

Calls for rapid antigen tests to be used across inner Melbourne amid fears the DELTA strain of Covid will extend a devastating lockdown that has crippled Victoria

By Wayne Flower, Melbourne Correspondent
06:41 07 Jun 2021, updated 07:10 07 Jun 2021



LONG DELAYS



EXTENDED LOCKDOWNS



RAPID TURNAROUND

0
shares

0 comments

- Victorian authorities have warned a mystery cluster may force longer lockdown
- Eleven cases of Covid-19 have been recorded in the past 24 hours in Victoria
- Mystery remains over how the 'Delta' variant of Covid-19 hit West Melbourne
- The variant originated in India and has since infected 10 people in the area
- Experts believe rapid tests could help end lockdowns if granted approval

As Melburnians face an agonising wait to learn their [lockdown](#) fate, the call for rapid testing of infected communities continues to get louder.

On Monday, Victoria recorded nine new cases of [Covid-19](#) amid fears a fast-moving strain from [India](#) had somehow infected a section of West [Melbourne](#).

ExaGrid: Best of Both

EXAG

Low Cost Disk
Dell, HPE Nimble, NTAP eSeries,
Cisco 3260, Others

OR

Inline Deduplication Appliance
Dell EMC Data Domain
HPE StoreOnce

ExaGrid Disk-cache Performance

ExaGrid Long-term Retention

- Fast for backups •
- Fast for restores •

Veeam to ExaGrid Tiered Backup

ExaGrid

Australian health officials have long feared the Delta strain breaking out in the community and remain baffled as to how it has emerged out in the wild.



© EPA

Healthcare workers in action at the Albert Park COVID-19 testing facility in Melbourne last month.

Premier Daniel Andrews claims to follow the advice of health officials. Some argue he doesn't listen to all of them

Testing Commander Jeroen Weimar has become the face of Victoria's latest lockdowns

With Melbourne's fourth hard lockdown scheduled to end on Thursday, diagnostic experts believe rapid tests could stop the spread of the virus while releasing Melburnians from isolation.

As it stands, the use of rapid tests in Australia is largely restricted to just a handful of businesses that get approval to test inhouse staff.

While veterinarians can quickly ascertain whether an animal has traces of the virus, Australians are effectively reliant on the slower polymerase chain reaction tests, which can take hours if not days to return results compared to just minutes.

The silence over Australia's reluctance to embrace the rapid test technology has been deafening.

But as Melbourne enters its 11th day of lockdown, its citizens are becoming increasingly hostile to the notion of extending it further.

An international expert in the field of rapid antigen tests, who asked to remain anonymous, told Daily Mail Australia their use had the ability to end lockdowns.

'When they find fragments of virus in the waste water and the reason they haven't detected those cases is because about half the people with Covid are asymptomatic,' he said.

'The big problem with the current policy is: (they say) if you have symptoms, get tested and PCR will pick it up. That's correct. The problem is if you don't have symptoms you don't go for a test and you don't get picked-up.

ADVERTISEMENT

'That's why when there's fragments in a town, they should go in and screen everybody in that town because it's the asymptomatic people causing that reading otherwise if they had symptoms they'd have gone and got tested.'

RELATED ARTICLES

[Melburnians are sadly no strangers to lockdowns but that doesn't make dealing with them any easier. WAYNE FLOWER examines why this one is going to hurt](#)

[Furious son whose dad is trapped in one of Victoria's infected aged care facilities slams the government's Covid failures amid frustration workers were allowed to cross-contaminate other nursing homes](#)

[A 'dog's breakfast' QR system, shutting the WRONG Woolies... and then blaming YOU: The full, shocking story of how a single Covid infection has condemned Victoria to a fourth lengthy lockdown](#)

[Notorious Covid conspiracy theorist Eve Black mocks QR code check-in systems after fleeing Victoria when footage of her breaking a lockdown blockade went viral](#)

Rapid antigen tests could be Melbourne's way out of future lockdowns

Health workers conduct COVID-19 testing at the Montague Street centre in South Melbourne last month

A woman receives a PCR test in Melbourne. Calls for more rapid tests have increased as Melbourne's lockdown continues

RAPID TESTS ENDED SLOVAKIAN LOCKDOWN

In October and November, Slovakia tested a large percentage of its population in several rounds of mass rapid antigen testing.

Determined not to enter another lockdown, two rounds of rapid mass testing saw the prevalence of Covid drop by more than half.

While the approach may not work everywhere, the findings supported population-wide rapid testing, when combined with other measures, as an important tool for combatting the pandemic.

Facing further lockdowns last year, the Slovakian government screened everybody over the age of 16 - more than three million people - in just days.

Those that returned positive results were isolated while the rest of the country got on with life.

'Let's say a town of 60,000 people has waste water in its treatment with Covid, there's no reason why you couldn't go out and screen those 60,000 people at home in a day, find five people that are asymptomatic and get them into quarantine. Then you're not waiting for an outbreak,' the source said.

Mary-Louise McLaws, a professor in epidemiology at the University of New South Wales, threw her support behind rapid testing after they were pulled from the Howard Springs quarantine facility in the Northern Territory for PCR tests.

The facility's medical director, Di Stephens, claimed the rapid tests did not have the sensitivity and specificity to pick up the people that had Covid and also had returned false positives.

Professor McLaws said the rapid antigen tests were an important tool in the infection control arsenal because they could be more effective at detecting coronavirus in its early stages and variants.

Victorian Chief Health Officer Brett Sutton continues to provide health advice that sees Melburnians locked up

Healthcare workers transport a person into a patient transport vehicle at Arcare Aged Care where Covid breached

Victorian Health Minister Martin Foley is being advised by health officials that have shunned rapid testing

HOW RAPID TESTS COULD HELP AGED CARE AND TRAVEL

Until now, the elderly in aged care have been tested for Covid once a month via PCR tests.

In Victoria, Covid managed to again infiltrate a facility in Melbourne's west.

Experts claim it makes little sense to conduct the monthly tests.

'You can get infected and be infectious within a week so what's the rationale for testing once a month?' a source said.

'It's been well proven that doing more regular antigen tests has better chance of picking up infection over a period.'

The rapid tests would also allow loved ones to visit more often.

'You can't test everybody visiting an old peoples home and give them a result in 10 minutes with PCR. You can't screen everybody at the airport before they get on a flight and give them a result when they're checking in.'

'I'm concerned that they're setting themselves up to have breach, because while PCR is an excellent approach to diagnosing people — particularly when they have symptoms — a rapid antigen test is the new science that provides really excellent results during that pre-symptomatic period,' she told the [ABC](#).

'The flights back to Australia are going to have more infected return travellers and if they bring with them a variant of concern, there is a likelihood that that mutation may prevent the PCR test from testing positive.'

Those in the diagnostic field believe the tests have been shunned by Australia's top medical advisers out of sheer bloody-mindedness.

'Australia has a diagnostics environment that is almost entirely dictated by the pathology groups to the point where the group in public health in NSW that advises the state government and the public health service on diagnostics is not called Diagnostics NSW - they're called Pathology NSW,' the source said.

'That gives you some idea who their stakeholders are and what their interests are. Their interests are to continue to have pathology as the only viable and accredited way of doing testing in the state and that is a problem at federal level because on the reimbursement committee all of the diagnostic and medical expertise is from the pathology group and it's all out of the Royal College of Pathologists therefore there's a vested interest in that side of the industry to the point Australia doesn't really have reimbursement for rapid testing.'

The PCR tests are eligible for a Medicare rebate of \$42.50, but the rapid antigen tests are not.

Melbourne will remain a ghost town for days to come, maybe weeks.

A resident gestures from an aged care facility in the Melbourne suburb of Maidstone last month after being placed in lockdown

Elderly residents at Arcare in Melbourne were locked down after Covid got in from a worker

'So it's very expensive for health care providers to use because they don't get the reimbursement for using it,' the source said.

The rapid tests can be bought over the counter in the United States and United Kingdom where they have been lauded for quickly identifying potential carriers and preventing lockdowns.

In Australia, health officials continue to discredit the tests and encourage those businesses that can utilise them not to do so.

While diagnostic experts agree PCR tests are the 'gold standard' they insist a combination with rapid testing added even more benefits.

ADVERTISEMENT

'That narrative doesn't suit them. So it's being completely ignored and PCR is really the only thing that they'll talk about because it's the only thing that goes through their lab now and what keeps providing them with revenue,' the source said.

Share or comment on this article: Calls for rapid antigen tests to be used across inner Melbourne

0
shares

[Comments](#)

MOST READ NEWS

Harry and Meghan take parental leave from their jobs after revealing birth of daughter Lilibet Diana...

Jab lines stretch for 'MILES' as Britons wait up to three hours for vaccine after NHS offers shots...

'We're delighted at the ha William, Kate and family ' Harry, Meghan and...

DON'T MISS

Harry and Meghan take parental leave from their jobs after revealing birth of daughter Lilibet Diana...

BAFTA TV Awards 2021: Normal People's Paul Mescal emotionally dedicates Leading Actor win to co-star...

BAFTA TV Awards 2021: Winner Ashley Banjo reflects on 'abuse' sparked by Diversity's BLM-inspired da...

Emily Ratajkowski flashes her incredible figure in a tiny bikini as she cradles baby Sylvester three...

BAFTA TV Awards 2021: Richard Ayoade calls Paul Mescal 'a b***d' PRE-watershed and takes a VERY ch...**

It's party time! Inside Professor Green and Gizzi Erskine's ULTIMATE p...

Ad Feature

BAFTA TV Awards 2021: Billie Piper wows in tuxedo dress as she hits the red carpet with Jodie Comer,...

Molly-Mae Hague 'forced to endure vile explicit chants about her sexual preferences' while supportin...

Adam Levine and Behati Prinsloo get flirty in the ocean as they steal away some alone time during be...

[Getting on the right track: How Tesco is turning to trains to help cut...](#)

Ad Feature

[BAFTA TV Awards 2021: Diversity's Ashley Banjo leaves fans in tears with moving speech after winning...](#)

['A little high, almost there': Scott Disick, 38, shares VERY suggestive snap of thong-clad girlfrien...](#)

[Jane Fonda, 83, shares snaps of strength training session ahead of pipeline protest in Minnesota](#)

[CHRISTOPHER STEVENS reviews the weekend's TV: Prison drama that turns tough guy Sean Bean into Mr...](#)

[BAFTA TV Awards 2021: Oti Mabuse puts on a VERY leggy display in a plunging white gown as she stuns ...](#)

[BAFTA TV Awards 2021: Stacey Dooley goes braless for afterparty in a tank top while Ashley and Jorda...](#)

[BAFTA TV Awards 2021: 'This is like the c**ppest episode of Gogglebox': Steve Pemberton swears befor...](#)

[Beyonce gleams in a leather mini before a Brooklyn Nets game with Jay-Z... as mother Tina Lawson sh...](#)

Kay Burley returns to Sky News for her first show in SIX MONTHS after being suspended for her lockdo...

Kris Jenner, Kyle Richards, Mauricio Umansky and Faye Resnick share a laugh leaving Nobu restaurant ...

'OUR BOY!' Binky Felstead gives birth to her first child with Max Darnton... sharing a sweet snap wi...

BAFTA TV Awards 2021: I May Destroy You's Michaela Coel calls for intimacy coordinators on sets to s...

Amy Winehouse's best friend Tyler James claims star 'made secret visits to Barbara Windsor's house t...

Sophie Turner shows off newly dyed red hair on Instagram after hinting in Pride month post she's...

General Hospital star Kirsten Storms shares update after brain surgery after doctor found 'a very la...

Chantel Jeffries looks white-hot wearing a string bikini on the beach in Miami - before watching the...

Clarence Williams III of The Mod Squad and Purple Rain dies at 81 after a battle with colon cancer

BAFTA TV Awards 2021 'They were snubbed': The Crown fans left shocked as show fails to pick up ANY g...

Kaia Gerber has fun at Disneyland with model Stella Maxwell and Red Hot Chili Peppers frontman Antho...

Little Mix 'team up with Anne-Marie for her new single after being in talks about a collaboration fo...

MORE TOP STORIES

[Contact us](#)

[Mobile apps](#)

[View desktop site](#)

[Advertise with us](#)

[Syndication](#)

[Terms](#)

[Privacy & cookies](#)

[How to complain](#)

[Do not sell my info](#)