

## Discussion Points for LEMCs giving consideration to COVID 19 preparations

### **Wheatbelt Regional Emergency Operations Centre- WA Country Health Service**

The WA Country Health Service (WACHS) has been preparing for community cases in the regions. Omicron is here despite the border opening being delayed and numbers will continue to grow. We will also see community transmission in other regional locations such as the SouthWest and have a few people in Wheatbelt who are in isolation having been to exposure sites or are contacts.

**Please get tested if you have any symptoms** or have been to an [exposure site](#) and encourage your family and friends to do the same. Controlling infection spread is dependent upon early case identification. Continue to check the list of potential [exposure sites](#) and follow the relevant health advice - given the increasing number of COVID cases, everyone needs to be vigilant.

If you have cold or flu like symptoms (eg sore throat, cough, headache, temp above 37.5), **get tested, isolate and do not attend work or the shops or other community events until you've got a negative test result.** If you test positive, advice about how to manage COVID-19 [is available on HealthyWA](#).

**Omicron is much more infectious than other previous variants** but scientific evidence is increasing worldwide that **having a booster vaccine dose (3<sup>rd</sup> dose) is more effective at managing symptoms** as builds up the antibodies again. It also means if you catch it you'll be less infectious as have lower 'viral load' than someone who's not vaccinated. You're also much less likely to need hospital care but may feel unwell for a few days managed with Panadol and fluids – just like a bad cold or flu. You will be infectious though hence why its important to stay at home.

**Get together your own and your family's COVID preparedness pack.** Masks, panadol, thermometer, 2 weeks of your usual prescription medication and other non-prescription meds/vitamins etc on hand, tissues. Work out who will be support your support person and ring you and get you food and drinks.

### **Stepping up the WA Health and Wheatbelt health system response**

The increasing number of COVID cases has led to changes for our hospitals and services.

1. **Masks** are now a mandatory requirement for [staff and visitors](#) to all WA Health hospitals, health services, aged care facilities and other workplaces.
2. WACHS teams, including emergency departments, are finalising plans to start using routine **rapid antigen tests** (RATs). Additional infrastructure will be needed in some places to manage this. We have currently no definitive advice on when or how RATs will be available to the general community or how they will be used in health services but we know 40million have been ordered by the WA government and 1.5million are currently in WA.
3. **Proof of vaccination requirements** in the community are being [expanded statewide](#) on January 31. This includes visitors to hospitals and aged care facilities.
4. **A Home Monitoring Service** run by Medibank Private and Calvary has been procured by WA Health to monitor and support people with COVID at home if they wish (its an Opt In service). They will call the person every day and give people at home a small machine called a pulse oximeter which you put your finger into and it measure blood oxygen levels and pulse rates. If it dips below a certain level you need to go to hospital.

5. **COVID telehealth readiness.** WACHS outpatient and community services should be via telehealth (videoconferencing) including into the home where possible, from 31 January 2022. This isn't always possible as patients need to be seen face to face but where possible Telehealth is being ramped up like in early 2020.
6. Wheatbelt has plans in place to **surge up staffing for ensuring the essential health services** (EDs, inpatient care, aged care and mental health and public health) continue even if other services and programs have to temporarily reduce or cease. We will only enact these if lots of staff get sick or have to stay at home as they're contacts of positive cases.
7. **25 WACHS sites across the Wheatbelt can test people for COVID.** Silver Chain nursing posts can also do tests in business hours. If the testing demand increases beyond what the hospital or health centre can do we have plans for six surge testing locations at Northam, Narrogin, Merredin, Moora, Jurien Bay and Southern Cross. We need more people trained to be COVID swabbers and support admin processes such as taking people's details and printing of labels for COVID swab specimen tubes or traffic management. Anyone can train to be a swabber.
8. **22 of the 25 sites can care for people with COVID** but we will aim to transfer people as quickly as possible to Narrogin or Northam where they have more nurses, doctors and specialised equipment to support people with respiratory problems due to COVID. There is no ICU in the Wheatbelt so if people need critical ICU care they will have to be transferred to Perth. There is a special COVID ambulance in the Wheatbelt (stripped out for easier cleaning) but if that's not available a normal ambulance can be used. We may have to transport medically stable but unwell patients ourselves from a small hospital to Northam or Narrogin with a nurse escort in the car.
9. **If there's a local COVID outbreak in your area the LEMC would be stood up** as the local Incident Support Group (ISG). Health would be the lead agency led by the local health service manager supported by their Operations Manager, the REOC and the Operational Area Support Group (DEMC) members. Health will be calling on local LEMC/ISG members to help practically if needed including if surge testing is needed locally and we need help with equipment, traffic controllers, providing meals/water and even people to do swabbing (we can train you!).