

Statement

The Hon James Merlino MP
Acting Premier
Minister for Education
Minister for Mental Health



Wednesday, 16 June 2021

STATEMENT FROM THE ACTING PREMIER

Since this pandemic started, distance has been one of the hardest things to live with.

Distance from our neighbours, from our workplaces - from the people we love and the places we've missed.

Distance that has kept us apart but kept us safe and saved lives.

But Victoria's at its best when we're together.

And I know we're all waiting to see those people and places we've missed, which is why, on the advice of the Chief Health Officer, Victoria will soon safely begin coming back together.

From 11.59pm Thursday 17 June, the 25km travel limit will be removed and travel between metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria will resume.

Two visitors per day (plus dependants) will be permitted to gather inside the home in metro Melbourne, and up to five people (plus dependants) in regional Victoria.

Twenty people can gather outside in Melbourne, and 50 in regional Victoria. Masks will continue to be required indoors but they are no longer required outdoors – however they'll still be recommended when you can't maintain physical distancing.

In Melbourne, funerals can be held with up to 75 mourners, and weddings no more than 20 – and 100 mourners and 50 wedding guests in regional Victoria.

Gyms can open across Melbourne, with density limits and COVIDSafe plans in place. And hair and beauty services can now operate without masks during service.

These are positive changes, but it's important to note that there are still some differences between regional and metropolitan settings.

We have not seen cases at all in regional Victoria. But knowing what we do about how infectious the Delta and Kappa strains are, and how quickly we saw them move through the community prior to the lockdown, we must remain vigilant.

We want to keep regional Victoria virus free – that's why the public health team have recommended slightly stronger settings for Melbourne as extra protection while we run down any remaining cases.

These rules mean that people will now be able to travel across the state, but also recognise that the majority of interactions in regional Victoria will be between regional Victorians.

And for Melbournians travelling to the snow this season, that means a requirement for everyone to get a COVID test within 72 hours of departing for Victoria's alpine resorts, and a negative result.

International experience has shown us that there is a high risk of spread in cold climates, where people come together to socialise and spend time indoors after a day out on the slopes.

There will be plenty more detail online, and if cases continue to remain low, we'll be able to ease restrictions further in another week.

But as we've said many times – this isn't over.

We all know better than most just how easily this virus takes hold and keeping on top of the situation means that we all have to protect our freedoms.

That means continuing to do the things that have diffused this outbreak.

But it's no exaggeration to say the single most important thing every single Victorian can do is to get tested as soon as they have even the mildest of symptoms.

As we head deeper into winter – this becomes more important than ever.

We can't assume that a scratchy throat is the sign of a winter cold.

Find out for sure – get tested.

Thank you for everything you've done so far to protect our state.

I know it hasn't been easy.

But we're getting there.