



Media release

Minister for Health and Minister for Ambulance Services
The Honourable Steven Miles

Wednesday, March 18, 2020

New laws to slow down the spread of COVID-19

The Palaszczuk Government has strengthened the powers of health and emergency officers in the response to novel coronavirus (COVID-19).

Changes to the *Public Health Act 2005* will give Queensland Health's Chief Health Officer and emergency officers more powers to contain the outbreak of COVID-19.

Minister for Health and Ambulance Services Steven Miles said the *Public Health and Other Legislation (Public Health Emergency) Amendment Bill 2020* was introduced in Parliament today to amend the *Public Health Act 2005* and was expected to pass tonight.

"These laws give us greater powers to enforce measures that will assist in slowing down the outbreak of COVID-19," Mr Miles said.

"Queensland has been quick to act throughout this unprecedented global event and subsequently has managed to stay ahead of the virus so far but we know that will change.

"We must continue to throw everything we have at this and support our frontline medical staff to do their vital work."

Under this new legislation, the Chief Health Officer will be issuing public health directions to ban non-essential gatherings in outdoor areas of more than 500 people, and non-essential gatherings of 100 people indoors.

This will affect entertainment venues, function centres, pubs and clubs and large restaurants.

It will not affect airports, public transport, medical facilities, emergency services, aged care, prisons, courts, our parliament, supermarkets, offices, schools, universities or construction sites.

The Chief Health Officer will also be able to recommend that businesses and facilities open, close or limit access to the facility to ensure the health and safety of customers. For example, the Chief Health Officer may recommend that supermarkets should open for longer hours and limit entry to customers in some circumstances, including holding special shopping periods for people with a pensioner concession card.

Emergency officers, which may include public health officers, will be provided with additional powers to assist in containing or responding to the spread of COVID-19 within the community.

"People may be directed to stay in their home, or another place decided by the emergency officer, for example, a hospital or other isolation area," Mr Miles said.

"An emergency officer may also direct an owner or operator of any business or facility to open, close or limit visitor access to the facility for a specified period.

"Failure to adhere to directions under this legislation could incur a fine of up to \$13,345.

"We are following the advice of the Australian Government and health experts as we respond to this outbreak.

"Measures are changing daily as the number of confirmed cases rise across the world.

"We need to be responsive and flexible, and this means that measures to slow down this virus could be advised at short notice."

Queensland Health's Chief Health Officer Dr Jeannette Young said additional powers and social distancing measures were essential to ensure the safety of Queenslanders, especially the most vulnerable in our communities.

"Our way of life is going to continue to change as we deal with this outbreak, but it is necessary to save vulnerable people's lives," Dr Young said.

"The more we can limit the spread, the more we can protect our most vulnerable, including the elderly and those with chronic conditions.

"I encourage people to observe social distancing practices as much as possible and be 1.5 metres apart wherever that is practicable to limit the spread of the virus.

"Slowing the spread of this virus is everyone's responsibility.

"The more everyone follows the advice to wash their hands and stay home when they're sick, the fewer people will catch novel coronavirus.

"You can protect yourself by washing your hands often and properly and staying home when you're sick.

"We also ask that people avoid touching others if it's not necessary, including shaking hands, hugging or kissing."

The latest information on novel coronavirus (COVID-19) is available on Queensland Health's website at www.health.qld.gov.au (<http://www.health.qld.gov.au/>)

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