

Media Release

20 December 2022

OzSAGE advice is to avoid decking the halls with COVID-19 folly.

Summary

- *Vaccinate children aged 6 months to 5 years*
- *Provide bivalent boosters to anyone who has not had a COVID-19 vaccine in the last six months*
- *Mandate clean air indoors, and mask wearing in specific high-risk locations*
- *Widen access to ongoing testing for COVID-19*

Statement

As we head into the Christmas and New Year holiday period, we urge National Cabinet and the Albanese Government to reflect on the lessons learned from Christmas 2021.

Unless governments take steps to reduce community transmission of COVID-19, it will not be a merry Christmas or happy New Year for many Australians.

“We need regulation of safe indoor air to protect workers and public, this will lower deaths and illness from Covid-19 and other airborne disease”, said Dr Karina Powers, Occupational and Environmental Physician .

Relying on a vaccine-only strategy and mass infection is not working. Simply put, “hybrid immunity” has not occurred despite multiple waves of COVID-19. For Australia, mass infection increases the population burden of long COVID.

Countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States of America, with far higher historical infection rates than Australia, continue to endure high numbers of cases, hospitalisations, and deaths from COVID-19. Their economies are being disrupted to the point where both are in recession, and economic commentators make it clear that more illness will only ever make that worse.

In many countries, and in Australia at present, the health systems are suffering unsustainable stress due to COVID-19 having tipped the balance, with the cancellation of elective surgeries, ambulance ramping, bed blocking and unremitting pressure on the reducing pool of health care workers.

We know that at least 5% percent of COVID-19 infections will lead to long COVID-19. Long COVID-19 causes substantial disruption to people’s lives and will result in a continuing drag on

the economy and the health system. This will cost Australia billions of dollars in lost productivity and healthcare.

Lack of supply of common drugs like antibiotics are at least in part related to a world-wide increase in invasive infections resulting from immune damage caused by COVID-19. This is another compelling reason to reduce spread of infection.

To date more than 16,600 Australians have died from COVID-19 and many more have died from COVID-19 sequelae including heart attacks and strokes caused by clotting disorders brought on by COVID-19.

Excess deaths in Australia for 2022 are running at about 15,400 above normal levels.

This means, on average, 300 people dying every week in addition to the expected number.

To date, about 2,000 people under 70 have died from COVID-19 in Australia, including 12 children under 10. COVID-19 infections and deaths in Residential Aged Care Facilities remain tragically and unacceptably high, with over 4,260 dead.

The Commonwealth has now reduced the clarity when reporting deaths in Residential Aged Care Facilities. Instead, it is now only with the work of independent data experts that the terrible degree of impact remains clear - see map below.

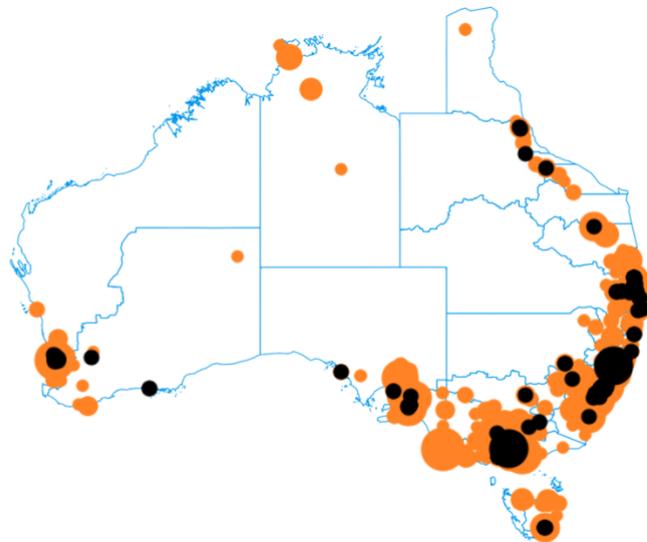


Figure 1. Distribution of COVID-19 cases and deaths in Residential Aged Care based on one month of reports made during November 2022.

Cases (orange, total estimate 6,300 and does not include staff) and deaths (black, total estimate 125) across Australia as reported during the month.

The dot areas are proportional to the number of residents who were sick or died from COVID-19. Data reported includes some events that happened before, but were reported during November 2022.

Source : OzSAGE analysis of [COVID-19 Outbreaks in Residential Aged Care Facilities](#)

COVID-19 infections in schools remained high through to the end of term and have been disrupting learning across Australia, however school transmissions do not appear to be being tracked and are certainly not reported in a transparent manner.

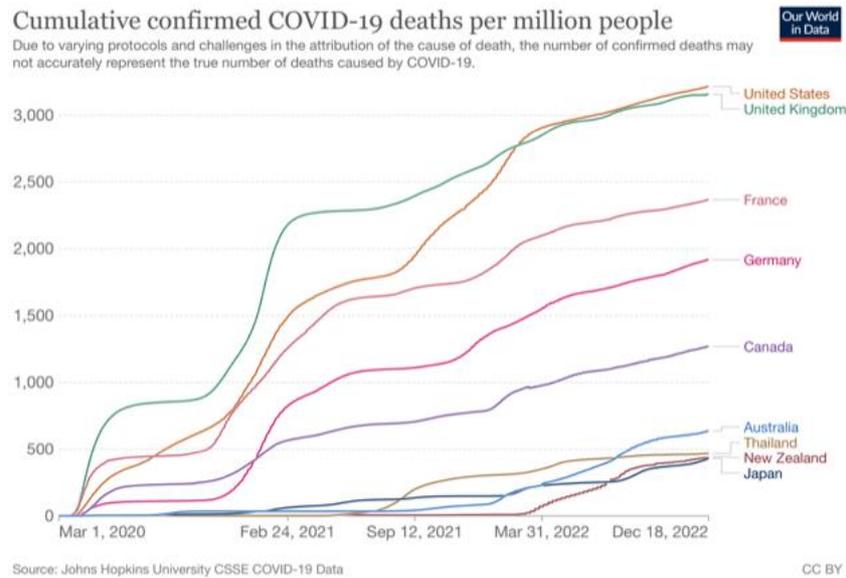


Figure 2: Source: Johns Hopkins University CSSE COVID-19 Data December 2022

As demonstrated by Figure 2, Australia led the world in containing infections up to October 2021, after which mitigations for COVID-19 were mostly removed. Since then, Australia’s performance on cumulative deaths per million has slipped behind that of Japan (which never utilised lockdowns) and Thailand.

OZSAGE recommends the public health precautions contained in our [Vaccine-Plus strategy](#), and:

1. Urgent revision of vaccination guidelines, including for children less than 5 years old, and accessibility to bivalent boosters for those who have had four doses already or greater than 6 months ago,
2. Mandating indoor air quality standards for high occupancy buildings, such as schools, shops, aged care facilities, pubs and clubs,
3. The mandated use of masks for public transport, shops, theatres, cinemas, taxis and similar crowded settings to help ensure community transmission stays low,
4. Widen access to testing. In Australia, falling testing rates, lower sensitivity against new sub-variants, lack of mandatory reporting of positive tests and restriction of PCR testing have weakened surveillance and reduce the opportunity for antiviral medication in eligible people, given antivirals can only be prescribed following a positive test.

In the land of the fair go, we can and must do better. Australia urgently needs National Cabinet to mount [an effective health promotion campaign](#) to empower people with knowledge about transmission of SARS-CoV-2 and simple measures to prevent infection. These include boosters, mask wearing and clean air strategies.

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