800 as at, as at Sunday morning. And so people in West Australia are doing a great job in coming forwards, but please keep doing so at the earliest possible time. Please do not wait. If you are in an eligible group, now's the time.

GARETH PARKER:

You say that. My very strong sense from feedback we get to the program is that there is a significant part of the over 50s cohort who are holding off. They're saying: I want Pfizer. What do you say to those people?

GREG HUNT:

Look, the advice from Brendan Murphy, Paul Kelly, from the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation, which is co-led by a brilliant Western Australian, Professor Chris Blyth, is do not wait. If you catch COVID, you could die.

As of yesterday morning we had 57 per cent of over 70s and 39 per cent of, of over 50s who had come forward around the country to be vaccinated. So, they're coming forward, they're being vaccinated, they're being protected. And the vaccination doesn't just protect them, it also protects everyone else.

So please do not wait and that's the medical advice, and it could save your life, and it could also save the life of those around you.

GARETH PARKER:

What I think is interesting in this latest Victorian outbreak where, of course, we're all feeling very much for Victorians, in particular Melburnians who are continuing to suffer through lockdowns.

But aged care was ground zero for COVID deaths in 2020 in Victoria. This time, there have been infections in aged care, but they've been infections of people who have had both doses of the vaccine, very elderly people, and it seems as though they are fine. That's a great news story. I wonder why we haven't heard more about that.

GREG HUNT:

So at this stage, there are three residents, a 79-year-old male, an 89-year-old man with a 99-year-old woman who have all been diagnosed as COVID positive.

All have been vaccinated, two of them have had two doses, one had had her first dose before being diagnosed and they're all in hospital for observation not because of their, their health condition. And so, that's, it is, as you say, so far, and we're not getting ahead of ourselves.

GARETH PARKER:

Sure.

GREG HUNT:

But so far, the advice is that all are in a very strong situation, but for the fact that they are infectious, they wouldn't be in hospital. So, they're there for isolation and observation.

It is a very important sign. And, you know, I don't get ahead of myself. I, you know, make sure every day that we're checking on them, they're getting the absolute best care. But they're in a dedicated unit for people from aged care who might be diagnosed as positive set aside in advance.

So, we continue to, to learn about the vaccines and the disease. And it's a reminder that the vaccine may not prevent you getting it, although it does a very, very good job around the world, but it protects you against serious illness and loss of life. And that's the vaccine as well as to reduce the spread around Australia, which no doubt it's doing as we're seeing around the world.

GARETH PARKER:

Yeah. Minister, just very briefly, because time will elude us.

GREG HUNT:

Sure.

GARETH PARKER:

What discussions have you had with the West Australian Government about a potential quarantine facility here? They've been talking about Busselton. Has that reached any discussions at your level?

GREG HUNT:

So that's one which would be happening through the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.

The PM set out, through National Cabinet last week on the basis of the Victorian facility, the conditions for around the country. And essentially, that is about making sure that it's near to an airport, so we're not busing people all around the country, most significantly near to a hospital, and near to workforce, because you don't want fly in, fly out workforce.

Sometimes people said, oh, let's just pop everybody in a remote facility and it turns out community-communal bathrooms for parents with babies, for elderly Australians, for positive cases, it's a very, very poor option.

But if you have those elements of proximity to an international airport, proximity to tertiary hospitals and to staff, then that's what we've identified in the Victorian circumstance.

But our quarantine system is always our first line of defence, not our last. And our quarantine system is what set Australia apart from the rest of the world.

Now, as we speak, 400,000 plus cases a day around the world. And, you know, we're in a vastly different situation to anybody else. No Australian has caught COVID and died from COVID in Australia this year.

There's been one person, sadly, who was diagnosed in quarantine, having contracted it overseas, but it incubated and they passed. But, you know, when the great test of the system is, are we saving lives in Australia? The answer is yes. Are we continuously improving? Absolutely. That's always the goal.

GARETH PARKER:

Minister, thank you very much for your time.

GREG HUNT:

Thanks very much and please keep coming forward to be vaccinated. Just to say to West Australians, you are really doing us proud. We're just so proud of the way you're coming forward. But the more who come forward, the more we'll all be protected.

GARETH PARKER:

Good on you. Health Minister Greg Hunt.

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