

Australia: New Coronavirus Lockdown Melbourne Amid Sex, Lies, Quarantine Hotel Scandal

[Tamara Thiessen](#) 12:56pm EDT

141,079 views | Jul 7, 2020,



Melbourne is set to again return to empty street scenes of April, as it re-enters a "hard lockdown" ... [+]

Barcroft Media via Getty Images

A serious outbreak of Covid-19 has sparked a new "hard" lockdown in [Australia's](#) second largest city, [Melbourne](#), amid a scandal over quarantine and security breaches at hotels.

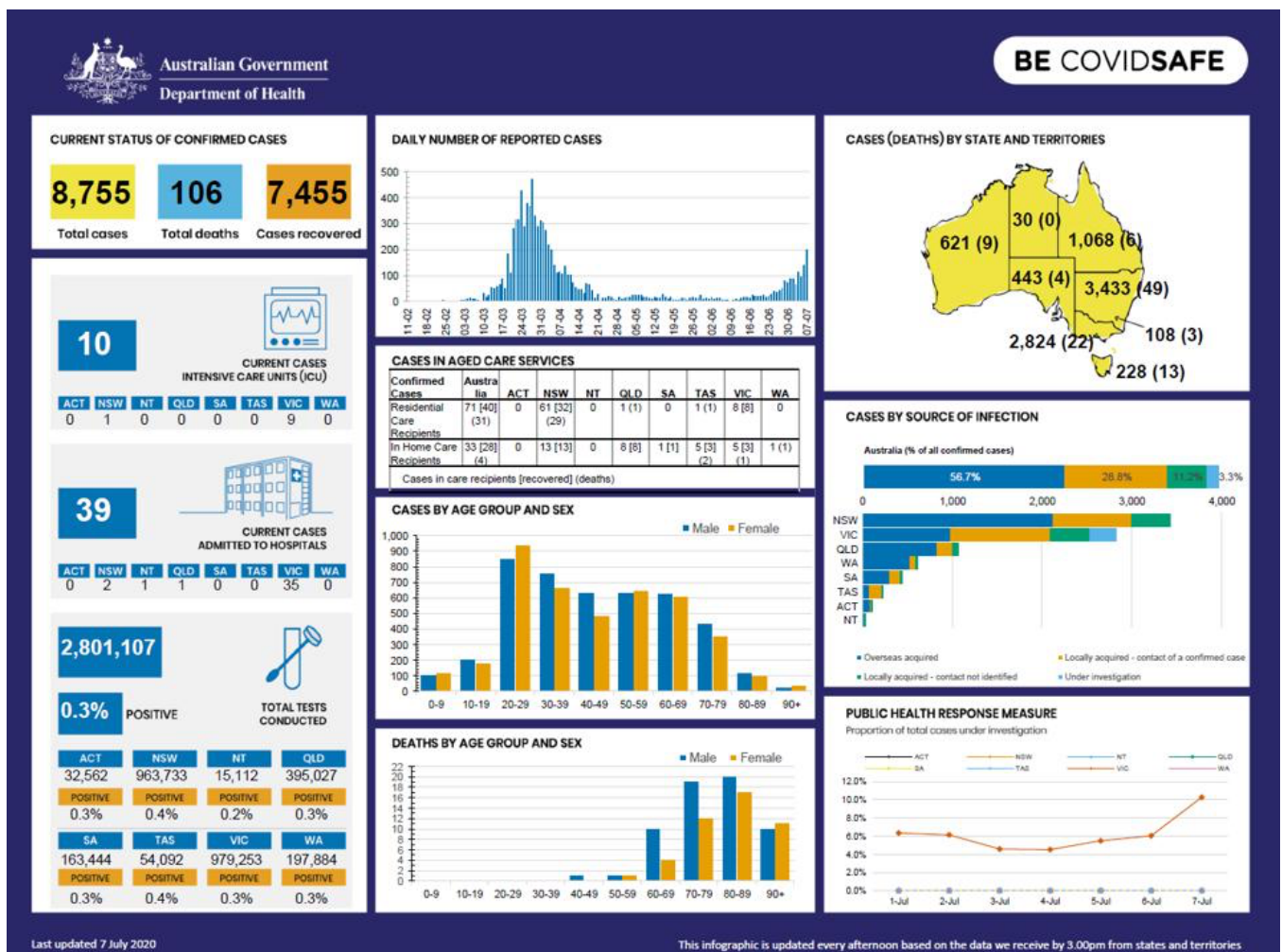
From midnight on Wednesday, the City of Melbourne will return to [strict lockdown](#) for a six-week period, the state Premier Daniel Andrews announced Tuesday. So too will regional Mitchell Shire just north of the city fringe.

Dan Andrews 
@DanielAndrewsMP

Statement from the Premier on
Stay at Home restrictions for
metropolitan Melbourne and
Mildura

The southeastern state of [Victoria](#) has been experiencing an alarming spike in Covid infections. Something which is largely put down to serious [infection control breaches](#) in the hotel quarantine system.

The lockdown comes after 200 cases were recorded in 24 hours. The worst since the country's onset of the pandemic. As the outbreak intensifies, the state has recorded a double-digit rise in daily cases for 22 consecutive days since around mid-June. There are now 772 active cases from a national total of 839. That's "up from 60 a month ago" according to [7 News](#).



Australia has registered 8,755 Covid cases so far, and 106 deaths. Victoria is contributing greatly ... [+]

Sex, Lies & Quarantine Hotel Scandals

Melbourne's quarantine hotels have been identified as a major source of the virus escalation. Since the Australia travel ban came into force in March, all travelers returning from overseas must [self-isolate for 14 days in their hotel rooms](#).

"Somehow this virus escaped ... It looks like it all came from one hotel, and a few security guards having a good time," said the ABC's chief political correspondent, [Laura Tingle](#). "It's obviously now escaped hugely," Tingle told [Late Night Live](#) host Phillip Adams.

The finger is being pointed at private security contractors involved in Victoria's hotel quarantine system. The state leader has launched a \$3 million judicial inquiry into the "bungled quarantine program", as [The Age](#) puts it. Particularly into the role of security guards in "infection control breach". Three firms were initially assigned to the job. "Some of the quarantine contracts were sub-contracted to smaller operators, a practice that drives down wages and muddles responsibility." All those guards are under gag orders (though one has [broken that to speak out](#)).

The virus containment method, which "was the envy of the world just a few weeks ago," was within 24 hours "brutally exposed" notes [News.com.au](#).



All arrivals in Australia must self-isolate for 14 days in their hotel rooms. That's been the case ... [+]

AFP via Getty Images

31 cases stem from the biggest hotel outbreak at a 5-star luxury hotel in Melbourne *The Australian* reports. That number continues to grow. Positive Covid tests taken during quarantine include security guards and "a household contact of a confirmed case."

Security staff and "quarantine-hotel insiders" claim hotel guards slept with guests during quarantine the newspaper says. And that "security personnel wore personal protective equipment for up to eight hours without changing it."

"Guards shook hands and shared lifts, some had just six hours of infection control training, some were caught sleeping on the job and quarantined families were allowed to go between rooms to play cards and games." The revelations were first made to Melbourne newspaper the *Herald Sun*.

Now [The Age](#) claims that the security company at the hotbed virus hotel also provided guards for a Melbourne public housing estate—another

Covid hotbed under hard lockdown since Saturday.

42 people including guards, their families and close contacts have so far been infected as a result of that outbreak, it reports. According to the paper's sources, subcontractors for MSS Security possibly worked at the North Melbourne and Flemington public housing estates, which has a cluster of some 53 cases. The health department has refuted such links. The company has so far declined to comment.

As well as sleeping with quarantined guests, [Sky News](#) reports, security firms also "allegedly charged fees for shifts that were never worked, paid security guards in cash and made up names for staffers who never existed."

The scandal and deteriorating situation in Victoria is undermining the grip on the disease and relatively low level of infection Australia-wide.

Australia's Health Minister, Greg Hunt, has told authorities to "throw the book" at anyone who has breached quarantine protocols. The inquiry has been given to September 25 to deliver its findings.

What Does A Return To "Hard Lockdown" Mean?



Medical staff at public housing flats in Melbourne, Australia. Amid a Covid-19 testing blitz in 12 ... [+]

Getty Images

The sharp uptick is forcing businesses and industries to shut down again, barely a month after [reopening](#). The health crisis will see Victoria totally isolated from the rest of the country as borders all around close.

Under new stay at home orders coming into effect on Wednesday, most 6.4 million Victorian residents are being urged to work from home. Cafes, restaurants and bars will be allowed to serve takeouts, while cinemas, beauty salons, gyms and swimming pools close their doors completely.

The lockdown will also see Greater Melbourne virtually cut-off. Roadblocks and vehicle checks will prevent people leaving or entering the 9990 km² (3857 square mile) area to visit friends, or to go to holiday homes.

The ABC [lists](#) all the 31 local government areas that fall within the soon to shutdown metropolitan Melbourne.

Four valid reasons for leaving your home are:

- For study or work, if you can't do so from home
- Medical care and caregiving
- Food shopping
- Daily exercise including fishing, boating, tennis, golf and surfing within the lockdown area

People can visit their "intimate partner" the broadcaster states. Including those who live across the 'border' of the restricted government areas or in regional Victoria.

State Border Closes For First Time In 100 years



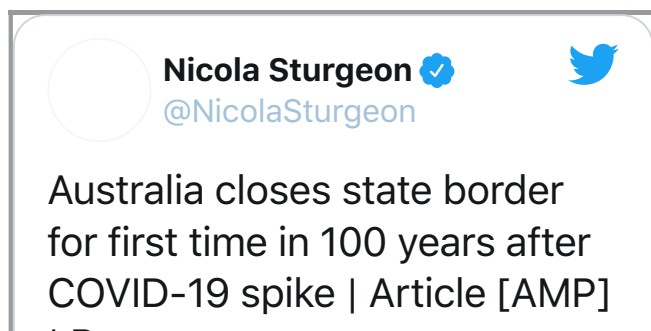
A car drives past a sign in the southern New South Wales border city of Albury, Australia, warning ... [+]

AFP via Getty Images

Much of Australia started relaxing a two-month lockdown in May, though several borders between the [states and territories remain shut](#).

Now for the first time since the Spanish flu pandemic of 1919, the border

between New South Wales and Victoria closed at midnight Tuesday. Something that even grabbed the attention of Scotland's First Minister.



The closure will be controlled by both police and drones. People can request [permits](#) in order to get an exemption for travel between the two. These apply to a dozen or so categories including residents returning home, seasonal workers, students and carers.

"In effect, Victoria has now been chucked out of the Federation and I'm wondering what the national implications of that are," Phillip Adams jibed.

Victoria will be completely shut off, as South Australia too closes its border to all but essential travel. And even then travelers must be [prepared to self-isolate](#).

Risk Of More Border, Business Closure Nationwide



Road signs are displayed near a police checkpoint on July 8 in Albury, Australia. The NSW-Victoria ... [+]

Getty Images

As the Northern Territory gets set to open its borders on July 17, its Chief Minister [declared](#) the whole of Melbourne a hotspot, and said all visitors from Greater Melbourne will face two weeks' supervised quarantine.

For Laura Tingle, the Victorian scenario raises the spectre of more to come nationally. "I think it's produced this much harder line ... the fact that we're now talking about border closures right across the country. And if there's one thing that essentially drove the Federation (Australia's coming together as a [nation in 1901](#)), it was having open trade between the colonies, so that's all gone incredibly pear-shaped in the interest of trying to lock down this virus and keep it under control."

But Tingle added, despite the outrage, Australia is trying to keep the state bickering at bay. "It's interesting that all the states in a way are essentially saying, "We've got to stop fighting amongst ourselves guys, stop piling it on to each other, we've got to try and keep civil" ... And It will be interesting to see if we can maintain that tone or not."

The possibility of more lockdowns and border closures within Australia is hardly good news for those [travelers wanting to visit, or leave the country soon](#).