

Variants of Concern review

March 2021

Overview of review

- Deputy Chief Health Officer Professor Allen Cheng, supported by an independent expert panel, conducted a Review of Management of Variants of Concern of COVID-19 in Hotel Quarantine Settings, which aimed to answer:
 - given the epidemiology of COVID-19 and Variants of Concern (VoC), to what extent will hotel quarantine be able to reduce the risk of transmission in-hotels and out to the community?
 - what would be the features of the most effective model of quarantine for VoC in Victoria?

Findings and recommendations

- VoCs have emerged worldwide. They appear to be more transmissible and associated with higher viral loads.
- It is not possible to eliminate risk completely from any quarantine system, so a strong hierarchy of controls is required including strong governance, a safety culture, continuous quality improvement and robust monitoring and evaluation.
- Additional controls, including vaccination, engineering (particularly ventilation) and administrative controls should reduce the risk of transmission of SARS-CoV-2 within hotel quarantine and from hotel quarantine to the community.
- If properly designed, alternative quarantine arrangements could improve several aspects of quarantine, including resident and staff health and wellbeing, infection prevention and control, clinical care, and security. However, these arrangements will take some time to implement.
- The report makes nine recommendations, including:
 - seven for COVID-19 Quarantine Victoria (CQV), including:
 - three recommendations regarding additional controls to support a hotel quarantine system, including that staff receive at least the first dose of vaccine, ventilation assessments are completed, and a timetable be established to deliver on those actions before international flights resume
 - four recommendations to confirm governance arrangements, including developing a Memorandum of Understanding between CQV and DH to clarify roles and responsibilities, and respond to Safer Care Victoria recommendations.
 - two for the Victorian Government, including considering options for future quarantine arrangements and establishing a permanent system so that safe, effective quarantine can be provided into the future.

CQV actions

- CQV has accepted all recommendations in full or principle, with five already underway or delivered:
 - the first dose of the vaccination has been delivered to more than 4,150 frontline quarantine workers since 22 February (as at 19 March), with the roll out of the second dose now underway.
 - ventilation assessments are underway at all hotel sites, with minor remediation works on track. Only once the works have been validated will these hotels become operational (please see the Ventilation Assessment document for further details).
 - the above actions are expected to be complete by mid-April.
 - A Memorandum of Understanding has been drafted to formalise the roles and responsibilities between CQV and DH, including around contact tracing and the issuing of detention notices. This includes developing an advisory board for CQV (with an independent Chair) to support and provide advice on the ever-changing nature of Covid 19 and necessary actions. This has been under development following the Hotel Quarantine Board of Inquiry Final Report.
 - CQV has developed an action plan to respond to the Safer Care Victoria review (please see the Safer Care Victoria document for further details).
- CQV has sought clarity around two recommendations related to governance and occupational health and safety, as there are existing processes and actions already underway which were not examined as part of the review.
- In relation to the recommendations for the government, CQV will continue to play an active role in the committee which is examining alternative COVID-19 accommodation options.