

## 'Sicktoria' can happen here

Think WA has nothing left to fear from COVID? Well, think again



**JOSH  
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Perhaps the first outward sign of the WA Government's growing anxiety over Victoria's second wave of coronavirus infections was the socially distanced chairs at Mark McGowan's Monday press conference.

As restrictions have been progressively peeled back and businesses have reopened on the "island within an island" a sense of complacency has crept back into daily life.

That has extended to press briefings, with the media pack — like the rest of the State — slowly losing focus on the physical spacing that was so stridently drummed into us in March and April.

Not so on Monday, when the seating for journalists at Dumas House had been pointedly placed exactly 1.5m apart, a throwback to the dark (not so) old days.

For anyone who hadn't got the message, the Premier's scripted opening remarks quickly drove home the gravity of the situation.

"The level of community spread inside Victoria is something that we haven't seen before in this country. There is no doubt about it, as a nation we are entering a new and dangerous space of this pandemic," McGowan said.

His words came shortly after it was announced Victoria had recorded 127 new coronavirus cases — a daily record that was smashed again the following day — and would shut its border with NSW.

And they were reinforced with this hammer blow for anyone at that point still labouring under the illusion WA had nothing to fear: "Even though we have our hard borders in place, any day the virus could slip through the cracks without us knowing."

The point of the press conference was to announce WA had requested a cap on international air arrivals — now set at 525 a week — and new legislation that would force returning travellers to pay for their own hotel quarantine.

Both measures were designed to "slow the flow" of arrivals into Perth and relieve pressure on the hotel quarantine system, which has come under increasing strain in recent weeks as an increasing number of West Australians decide they'd prefer to ride out the global coronavirus storm in a port where the pubs are open.

Melbourne has provided a chilling case study of what occurs when quarantine is not managed effectively and it makes sense the WA Government would move to ensure the same thing does not happen in Perth.

But the reality is the

Victorian outbreak, currently at nearly 900 active cases with community transmission rampant, presents a much greater health risk to WA than the millions of overseas cases.

As the Premier noted on Monday, while private vehicles crossing into WA from the east have all but stopped, "essential freight continues to ensure our State continues to operate and live freely and we have essential suppliers".

And that means the people most likely to slip through the "cracks" aren't coming from overseas.

They're the truckies and train drivers and pilots and other essential workers crossing into the State daily.

Australian Medical Association (WA) president Andrew Miller put it this way: "All your truckies, all your pilots, lots of other essential workers are getting a good to go pass and the first thing they do

when they get here is go to the pub."

Anyone designated an essential worker — which also includes emergency services, defence personnel and politicians — and granted an exemption is asked to "stay at home when not at work except for essential reasons such as food shopping" and "refrain from all non-essential travel".

That's a far cry from being forced to spend 14 days shackled up in a hotel under semi-frequent surveillance.

Quizzed on the protocols surrounding essential workers, McGowan conceded "it's not ideal" but "we can't put a police officer on every single person that comes into the State".

He's right. It's not feasible to cut WA off from the east and the vital food and goods it supplies completely, nor is it realistic to force people working in essential jobs to sideline themselves for a fortnight every time they cross an interstate border. Frustratingly, that leaves WA — the State that has opened up "the furthest the fastest" — in a difficult situation born entirely out of the ineptitude of the Victorian Government.

With very few restrictions in place, a single coronavirus carrier visiting a packed nightclub or church service or football game has the potential to quickly spiral out of control. That means whether next week's western derby is played in front of a sellout crowd or 30,000 is the least of our worries. On Tuesday, Health Minister Roger Cook refused to rule out reintroducing some restrictions as a precaution.

Hopefully, it does not come to that — and West Australians can play their part by taking their own precautions.

Don't leave your home if you're feeling unwell. Keep up good hand hygiene.

And if you are at the pub, consider moving the chairs a few extra inches apart.



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## Workers aim for new health highs by standing at desks

Most adults understand that slouching in an office chair all day long can put your health at risk.

In fact, some experts argue that "sitting is the new smoking". They warn that every minute of seat time will shave years off your life and increase the risk of ailments such as heart disease and diabetes.

Not surprisingly, the status of the standing desk has stood tall and transformed from office oddity to workplace staple. These portable contraptions have filled the void created by the removal of germ-ridden hot desks and become a key

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component of the makeshift office set-up for those working from home. Also known as a sit-stand desk or height-adjustable desk — they allow users to work at their desks while standing rather than sitting.

But before you stand up to your bosses and hit them up for the latest designer model, avoid misunderstandings by being clear on the ups and downs of this workplace fad.

Understandably, pro-standers credit the desks with a raft of health benefits including weight loss, reduced risk of heart disease and type-2 diabetes and improved back health. But their critics adopt a different standpoint and claim that those who use a standing desk mistake standing around all day as equal to doing proper exercise.

Pointing to data on energy burned through various types of activity, they say the action of sitting and typing on average burns 80 calories (335 kilojoules) per hour while standing at a computer screen consumes just 88 calories

(368KJ). In comparison, a one-hour lunchtime walk on average will chew up 210 calories (879KJ).

Anti-standers are firm in their view that standing-desk users would be better off remaining comfortably seated and taking a half-hour walk during the lunch break.

And they claim there is enough evidence to suggest over-standing can create problems such as bodily aches, an increased risk of varicose veins and even reduced attention span.

Notwithstanding those claims, most experts agree that while standing desks are far from a

miracle cure for a range of ailments, they do have a place in the modern office scape.

Standing desks are unlikely to take a back seat because their advantages outweigh perceived or real disadvantages. But they can be even more health-aiding if sitting and standing in any workplace is supplemented by "walking it out". This means taking the stairs, having the odd walk-and-talk meeting, a lunchtime stroll — or upgrading to a treadmill desk.

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